

**HELP OR DO NO HARM. MEDICAL IMAGERY IN SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS*  
*TYRANNUS AND OEDIPUS AT COLONUS***

by

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M.Sc., Universidad de Los Andes, 2009

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES  
(Ancient Culture, Religion and Ethnicity)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

March 2014

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## Abstract

There is a vast amount of scholarly work devoted to *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. However, the number of studies relating these plays to Hippocratic medical thought is small and, in the case of *OC*, almost non-existent. Bernard Knox's study *Oedipus at Thebes* (1957) constitutes the most direct approach to medical thought in *OT*. He describes how Oedipus shifts between being a physician, a patient, and ultimately, a disease at different stages of the play (1957: 139-147). Knox supports these role shifts by comparing some of the vocabulary of selected passages in the tragedy with their occurrence in the medical writings of the Hippocratic Corpus.

The approach I propose in this study is to account for these role shifts from the standpoint of the doctor-patient relationship as described in different writings of the Hippocratic Corpus. I will focus on how the elements of the doctor-patient relationship (i.e., disease, patient, and physician) are represented and the reconfigurations they undergo in the plays. In the first chapter, I will examine how the doctor-patient relationship was viewed among the authors of the medical writings. In addition, I will examine Sophocles' involvement in the cult of Asclepius in order to determine how this aspect of his life might have influenced his work.

In the second chapter I will analyze how the doctor-patient relationship fluctuates in *OT*. I will use as reference the set of guidelines established in the first chapter regarding the notion of the doctor-patient relationship. In the third chapter, I will suggest that *OC* provides two complementary approaches to account for the doctor-patient relationship: the Hippocratic model and a new metaphor in which Oedipus stands for a healing god.

The medical imagery of the doctor-patient relationship found in *OT* and *OC* indicates that Sophocles was well aware of the medical practices of his time. Furthermore, I will suggest that his involvement in the cult of Asclepius is reflected in the metaphor of Oedipus as a healing god at the end of *OC*.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Alexandra Cruz Akirov. The drawings in this thesis have written permission for their use from their author, Larissa Rivero Akirov.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: On doctors and patients, playwrights and cults. ....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Preliminary Notes.....	4
1.2 The Hippocratic Physician and his Patient.....	7
1.3 Sophocles and Asclepius.....	19
<b>Chapter 2: <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>: doctor, patient, and disease. ....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter 3: <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>: disease, patient, and doctor. ....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>77</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Asclepius. By Larissa Rivero Akirov.....	3
Figure 2. Oedipus and the Priest. By Larissa Rivero Akirov .....	30
Figure 3. The misfortune of Oedipus. By Larissa Rivero Akirov .....	53

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Classics, Near Eastern and Religious Studies for their support during my studies at UBC. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. C. W. Marshall, for his constant encouragement and patience in the process of writing and revising this thesis. In addition, I am very grateful to Dr. Florence Yoon and Dr. Michael Griffin for their work as readers and for their valuable suggestions and comments.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude for the endless love and support of Ace Krupkin, Emi Brown, and Gabriel Canal, who also contributed as patient and encouraging proofreaders at different stages of this project. Their presence and company have made this journey an enjoyable one. Finally, I give my love to my parents at home, Alejandra Akirov and Jacinto Cruz, for always supporting me in every endeavour I have undertaken, and my sister, Larissa Rivero Akirov, for showing her support through the incredible drawings that frame each of the chapters of this work.

## Introduction

There is a vast amount of scholarly work devoted to *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. However, the number of studies relating these plays to Hippocratic medical thought is small and, in the case of *OC*, almost non-existent. Furthermore, studies approaching *OT* from a medical standpoint mainly focus on medical/technical vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Clarke Kosak (2004) demonstrates Euripides' engagement in medical issues analysing his plays under the scope of Hippocratic medical theory. In Sophocles' case, Bernard Knox's study *Oedipus at Thebes* (1957) constitutes the most direct approach to medical thought in *OT*. He describes how Oedipus shifts between being a physician, a patient, and ultimately, a disease at different stages of the play (1957: 139-147). Knox supports these role shifts by comparing some of the vocabulary of selected passages in the tragedy with their occurrence in the medical writings of the Hippocratic Corpus.

Knox's suggestions have led me to believe that the role shifts represent a deeper connection with medical thought than is represented simply on a vocabulary level. The approach I propose is to account for these role shifts from the standpoint of the doctor-patient relationship as described in different writings of the Hippocratic Corpus. I will focus on how the elements of the doctor-patient relationship (i.e. disease, patient, and physician) are represented and the reconfigurations they undergo in the plays. In the first chapter, I will examine how the doctor-patient relationship was viewed among the authors of the medical writings. The notion of the doctor-patient relationship will allow me to explore Sophocles' work in search of elements that demonstrate his awareness of contemporary medical practices. In addition, I will examine

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Collinge 1962, Miller 1942, 1944; Dumortier 1935. For approaches to the plague see Mitchell-Boyask 2008; Lloyd 2003; and Ryzman 1992.

Sophocles' involvement in the cult of Asclepius in order to determine how this aspect of his life might have influenced his work.

The frame of the Hippocratic doctor-patient relationship will inform my analysis of both plays. In the second chapter I will analyze how the doctor-patient relationship fluctuates in *OT*. I will use as reference the set of guidelines established in the first chapter regarding the notion of the doctor-patient relationship. This framework will allow me to demonstrate Sophocles' knowledge of contemporary medical practices through his portrayal of the doctor-patient relationship in the play, and at the same time, explain the reason why Oedipus constantly fails to be a successful physician and restore Thebes' health.

The Hippocratic model applied in the second chapter will prove insufficient to fully explain how the doctor-patient relationship unfolds in *OC*. Thus, in the third chapter, I will suggest that this play provides two complementary approaches to account for the doctor-patient relationship. The Hippocratic model will account for the development of a doctor-patient relationship between Oedipus, the Chorus, and Theseus just before Oedipus' supernatural death. At this point in the play, Sophocles, I believe, introduces a metaphor in which Oedipus stands for a healing god. This metaphor will allow me to account for the final stage of the doctor-patient relationship between Oedipus, Theseus, and Athens and suggest that it is a way for Sophocles to reflect the coexistence of two approaches to healing in late fifth-century Athens.

Ultimately, the medical imagery of the doctor-patient relationship found in *OT* and *OC* indicates that Sophocles was well aware of the medical practices of his time. Furthermore, I will suggest that his involvement in the cult of Asclepius is reflected in the metaphor of Oedipus as a healing god at the end of *OC*.

**Chapter 1: On doctors and patients, playwrights and cults.**



**Figure 1. Asclepius. By Larissa Rivero Akirov**

## 1.1 Preliminary Notes.

The existence of two schools of medicine, one in Cos (to which Hippocrates supposedly belonged) and the other in Cnidos, was a given fact among philologists and historians of medicine until the 1970s (Langholf 2011: 12). Nineteenth-century editors of the Hippocratic Corpus such as Littré<sup>2</sup> and Ermerins<sup>3</sup> supported the notion that these two alleged schools were opposed to each other and defended different medical principles.<sup>4</sup> Influential scholars like Jouanna (1999: 49-50) have continued this line of thought, although he admits that there is not enough evidence to know how these so-called schools were organized. Langholf suggests that there is no certainty about the type of association these schools actually had, and that the term 'school' could be an anachronistic designation (2011: 16).

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Cnidos and Cos were medical centres. In each city a branch of the aristocratic group of the Asclepiads handled the medical knowledge. An inscription at Delphi suggests that they had some kind of association:

Decree of the *koinon*<sup>5</sup> of the Asclepiads of Cos and of Cnidus: the Asclepiad arriving at Delphi, if he desires to consult the oracle or to sacrifice, must swear, before consulting the oracle or sacrificing, that he is Asclepiad by male descent [gap]. He who breaks these rules will not have access to the oracle as an Asclepiad, and any other privilege granted by the Delphians will not be accorded to him if it is not in conformity with the preceding prescriptions (Trans. by Jouanna 1999: 34).<sup>6</sup>

This inscription leaves no doubt about the existence of two branches of the Asclepiad family operating in Cos and in Cnidos. According to Langholf (2011: 25) several physicians belonged to these aristocratic groups, including Hippocrates's family. These groups were engaged in

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<sup>2</sup> Littré, E. (ed.) (1893), *Oeuvres complètes d'Hippocrate (I-X)*, Ballière, Paris.

<sup>3</sup> Ermerins, F. Z. (ed.) (1859), *Hippocratis et aliorum medicorum veterum reliquiae (I-IV)*, Kemik and Son, Rhine.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed characterization of both schools, their principles and methods see Laín Entralgo 1970b: 406-410.

<sup>5</sup> On the meanings of *koinon*, see Langholf 2011: 26.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the edition of this inscription see Langholf 2011: 26, n.51.

common religious and political activities regardless of the place of residence or citizenship of the members.

The rivalry between the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidos has usually been taken as a fact. However, there is little and unreliable evidence about the rivalry between the two medical branches (Jouanna 1999: 50). Langholf (2011: 28) states that nowhere in the Hippocratic Corpus<sup>7</sup> is it possible to find a clear reference to the alleged rivalry between the medical ‘schools.’

The main textual evidence that has led scholars to believe in the existence of two opposed medical ‘schools’ is *Cnidian Sentences*,<sup>8</sup> a work lost to us but cited by the author of *Regimen in Acute Diseases* (I-III).<sup>9</sup> Langholf (2011: 15-16) argues that the citation of *Cnidian Sentences* in *Regimen in Acute Diseases* has been over-interpreted in order to fit the common belief of the existence of these two ‘schools.’ He highlights the fact that the author of the Hippocratic treatise does not talk about a school or refer to a specific collective nor say anything that can be interpreted as an actual indication of rivalry among physicians. The Hippocratic author just expresses his disagreement with the methods of those who wrote the *Cnidian Sentences* (II):

Ὅκοταν δὲ ἐς τέκμαρσιν λέγεται ὡς χρὴ ἕκαστα ἰητρεύειν, ἐν τούτοις πολλὰ ἑτεροίως γινώσκω ἢ ὡς ἐκεῖνοι ἐπεξήεσαν (...)

But whenever it is said, according to the symptoms, how each case must be treated, in these cases I judge very differently from how they proceeded (...)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Under the name of Hippocrates has come down to us a group of medical texts known as the Hippocratic Corpus. This collection comprises fifty-three treatises arranged in seventy two books. The classification of this material has undergone different criteria throughout time (authorship, chronology, themes). In 1839 E. Littré published the whole works of Hippocrates in ten volumes. He organized them following the authorship criteria. For more on his classification criteria see *Oeuvres complètes d'Hippocrate*, vol. I, pp. 292-439. Furthermore, Jones (1923a) highlights the heterogeneity of the collection and the various difficult problems of its classification. He conceives of the collection as a library and therefore refuses any attempt at an elaborate classification (*Hippocrates*, vol. I, xxx). Due to the difficulty inherent to the authorship criteria recent editors prefer a thematic classification. Thus García Gual *et al.*, *Tratados Hipocráticos*, Madrid 1983-1989, in six volumes.

<sup>8</sup> On the problems regarding the translation of this title see Langholf 2011: 13, n.9.

<sup>9</sup> Jones' edition, 1923b.

<sup>10</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations from the Greek are my own.

Langholf (2011: 18) stresses the fact that *Cnidian Sentences* has always been unquestionably taken as a collective work produced by the so-called Cnidian School. He suggests that this work could have originated in Cnidos and then been spread by a non-Cnidian physician, or that it could have been taken from sources unknown to us that could also have been available to non-Cnidian physicians. Therefore, there is not enough evidence to indisputably assert the rivalry between these two branches of Asclepiads, or how these medical guilds were structured (if at all).

Medical writings like *The Sacred Disease* show that one of the goals of Hippocratic medicine was to differentiate itself from certain ritualistic practices provided by charlatans, purifiers and vagabonds (μάγοι τε καὶ καθάρται καὶ ἀγύρται, *The Sacred Disease II*). However, the Hippocratic physician did not challenge the religion of the great sanctuaries. In fact, the cult of Asclepius provided an important healing complement to the Hippocratic medicine (Kosak 2004: 3). These two approaches to healing coexisted in Athens at a time where both were experiencing great popularity and development.

Sophocles, on the other hand, was no stranger to the cult of Asclepius. There is enough evidence to suggest that Sophocles was deeply involved with the cult of Asclepius and its installation in Athens around 420 BCE. Moreover, I believe that it is possible to find traces of Hippocratic medical thought in his works. In order to do so, it is necessary to contextualize late fifth-century medical thought by exploring two main areas:

- a) The notion of the doctor-patient relationship as defined throughout the Hippocratic corpus, since I will explore Sophocles' work in search of elements

that will allow us to demonstrate his awareness of contemporary medical knowledge; and

- b) Sophocles' involvement with the cult of Asclepius, in order to establish the grounds for his participation in cultic life and the way in which this aspect of his life may have influenced his work, as I will examine in later chapters.

## 1.2 The Hippocratic Physician and his Patient.

Throughout the Hippocratic Corpus it is possible to identify guidelines for physicians when examining patients. The main source of information was the patient himself and what the physician could observe. Therefore, the Hippocratic physician relied heavily on his senses and his perception of the patient's body, his external appearance and whatever fluids came out of it.<sup>11</sup> A thorough examination of the patient was crucial to determine the possible course of the disease and, therefore, the best way to treat it. This close approach allowed the Hippocratic physician to have a direct relationship with those for whom he cared.

Determining who those patients were will help clarify the characteristics of the relationship between the Hippocratic physician and his patient. Plato has been the primary source for establishing the type of patients of the Hippocratic doctor. In his *Laws* (4.720 c-d),<sup>12</sup> it is

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<sup>11</sup> Laín Entralgo (1970b: 239-243) provides a detailed account on what was the role of each sense in the Hippocratic method of diagnosis. See especially p. 240, n.18, and p. 241, n. 20 for a list of works where there is mention of how the physician must employ his senses. On clinical observation and perception through the senses see also Jouanna 1999: 291-303.

<sup>12</sup> Ἄρ' οὖν καὶ συννοεῖς ὅτι, δούλων καὶ ἐλευθέρων ὄντων τῶν καμνόντων ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι, τοὺς μὲν δούλους σχεδόν τι οἱ δοῦλοι τὰ πολλὰ ἰατρούουσιν περιτρέχοντες καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἰατρείοις περιμένοντες (...) ὁ δὲ ἐλεύθερος ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον τὰ τῶν ἐλευθέρων νοσήματα θεραπεύει τε καὶ ἐπισκοπεῖ, καὶ ταῦτα ἐξετάζων ἀπ' ἀρχῆς καὶ κατὰ φύσιν (...) (And indeed you realize that, since there are slaves and free men among the sick persons in the cities, slaves probably treat mostly slaves, who come and go and wait in the surgeries ... but most of the time, the free [doctor]

reported that the physician took care of free men, and that slaves were usually treated by other slaves who most likely were the physician's assistants. As Jouanna (1999: 113) duly notices, Plato is not trying to provide a faithful picture of the medical science during his time, but to compare a good physician with a bad one, and on that basis oppose the practices of a good legislator with those of a bad one. A closer examination of the works within the Hippocratic Corpus reveals that the Hippocratic physician rarely delegated his duties to anyone else. On the few occasions where there is any record of this happening it is not exactly an assistant who is entrusted with the care of a patient, but rather an advanced student.

In *Epidemics I*,<sup>13</sup> we find fourteen cases of different conditions. Nine of these were men, (of which seven were referred to by name), and five were women (of which only one is referred to by name, three by their husbands' names, and an unidentified one). *Epidemics III* offers twelve cases: five men, of which four were mentioned by name; six women, five unidentified and one identified as the daughter of Euryanax; and a youth. These accounts demonstrate that the Hippocratic physician treated men, women, and children without distinction. In these two books of the *Epidemics* some patients are called by their names, which is a sign that they were free men (Jouanna 1999: 114). The remaining books of *Epidemics*<sup>14</sup> give accounts of several hundred cases that provide a broad spectrum of the types of patients the Hippocratic physician dealt with.

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treats and observes the diseases of free men, inquiring about them from their beginning and according to [its] nature...)

<sup>13</sup> Books I and III have always been considered as a separate group from the rest of the *Epidemics* because of their similar structure and style (Jones 1923a: 141; Smith 1994: 7). Like the rest of the works from the Hippocratic Corpus, it is very difficult to date the *Epidemics*. However, the year 410 B.C.E. has been suggested as a possible date of composition (thus Nutton 2004: 60, and Langholf 2011: 77). The title *Epidemics* seems to refer to the visits of the itinerant physician to a particular city rather than diseases. For further reference see Smith 1994: 1, n.1; Langholf 2011: 78.

<sup>14</sup> Books II, IV, V, VI, and VII form a more heterogeneous group of writings. Nutton (2004: 60) suggests that books II, IV and VI were written around 400 B.C.E.; books V and VII between 358 and 348 B.C.E. Langholf (2011: 77) agrees with these time frames.

We find free men and women, children, foreigners (Μειράκιον ξεῖνον, IV 17), and servants (Ἡ ἐκ τῶν γειτόνων Θέστορος οἰκέτις, IV 9; ὁ θεράπων ὁ τοῦ Ἀττικοῦ, IV 13). There are patients of diverse occupations such as rope-makers (σχοινοπλόκως), shoemakers (σκυτεύς), carpenters (τέκτων), teachers (γραμματικός), and gardeners (κηπουρός), to name a few. These testimonies prove that the physician treated patients without distinction regardless of their backgrounds.

The fact that there were patients with different resources makes one wonder about how the Hippocratic physician earned his living and how this affected his relationship with his patients. Jouanna (1999: 119-20) states that physicians were paid for their services, and during Hippocrates' time there were complaints about the high cost of health care.<sup>15</sup> Charging a fee was not the main purpose of the Hippocratic physician. *Precepts* states overtly that physicians should sometimes provide their services for free:

Παρακελεύομαι δὲ μὴ λίην ἀπανθρωπίνην εἰσάγειν, ἀλλ' ἀποβλέπειν ἕξ γε περιουσίην καὶ οὐσίην· ὅτε δὲ προῖκα, ἀναφέρων μνήνην εὐχαριστίας προτέρην ἢ παρεούσαν εὐδοκίην. Ἦν δὲ καιρὸς εἶη χορηγίης ξένῳ τε ἐόντι καὶ ἀπορέοντι, μάλιστα ἐπαρκέειν τοῖσι τοιοῦτέοισιν· ἦν γὰρ παρῆ φιλανθρωπία, πάρεστι καὶ φιλοτεχνία (VI).

I recommend not to show unkindness, but to consider the surplus or the existence of means: sometimes make a gift, bearing first in mind gratitude or present good-will. For if there could be an opportunity to assist someone who is a stranger and without resources, help those even more: for if there is love for mankind, there is also love for the art.

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<sup>15</sup> This situation was addressed by Euripides and Aristophanes:

ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις δ' ἠνίκ' ἄν γνώμης πέσω, σκοπῶ τὰ χρήμαθ' ὡς ἔχει μέγα σθένος, ξένοις τε δοῦναι σῶμά τ' ἐς νόσους πεσόν δαπάναισι σῶσαι... (Eur., <i>Elec.</i> 426-29)	in these circumstances, when I fall out of my intention, I see that money has great power, to give it to strangers, and to save the body with money when it falls sick...
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τίς δῆτ' ἰατρός ἐστι νῦν ἐν τῇ πόλει; οὔτε γὰρ ὁ μισθὸς οὐδὲν ἔστ' οὔθ' ἡ τέχνη. (Arist., <i>Plutus</i> 407-08)	What doctor is now in the city? Since there is no salary, there is no art.
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This behavior would not represent a threat to the physician's earnings since he, belonging to the Asclepiad family, would surely count on a wealthy clientele to make his living (Jouanna 1999: 120). In addition, by following this recommendation, the physician would gain a good reputation for himself and for the τέχνη ιατρική as a whole.

From the numerous cases described in the *Epidemics* it is easy to observe that apparently the Hippocratic physician did not discriminate between his patients; he esteemed them as human beings regardless of their origin, means, gender or background. According to Jouanna (1999: 125), this was a sign that what mattered the most for the physician was his relationship with the patient, “no matter who the patient was.”<sup>16</sup>

The goal of Hippocratic medicine was to fight diseases or any other type of disturbance of health with the tools given by the τέχνη. However, it was not a secret within the medical community that sometimes health was difficult to restore. In these circumstances, a set of recommendations was provided to the medical practitioner defining his conduct towards the patient:

Τούτω ἀφηρεῖται μὲν τὸ νόσημα· χρηστῶς, ὡς ἔδει, τὸ σῶμα· ὠφελεῖτο δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν προσφερομένων· τελευτῶντι δὲ ἐρράγη τὸ νόσημα κάτω, καὶ ἐχώρει πᾶν ὑπὸ πολλῇ χολῇ, καὶ παρέκοψε, καὶ ἔθανεν· ἐδόκεε δ' ἂν ἐκφυγεῖν τὸ νόσημα.  
(*Epidemics* V, 31)

The disease was relieved in him. The body was strong, as it should be. He benefited from the things administered. But at the end, the disease broke out below, and

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<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, Edelstein (1956) duly notes that this φιlanθρωπία did not necessarily have the elevated connotation it has today. It had more to do with the proper behaviour of the physician towards anyone he came in contact with, “it means no more than a certain friendliness of disposition, a kindness, as opposed to any misanthropic attitude” (Reprinted in Temkin and Temkin 1967: 320). He further states that φιlanθρωπία was “viewed as a minor social virtue, so to say” (Reprinted in Temkin and Temkin 1967: 322). The desired result from this φιlanθρωπία was for the patient to be well-disposed towards the treatment prescribed (For a detailed account on the implications of φιlanθρωπία, see especially Edelstein reprinted in Temkin and Temkin 1967: 321, n. 4; 322, n. 5).

everything flowed next to much bile, he went mad, and he died. It seemed as if he could escape the disease.

...ἀσκέειν, περὶ τὰ νοσήματα, δύο, ὠφελέειν, ἢ μὴ βλάπτειν. Ἡ τέχνη διὰ τριῶν, τὸ νόσημα, ὁ νοσέων, καὶ ὁ ἰητρός· ὁ ἰητρός, ὑπηρέτης τῆς τέχνης· ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι τῷ νοσήματι τὸν νοσεῦντα μετὰ τοῦ ἰητροῦ χρῆ. (*Epidemics I*. XI)

...regarding diseases, practice two things: to help, or to do no harm. The art [exists] through three things: the disease, the patient, and the physician. The physician is a servant of the art; and it is necessary for the patient to defeat diseases along with the physician.

Διαιτήμασί τε χρῆσομαι ἐπ' ὠφελείῃ καμνόντων κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ κρίσιν ἐμήν, ἐπὶ δηλήσει δὲ καὶ ἀδικίῃ εἴρξιν. Οὐ δώσω δὲ οὐδὲ φάρμακον οὐδενὶ αἰτηθεὶς θανάσιμον, οὐδὲ ὑφηγήσομαι ζυμβουλίην τοιήνδε· ὁμοίως δὲ οὐδὲ γυναικὶ πεσσὸν φθόριον δώσω (*Oath*, 16-21).<sup>17</sup>

In regimes, according to my ability and judgment, I will make use [of those] for the benefit of patients, and abstain from harm and wrongdoing. I will not give to anyone any deadly medicine even if asked, nor will I provide such advice. Likewise, I will not give a woman an abortive pessary.<sup>18</sup>

These passages demonstrate that the purpose of Hippocratic medicine is not only to restore health, but also “to protect the interests of the patient” (Jouanna 1999: 126). The prescribed behavior for the physician is in consonance with the maxim in *Epidemics I* of ‘ὠφελέειν, ἢ μὴ βλάπτειν,’ and look after the patient’s physical integrity.

The *Oath* also shows concern about the physical integrity of the patient and about the physician’s attitude towards him. The physician must be discreet, and should conduct his life in a modest and righteous manner:

Ἐς οἰκίας δὲ ὀκόσας ἂν ἐσίω, ἐσελεύσομαι ἐπ' ὠφελείῃ καμνόντων, ἐκτὸς ἐὼν πάσης ἀδικίης ἐκουσίης καὶ φθορίας, τῆς τε ἄλλης καὶ ἀφροδισίων ἔργων ἐπὶ τε γυναικείων σωμαίων καὶ ἀνδρῶν, ἐλευθέρων τε καὶ δούλων. Ἄ δ' ἂν ἐν θεραπείῃ ἢ

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<sup>17</sup> The numbers refer to lines in Jones’ edition 1923a.

<sup>18</sup> The meaning of the adjective φθόριος is ‘destructive.’ However, one of the meanings provided by the LSJ is ‘to produce abortion.’ For a detailed discussion on the difficulty of translating this passage see Carrick 2001: 97-99, especially 97, n. 47.

ἴδω, ἢ ἀκούσω, ἢ καὶ ἄνευ θεραπήης κατὰ βίον ἀνθρώπων, ἂ μὴ χρή ποτε ἐκλαλέεσθαι ἔξω, σιγήσομαι, ἄρρητα ἠγεύμενος εἶναι τὰ τοιαῦτα. (*Oath* 24-32)

Into whatever houses I might enter, I will go for the benefit of the patients, staying away from all voluntary wrongdoing and corruption, and from any other [misdeed], and from sexual actions against the bodies of women, men, either free or slaves.<sup>19</sup> The things which I see during treatment, or will hear, away from treatment, about the life of men, those things which should not be divulged outside, I will keep quiet, considering that those things are secrets.

Τηρεῖν δὲ χρή ἐωυτὸν ὅτι μάλιστα, μὴ πολλὰ φαίνοντα τῶν τοῦ σώματος μερέων, μηδὲ πολλὰ λεσχηνεύμενον τοῖσιν ιδιώτησιν, ἀλλὰ τἀναγκαῖα νομίζειν γὰρ τοῦτο βίη εἶναι ἐς πρόκλησιν θεραπήης. (*Decorum* VII)

He must watch over himself very much, to not show many portions of his body, nor converse too much with laymen, but only what is necessary; for he knows that this is violence against the proposal of a treatment.

Δεῖ δὲ σκοπέειν τάδε περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τὸν σώφρονα, μὴ μόνον τὸ σιγᾶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τὸν βίον [τὸ] πάνυ εὐτακτον, μέγιστα γὰρ ἔχει πρὸς δόξαν ἀγαθὰ, τὸ δὲ ἦθος εἶναι καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν, τοιοῦτον δ' ὄντα πᾶσι καὶ σεμνὸν καὶ φιλόανθρωπον. (*Physician* 1)<sup>20</sup>

The prudent [physician] must observe these things about his personality: not only to be silent, but also to be completely well-disciplined about his life, for that brings great benefits to his reputation; to be good and noble in character, for being such he [will be] grand and kind to all.

The three passages cited above clearly set standards regarding malpractice and provide the physician with a wide range of recommendations of general conduct. Discretion and righteousness are the main notions surrounding the practitioner's behavior towards the patient.

The treatise *Physician* gives more specifics about the practitioner's behavior and physical appearance:

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<sup>19</sup> Edelstein (1943) determinedly states that "Everything [...] that the Oath stipulates in regard to sexual continence agrees with the tenets of Pythagoreans ethics, in fact, with the ideals of these philosophers alone" (Reprinted in Temkin and Temkin 1967: 35). Against this view, see Carrick 2001: 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> Jones' edition, 1923b.

πρὸς δὲ ἰητρὸν οὐ μικρὰ συναλλάγματα τοῖσι νοσοῦσιν ἐστίν· καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὺς ὑποχειρίους ποιέουσι τοῖς ἰητροῖς, καὶ πᾶσαν ὄρην ἐντυγχάνουσι γυναῖξιν, παρθένοις, καὶ τοῖς ἀξίοις πλείστου κτήμασιν· ἐγκρατέως οὖν δεῖ πρὸς ἅπαντα ἔχειν ταῦτα. Τὴν μὲν οὖν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ σῶμα οὕτω διακεῖσθαι. (*Physician 1*)

For the physician, the commitments towards the patients are not small. Indeed, [the patients] put themselves in the hands of the physicians, and every time [the physicians] meet women, and girls and possessions worthy of much. Towards all these things he must have self-control. He should be this way in respect of his body and personality.

Ἰητροῦ μὲν ἐστὶ προστασίη, ὀρῆν εὐχρως τε καὶ εὐσαρκος πρὸς τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν αὐτῷ φύσιν· ἀξιοῦνται γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν οἱ μὴ εὖ διακείμενοι τὸ σῶμα οὕτως, οὐδ' ἂν ἐτέρων ἐπιμεληθῆναι καλῶς· ἔπειτα τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν καθαρῶς ἔχειν, ἐσθῆτι χρηστῇ καὶ χρίσμασιν εὐόδοις, ὁδμὴν ἔχουσιν ἀνυπόπτως· πρὸς ἅπαντα ταῦτα γὰρ ἠδέως ἔχειν ζυμβαίνει τοὺς νοσέοντας. (*Physician, 1*)

The dignity of a physician resides in looking healthy and also in good condition according to his proper nature. For they are considered by the crowds not worthy of taking good care of others, if they themselves are not well in respect to the body. Thereafter, he must be clean in every respect about him, fittingly dressed, with sweet-smelling ointments that have not an unexpected smell. All these things are pleasant for the patients.

Together, all these passages embody a unified view of how the physician relates to his patients professionally. This provides a theoretical frame of moral conduct for the practitioner of medicine to comply with when interacting with patients. It is evident that all these recommended behaviors aim to observe the well-being of patients, and at the same time, the reputation of the physician and his art.

The texts discussed above show that throughout different medical writings there is a comprehensive notion of how a physician should behave. At the same time, this behavior is directly related to the importance for the Hippocratic physician of achieving a good reputation among laymen and fellow physicians, for the reputation acquired by one will project onto the

τέχνη as a whole since “what is good for the doctor, is also good for the *téchne* [sic] and it evidently affects the patient” (Lara Nava 2004: 48).

The effectiveness of the treatment also depends on the patient’s trust in the physician’s ability to cure him; thus trust “was an essential element in the struggle against disease” (Nutton 2004: 88). The physician needs to demonstrate that he possesses the technical knowledge to help the patient and he should apply it “with dignity and tact” (Laín Entralgo 1970a: 159). One of the distinctive features of Greek medicine was its gentleness in treatment. Herodotus provides testimony of this feature:

Μετὰ δὲ ὧς οἱ ἐπέτρεψε, Ἑλληνικοῖσι ἰήμασι χρεώμενος καὶ ἦπια μετὰ τὰ ἰσχυρὰ προσάγων ὕπνου τέ μιν λαγχάνειν ἐποίηε καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ ὀλίγῳ ὑγίεια μιν ἀπέδεξε, οὐδαμὰ ἔτι ἐλπίζοντα ἀρτίπουν ἔσεσθαι. (3.130)

But afterwards, when he turned to him, [Democedes] using Greek remedies and gentleness instead of harshness made him able to sleep and in a short time restored his health, although he was not hoping to regain use of his foot.

The physician should always try to be attentive and treat his patient with softness. The author of *Physician* recommends that, when the surgery only requires one incision, the physician make it a quick one since the patient is going to be in pain and he, the practitioner, should make the pain last as little time as possible (τὸ λυπέον μὲν ὡς ἐλάχιστον χρόνον δεῖ παρεῖναι, 5). He also states the proper method of bandaging in order for it to be helpful for the patient (ὠφελεῖσθαι τὸν θεραπευόμενον, 4) along with what bandages to choose, for the wrong ones will likely do harm to the patient (πολλάκις τε βλάβην οἴσον τῷ θεραπευομένῳ, 4).<sup>21</sup> Works like the *Oath* and *Physician* demonstrate an early awareness of the fact that medical treatment can also be a source

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<sup>21</sup> Potter’s edition, 1995.

of pain for the patient. The *Oath* (16-21) is specifically concerned with the well-being of the patient and states that the physician should make use of his abilities for their benefit. This concern is also found in *Epidemics* I, 11 where the author overtly recommends ‘to help, or to do no harm.’ The passages from both works show how the physician should refrain from deliberately causing pain to the patient or creating any disadvantage for the patient’s situation through treatment to the best of his abilities (Van Der Eijk 2005a: 101-102). The Hippocratic physician should also have all his equipment prepared and ready for action, for the lack of preparedness will result in hardship and harm (ἀμηχανία καὶ βλάβη ἐστίν, *Decorum* VIII). These are just a few examples of the concern about the patient’s pain found throughout several medical writings. This concern is in complete consonance with the ‘ὠφελέειν, ἢ μὴ βλάπτειν’ statement of *Epidemics* I.

There are a few instances throughout the books of *Epidemics* where the author reports how that statement of *Epidemics* I manifests itself in the course of treatment, whether this entails changing the remedy to cause less pain or gain effectiveness, or stopping treatment altogether. Several cases demonstrate how the treatment provided some pain relief for the patient, or how after changing it, some relief was found:

ἀγκῶνα ἔταμον· ἐρῥύη πολλὸν, οἷον ἔδει· ξυνέδωκαν μὲν οἱ πόνοι· αἱ μέντοι βῆχες ξηραὶ παρείποντο. (*Epidemics* III, 17)

I cut the arm; it flowed abundantly, as it should. The pains diminished. However, the dry cough remained.

Οὗτος φάρμακα πίνων παντοδαπὰ καὶ ἄνω καὶ κάτω, οὐδὲν ὠφελέετο· φλεβοτομούμενος δὲ ἐν μέρει ἑκατέρην τὴν χεῖρα, ἕως ἕξαιμος ἐγένετο, ἔπειτα ὠφελήθη, καὶ ἀπηλλάγη τοῦ κακοῦ. (*Epidemics* V, 6).

Although he drank all sorts of drugs, upward and downward, he was not benefited. When he was bled on each arm in turn until he became bloodless, then he was benefited and was relieved from trouble.

ύγιης δὲ πολλῶ χρόνῳ· φάρμακα δὲ ἔπινε, καὶ σικύας προσεβάλλετο, καὶ ἐφλεβοτομεῖτο, καὶ ἐδόκεε ῥήϊον γίνεσθαι ταῦτα πάσχοντι (*Epidemics* v, 8).

Health [lasted] for a long time. But he drank drugs and was applied the cupping-instrument, was bled, and it seemed to be easier when treated thus.

These passages clearly reflect the thoughtfulness of the Hippocratic physician always bearing in mind the benefit for the patient, applying treatments or changing them if they proved harmful or inefficient. There is also record of the physician knowing when there is nothing left to do to help the patient. Thus the author of *Epidemics* III admits that there was not much more to do for a female patient: ὠφελέειν οὐδὲν ἠδύνατο· ἀπέθανεν (“it was not possible to help at all; she died,” *Epidemics* III, 9).

The physician was not entirely alone in trying to accomplish that purpose; the patient had an important role as well. Both physician and patient had duties towards one another in order for the treatment to be effective. Throughout the Hippocratic Corpus it is possible to find references to patients and what was expected from them. The Hippocratic physician was expecting some collaboration from his patient. The author of *Epidemics* I points out that the patients must defeat diseases along with the physician (μετὰ τοῦ ἱητροῦ, 11). Likewise, at the beginning of *Aphorisms* (I,1) the physician is instructed to seek the cooperation of the patient and his/her relatives: Δεῖ δὲ οὐ μόνον ἑαυτὸν παρέχειν τὰ δέοντα ποιεῦντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν νοσέοντα, καὶ τοὺς παρεόντας, καὶ τὰ ἔξωθεν (“He must prepare not only himself to do what he needs to do, but also the patients, the attendants, and the matters outside the house”).

Since the Hippocratic Corpus was meant primarily for physicians, there is no systematic exposition of the responsibilities of the patient. However, there are several instances where the type of cooperation expected from him is stated: Ὁ δὲ χειριζόμενος τῷ χειρίζοντι τῷ ἄλλῳ τοῦ

σώματος μέρει ὑπηρετεῖτω, ἢ ἐστεῶς, ἢ καθήμενος, ἢ κείμενος (“The operated must help the operator with the other part of his body, either by standing, or sitting, or lying,” *The Surgery* 3). Another example is given in *Hemorrhoids*. When describing the cauterization of hemorrhoids, the author gives instructions on how the patient must be held down by assistants, and how the physician should let the patient cry, for this would help him perform the surgery: βοάτω καίόμενος· ὁ γὰρ ἀρχὸς μᾶλλον ἐξίσχει (“Let him shout while being cauterized, for the anus will protrude more,” *Hemorrhoids* 2).

Although the Hippocratic physician expected some cooperation from his patients, he nonetheless was aware that the patient would likely not follow his instructions in his absence. The nature of the complaints found throughout the Hippocratic Corpus “suggests that the relationship between physician and patient was sometimes less than perfectly harmonious” (Jouanna 1999: 136). The physician knew that patients were prone to lying especially when it came down to concealing their disobedience and negligence regarding the treatment prescribed:

Ἐπιτηρεῖν δὲ δεῖ καὶ τὰς ἀμαρτίας τῶν καμνόντων, δι' ὧν πολλοὶ πολλάκις διεψεύσαντο ἐν τοῖσι προσάμμασι τῶν προσφερομένων· ἐπεὶ τὰ μισητὰ ποτήματα οὐ λαμβάνοντες, ἢ φαρμακευόμενοι ἢ θεραπευόμενοι, ἀνηρέθησαν· καὶ αὐτῶν μὲν οὐχ ὡς ὁμολογίην τρέπεται τὸ ποιηθὲν, τῷ δὲ ἰητρῷ τὴν αἰτίην προσῆψαν (*Decorum*, 14)

It is necessary to watch for the faults of the patients, through which many of them often lie about the rations of the things administered. When they are not taking disgusting drinks, or being purged, or treated, they die. And what they have done does not come out as confession, but rather they attach the blame to the physician.

Nevertheless, the Hippocratic physician had at his disposition a set of instructions on what signs to look for when trying to expose the faults of his patients regarding their prescribed diet. These included a thorough everyday inspection of the patient’s body, at the same time and location, preferably in the morning. The physician should inspect the patient’s appearance, his skin, whether his belly is swollen or not, his excretions, and his attitude in general (*Prorrhetic* II, 4).

To perform a successful follow-up of a patient in order to find out whether he is lying or not about the treatment, the physician must be familiar with the patient's daily routine: Ἐνθυμέεσθαι δὲ χρὴ καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τῆς τε γνώμης τοῦς τρόπους, τοῦ τε σώματος τὴν δύναμιν· ἄλλοι γὰρ ἄλλα ῥηϊδίως ἐπιτελοῦσι τῶν προστασσομένων καὶ χαλεπῶς (“It is necessary to notice the ways of the mind of a man, and the strength of his body, for some patients accomplish the things prescribed easily, while others rather with difficulty,” *Prorrhetic* II, 4). The relevance of exposing the failings of the patient lies in the implication that an unsuccessful treatment would have on the physician's reputation, as discussed earlier. For the author of *Decorum* in the passage cited above, it is clear that when a patient dies, even if he dies because of his own negligence or disobedience, the blame was placed upon the physician. However, physicians were not held accountable legally when a patient died (Jouanna 1999: 140). The concern in those circumstances was the effect on his reputation and that of the whole medical guild.

The passages discussed above allow me to summarize the main features of the relationship between the Hippocratic physician and his patient. The guidelines provided throughout the Hippocratic Corpus observe the recommendation of ‘ὠφελέειν, ἢ μὴ βλάπτειν’ presented in *Epidemics* I and echoed in the *Oath*. These guidelines focus on two main issues: the preservation of the patient's well-being, and the physician's conduct. Therefore, the physician should use his knowledge for the benefit of his patients, abstain from harm and wrongdoing, and not give poisonous or deadly remedies (*Oath* 16-21). He must abstain from corruption and sexual behaviour towards women, men, and children, free or slave (*Oath* 24-28), and be gentle when treating patients in order to avoid causing too much or unnecessary pain (*Physician* 5; 4). Furthermore, he must be discreet about everything he hears or sees at a patient's home (*Oath* 29-

32) and not talk either too little or too much with laymen (*Decorum* VII). He should dress discreetly and look healthy, clean and sweet-smelling (*Decorum* VII; *Physician* 1). Finally, he is instructed to carry out a righteous life and always have self-control (*Physician* 1).

Since the works of the Hippocratic Corpus were meant for the medical community, there is little evidence about what was expected from the patient. However, there are a few instances where it is stated that some cooperation from the patient was desired. The author of *Epidemics* I, 11 recalls that the patient must defeat the disease along with the physician, and the author of *The Surgery* (3) takes for granted the fact that the patient will help the physician with the part of the body that is not being operated on.

All these guidelines have the ultimate goal of achieving a successful relationship between the physician and his patient. As the author of *Epidemics* (I, 11) stated, the medical art exists thanks to three elements: the disease, the patient and the physician. If the relationship between physician and patient is a successful one, it will have a positive effect not only on the patient's health, but also on the physician's reputation, on the whole medical community and, ultimately, on the medical art itself.

### **1.3 Sophocles and Asclepius.**

In the cultural milieu where these notions of proper medical practise were developing, Sophocles was writing his plays. Most of the stories surrounding Sophocles' life are anecdotal and generally cannot be interpreted as actual facts. One of the accurate dates we have for Sophocles is that of his death in 406/405 BCE. Taking this date as a reference, several suggestions for a birth date have been made, spanning from 497 to 494 BCE. During his lifetime, Sophocles held several public offices: Hellenotamias in 443/442 BCE; general for 441/440 BCE during the

Samian war; and member of the board, which in 411 BCE, voted in favor of the oligarchic regime of the Four Hundred.<sup>22</sup> However, although Sophocles held high public offices he is not mentioned as a speaker in the assembly; this may indicate that he did not have “any desire to be a civic leader” (Scodel 2012: 33).

Sophocles’ public life was also associated with public cultic life. There are several ancient sources that provide evidence of Sophocles’ connection with the cult of Asclepius. The compiler of the *Vita* states that he was a priest of Halon, a hero closely associated with Asclepius and Cheiron.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Plutarch provides further testimony about Sophocles’ connection with the cult of the healing god:

Σοφοκλεῖ δὲ καὶ ζῶντι τὸν Ἀσκληπιὸν ἐπιξενωθῆναι λόγος ἐστὶ πολλὰ μέχρι δεῦρο διασώζων τεκμήρια, καὶ τελευτήσαντι τυχεῖν ταφῆς ἄλλος θεός, ὡς λέγεται, παρέσχεν (*Numa* 4.6.4-7).

The story says that Asclepius stayed as a guest with Sophocles when he was alive, and many proofs are preserved until now, and it is said that when he happened to die, another god provided the burial.

ἢ Φορμίων τοὺς Διοσκόρους ἢ τὸν Ἀσκληπιὸν Σοφοκλῆς ξενίζειν αὐτός τε πειθόμενος καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οὕτως ἐχόντων διὰ τὴν γενομένην ἐπιφάνειαν; (*Moralia* 1103 b 1-4).

Or Phormio, who received the Dioscuri, or Sophocles who received Asclepius, he himself being convinced, and the others believed the same because of the epiphany that happened?

These passages have been often interpreted as testimony to Sophocles’ privileged relationship with Asclepius. In the case of the *Numa* passage, the account is relevant for it is mentioned among famous stories about how the gods have manifested affection for specific individuals. The

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<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed account about Sophocles’ public involvement, see Jouanna 2007: 23-72.

<sup>23</sup> Ἔσχε δὲ καὶ τὴν τοῦ Ἄλωνος ἱερωσύνην, ὃς ἦρως μετὰ Ἀσκληπιοῦ παρὰ Χείρωνι... ἰδρυθεις ὑπὸ Ἰοφῶντος τοῦ υἱοῦ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν (“He had the priesthood of Halon, a hero who along with Asclepius beside Cheiron... was settled by Iophon after his death,” *Vita Sophoclis*, 39-40).

passage of *Moralia* has a similar context. The reference to Sophocles receiving Asclepius is given when discussing the gods' kindness and affections towards wise and just men. Both accounts prove that Sophocles' affinity with Asclepius was a widespread belief even more than five centuries later. Nonetheless, scholars have found it difficult to determine what exactly Plutarch is implying by having Sophocles receive/entertain (ξενίζω; ἐπιξενόομαι) the god. The verb ἐπιξενόομαι mainly means 'to be entertained as a guest; be on a visit' (*LSJ*).<sup>24</sup> Likewise, ξενίζω has the meaning of 'receive, or entertain as a guest' (*LSJ*).<sup>25</sup> Jouanna (2007: 77) explains that receiving a god into one's house means to lodge a representation of the god, an image,<sup>26</sup> from a pre-existing temple. If this is correct, Sophocles probably had received an image of the god from the temple at Epidaurus which was the most important and famous at the time.<sup>27</sup>

Several scholars<sup>28</sup> agree with this interpretation of Sophocles' reception of Asclepius. In addition, another source reinforces this explanation of the reception story. A ninth-century CE dictionary entry explains how Sophocles was honoured after his death because of his reception of Asclepius:

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<sup>24</sup> This meaning is found in Aristotle: τό τε γὰρ ἐπιξενούσθαι τινας ἐν ἄλλοις τεθραμμένους νόμοις ἀσύμφορον εἶναι φασι πρὸς τὴν εὐνομίαν ("for they say that to visit people brought up according to different laws is prejudicial for the good order," *Pol.* 1327a).

<sup>25</sup> This use is already found in Homer: ὄφρ' ἂν ἐγὼ γε ζῶω, ἔπειτα δὲ παῖδες ἐνὶ μεγάροισι λίπονται ξείνους ξενίζειν, ὅς τις κ' ἐμὰ δώμαθ' ἔκηται. ("while I live, and afterwards my children are left behind in my halls entertaining strangers as guests, whoever may come to my house," *Od.*, 3.354-355); ἐννῆμαρ ξείνισσε καὶ ἐννέα βοῦς ἰέρευσεν ("for nine days he received him and sacrificed nine oxen," *Il.*, 6.174).

<sup>26</sup> Probably a cult image of a sacred snake. Jouanna (2007: 77) argues in favor of this possibility. In order to establish a comparison, Jouanna relies on Pausanias' description of how the cult of Asclepius was introduced in Sicyon: φασι δὲ σφισιν ἐξ Ἐπιδάουρου κομισθῆναι τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ ζεύγους ἡμιόνων δράκοντι εἰκασμένον, τὴν δὲ ἀγαγοῦσαν Νικαγόραν εἶναι Σικυωνίαν Ἀγασικλέους μητέρα, γυναῖκα δὲ Ἐχετίμου ("They say that the god was brought to them on a mule chariot in the likeness of a serpent, and that Nicagora, a Sicyonian, mother of Agasicles and wife of Echetimus was the one who brought it," 2.10.3.5).

<sup>27</sup> The relevance of the temple at Epidaurus is attested in Pausanias: μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι καὶ τότε ἐν Ἐπιδάουρῳ τὸν θεὸν γενέσθαι· τὰ γὰρ Ἀσκληπιεῖα εὐρίσκω τὰ ἐπιφανέστατα γεγονότα ἐξ Ἐπιδάουρου ("I have evidence that the god was born in Epidaurus, for I have found that the most renowned temples of Asclepius originated from Epidaurus," 2.26.8.).

<sup>28</sup> Nutton 2004: 51; Hart 2000: 177; Farnell 1970: 259, 364; Rohde 1950: 148, n. 71. However, Scodel (2012: 36) and Lefkowitz (1981: 84) suggest that this reception story could be fictional.

Δεξίων: Οὕτως ὠνομάσθη Σοφοκλῆς ὑπὸ Ἀθηναίων μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν. Φασὶν ὅτι Ἀθηναῖοι τελευτήσαντι Σοφοκλεῖ, βουλόμενοι τιμὰς αὐτῷ περιποιῆσαι, ἡρώϊον αὐτῷ κατασκευάσαντες, ὠνόμασαν αὐτὸν Δεξίωνα, ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ δεξιώσεως. Καὶ γὰρ ὑπεδέξατο τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ οἰκίᾳ, καὶ βωμὸν ἰδρύσατο. Ἐκ τῆς αἰτίας οὖν ταύτης Δεξίων ἐκλήθη. (*Etymologicum Magnum*, 256.16)

Dexion: Sophocles was called thus by the Athenians after his death. They say that the Athenians, wanting to provide honours to the dead Sophocles, prepared a hero's shrine for him and called him Dexion, because of the reception of Asclepius. For he indeed received the god in his house and dedicated an altar. For this very reason he was called Dexion.

This testimony is interpreted by Jouanna (2007: 79-80) as clear proof of two things: first, that Sophocles in fact hosted the god in his house; and second, that this circumstance made the Athenians honour Sophocles by establishing a cult and worship him as Dexion. Furthermore, the *Vita* also provides evidence of the existence of some sort of worship of Sophocles: Ἴστρος δέ φησιν Ἀθηναίους διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴν ψήφισμα πεποιηκέναι καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος αὐτῷ θύειν ("But Istros says that the Athenians made a decree to make a sacrifice for him each year on account of his excellence," *Vita Sophoclis* 74-75; *FGrHist* 334 F 38).

These sources demonstrate that there was a very widespread tradition of connecting Sophocles to Asclepius and supporting the existence of a heroic cult<sup>29</sup> in Sophocles' honour. Further epigraphic evidence shows that there was in fact a cult to a hero named Dexion and that it was closely associated with Asclepius. Two inscriptions mention the association of the priests

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<sup>29</sup> The cult of heroes was well established along with the worship of regular gods (Rohde 1950: 115). These heroes were "beings of a higher kind" who were worshiped with regular sacrifices (115). Furthermore, Rohde explains that these heroes were the spirits of the dead (not to be confused with demigods or daimones), and though they were men once, "it does not follow that all men become Heroes after their death" (118). Among this group were worshiped heroes whose lifetimes were set in a distant past and who were considered the forefathers of humanity. Therefore, the cult of heroes was not a cult of souls but rather a cult of ancestors (118). For an in-depth study about the worship of specific heroes such as the epic ones, see Farnell (1970). Snodgrass (2000) returns to the issue of heroic cult, including archaeological evidence to argue that the installation of a heroic cult depended on different factors other than the influence of Homeric Epic.

of Amynos, of Asclepius and of Dexion, thus reinforcing the close association between the cults of these divinities:

Κλειαινέτος Κλεομένους Μελιτεὺς εἶπεν· δεδόχθαι τοῖς ὀργεῶσι· ἐπειδὴ εἰσιν ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ περὶ τὰ κοινὰ τῶν ὀργεῶνων τοῦ Ἀμύνου καὶ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ καὶ τοῦ Δεξίονος Καλλιιάδης Φιλίνου Πειραιεύς, Λυσιμαχίδης Φιλίνου Πειραιεύς, ἐπαινέσαι αὐτοὺς ἀρετῆς ἔνεκα καὶ δικαιοσύνης τῆ<ς> εἰς τοὺς θεοὺς καὶ περὶ τὰ κοινὰ τῶν ὀργεῶνων καὶ στεφανῶσαι αὐτῶν ἑκάτερον χρυσῶ ἀπὸ Γ δραχμῶν· (...) ἀναγράψαι δὲ τόδε τὸ ψήφισμα ἐν στήλαις λιθίναις δυοῖν καὶ στῆσαι τὴν μὲν ἐν τῷ τοῦ Δεξίονος ἱερῷ, τὴν δὲ [ἐ]ν τῷ τοῦ Ἀμύνου καὶ Ἀσκληπιοῦ· (...) (*IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 1252*).

Kleianetos, son of Kleomenes, of the deme Melite, moved this measure. It has been decided by the priests: since Kalliadēs, son of Philinos, of the deme Peiraieus, and Lysimachides, son of Philinos, of the deme Peiraieus are good men regarding the association of the priests of Amynos and Asklepios and Dexion, to commend them for their merit and righteousness toward the gods and concerning the association of the priests, and to award each of them a crown of gold worth 500 drachmas (...) To record this measure on two stone pillars and to erect one in the shrine of Dexion and the other in the shrine of Amynos and Asklepios (...).

Θεοί· ἔδοξε τοῖς [ὀργεῶσιν· . . . .] Ἴππομάχου Με[λιτεὺς εἶπεν· ἐπειδὴ . . .] δῶρος καὶ Ἀντ[ . . . . .] ἄνδρες δίκαιοι γεγόνασιν περὶ τὰ κοινὰ τῶν ὀργεῶνων τοῦ Ἀμύνου καὶ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ καὶ τοῦ Δεξίονος, ἐπαινέσαι αὐτοὺς δικαιοσύνης ἔνεκα καὶ στεφανῶσαι αὐτῶν ἑκάτερον χρυσῶ στεφάνῳ. τὸ δὲ ψήφισμα τόδε ἀναγράψαι ἐ[ν] τῷ[ι] ἱερῷ ἐν στήλει λιθίνῃ (*IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 1253*).

Gods; it was decided by the [priests; . . . .] of Hippomaches, of the deme Me[lite moved. Since . . .] doros and Anti[. . . . .] have proved to be just men concerning the association of the priests of Amynos and Asklepios and Dexion, to commend them because of their righteousness and to award each of them with a gold crown. To record this measure in the shrine on a stone pillar.<sup>30</sup>

For Jouanna, these inscriptions complement the ninth-century CE dictionary entry of Dexion (see above, p. 22). Without this literary testimony “we wouldn’t have known that Dexion, in the

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<sup>30</sup> For both these inscriptions I am following Tyrrell’s translation (2006).

epigraphic text, corresponded to Sophocles heroised” (2007: 80-81).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the first inscription (*IG* II/III<sup>2</sup> 1252) confirms the existence of a sanctuary devoted to Dexion which is mentioned in the dictionary entry as well (Jouanna 2007: 81).

It is important to note that the epigraphic evidence does not suggest any direct correspondence between Sophocles and Dexion whatsoever. Connolly (1998: 5) admits that Δεξιῶν could indeed suggest the idea of receiving (from δέχομαι). He points out that it could also have referred to the hero’s attitude towards his worshipers instead of towards the hero receiving the divinity. Furthermore, *dexion* could be derived from “right hand” and its frequent association with healing (1998: 5; Lefkowitz 2012: 84). Heroisation of historical persons during the classical period was common for benefactors of particular communities. Men who were heroised then were prominent in fields other than those in which Sophocles excelled (Connolly 1998: 19). Connolly states that there is little evidence of heroisation in the classical period of people who received divine visitation and that there are but a few poet heroisations<sup>32</sup> before the Hellenistic period. Additionally, Connolly does not find any parallel for the worship of a historical person under a new name during the Archaic and Classical periods (1998: 19; Lefkowitz 2012: 85). Therefore, if Sophocles was heroised at all, it probably did not occur before the 330s BCE, and it is plausible that the whole heroisation story was a Hellenistic fabrication (Connolly 1998: 20; Scodel 2012:36).

There is another aspect attested in ancient sources that further emphasizes Sophocles’ involvement with the cult of Asclepius. In the early third century CE there was a widespread belief that a paean to Asclepius sung in Athens at the time was composed by Sophocles. In the

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<sup>31</sup> The English translation is my own.

<sup>32</sup> Farnell (1970: 364) mentions a cult in honor of Pindar at Delphi.

*Vita Apollonii* Philostratus the Elder explains that the Indians had a song like the one by Sophocles which was sung in honor of Asclepius amongst Athenians (οἱ δὲ ἤδον ᾠδὴν, ὁποῖος ὁ παιᾶν ὁ τοῦ Σοφοκλέους, ὃν Ἀθήνησι τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ἄδουσιν, 3.17). Likewise, Philostratus the Younger (*Imagines* 13), when describing a painting of Melpomene giving Sophocles the gifts of grandiloquence and loftiness of thought, says that standing beside them is Asclepius, his sight upon Sophocles “hinting at the hospitality soon to come” (βλέμμα τε αὐτοῦ πρὸς σὲ φαιδρότητι μεμιγμένον τὰς [παρὰ] μικρὸν ὕστερον ἐπιξενώσεις αἰνίττεται. *Imag.* 13.11-13).

Philostratus the Younger describes Asclepius “commanding you [Sophocles] to write a paean” (παιᾶνα που παρεγγυῶν γράφειν, *Imag.* 13.10). Sophocles’ alleged composition of a paean was confirmed by an inscription found on a monument dedicated by a certain Sarapion celebrating a choragic victory around 100 CE. In 1936 James H. Oliver published a report on the inscriptions found on the Sarapion monument. Oliver indisputably attributes to Sophocles the paean found on the left side, “for it is so stated on the monument and no argument from the style would dispose us to reject the ancient testimony” (1936: 113). He suggests that the Sophoclean paean was not famous at the time when Sophocles wrote it, but that it was probably revived by “the archaistic taste of the second and early third centuries of the Christian era” (1936: 114). Furthermore, he believes that for the Greeks of the third century CE, the famous hymn to Asclepius sung in Athens was written by Sophocles, and the hymn found on the left side of the Sarapion monument is the famous one referred to by the tradition (1936: 118).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Oliver stresses the fact that, since Koumanoudes first identified the hymn as the Sophoclean one in 1876, there has been no serious refutation of this identification (1936: 118). In 1878 Dittenberger suggested that the Sophocles of the inscription was not the tragic poet. He stated that Sophocles was a common name at the time and therefore it was probably not the tragic poet. Nonetheless, G. Kaibel replied to this theory in 1879. He, on the contrary, argues that the absence of both patronymic and demotic names points to the famous Sophocles (Oliver 1936: 118).

On the other hand, Oliver mentions a theory proposed by Bergk in 1882. Bergk suggested that the hymn is in fact Sophoclean but it might not be the famous one to Asclepius. Rather, he thought that the hymn found on the Sarapion monument was addressed to Coronis, Asclepius' mother. Oliver further makes Bergk's argument more plausible by asserting that monuments like the Sarapion one rarely have two hymns for the same god: "...the monuments at Epidaurus contain hymns to separate deities rather than several hymns to the same" (1936: 120). Connolly (1998: 4), following Oliver's discussion, agrees with attributing the paean of the monument to Sophocles.

A fourth-century BCE inscription from a monument of the Asclepieion in Athens challenges the claim that Sophocles introduced the cult of Asclepius in Athens (Jouanna 2007: 79-81; 84-86). It tells us about a certain Telemachos who was the first one to introduce the cult in Athens and build the first altar<sup>34</sup> of Asclepius and his family in Athens:

.....9.....Σ....8.....  
 [...7... ἀ]νελθῶν Ζεόθ[ε]-  
 [ν μυστηρί]οις τοῖς μεγά-  
 [λοις κατ]ήγετο ἐς τὸ Ἐλ-  
 [ευσίνιο]ν καὶ οἴκοθεν  
 [μεταπεμ]ψάμενος δ<ρ>ά[κ]-  
 [οντα ἦγ]αγεν δεῦρε ἐφ' [ἄ]-  
 [ρματος] Τηλ[ε]μάχο [...α[.]]-  
 [. .6. . .ο]ς ἄμα ἦλθεν Ὑγ-  
 [ία καὶ] οὕτως ἰδρύθη  
 [τὸ ἱερὸ]ν τόδε ἅπαν ἐπὶ  
 [Ἀστυφί]λο ἄρχοντος Κυ-  
 [δαντίδο]... (IG II<sup>2</sup> 4960a)

.....  
 ..... Having come from Zea,  
 at the time of the great mysteries,  
 [the god] put in at the Eleusinion

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<sup>34</sup> Farnell 1970: 259.

and summoned from home a serpent,  
he brought it here on a chariot  
of Telemachos . . . .  
. . . . At the same time came Hygieia  
and thus this whole temple was founded  
in the archonship of Astyphilos of Kydantidai. . . .<sup>35</sup>

If this story is true, what was Sophocles' role in the introduction of the cult? According to Jouanna, these two stories are not necessarily incompatible. He considers them "...two individual initiatives for introducing a cult that, at the beginning, was not public..." (2007: 86).<sup>36</sup> Jouanna cites a passage by Marinus in the *Life of Proclus*, where he says that Proclus lived in Athens near the Asclepieion, which was made famous because of Sophocles:

... και γὰρ πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις εὐτυχήμασιν, ἀρμοδιωτάτη αὐτοῦ και ἡ οἰκησις ὑπῆρξεν, ἣν ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ Συριανός και ὁ προπάτωρ, ὡς αὐτὸς ἐκάλει, Πλούταρχος ὄκησαν, γείτονα μὲν οὖσαν τοῦ ἀπὸ Σοφοκλέους ἐπιφανοῦς Ἀσκληπιείου, και τοῦ πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ Διονυσίου, ὀρωμένην δὲ ἡ και ἄλλως αἰσθητὴν γιγνομένην τῇ ἀκροπόλει τῆς Ἀθηνῶν (*Vita Procli*, 29).

...and among the rest of his good fortunes, he had the most agreeable dwelling, which his father Syrianus and his grandfather Ploutarchos, as he called him, inhabited. It was neighbouring the Asclepieion, famous because of Sophocles, and the theatre of Dionysus, and it was seen and completely in sight of the acropolis of Athena.

Furthermore, Farnell (1970: 259) explains that although the cult was introduced around 420 BCE by a citizen called Telemachos, Sophocles "had the credit of having enjoyed already the familiarity of the god in Athens, of having received him in his house (...) and of having composed a paeon in his honour, which was still sung in the later ages."

After considering all of the literary and epigraphic evidence for Sophocles' heroisation, I would not go as far as Jouanna and interpret all of them as indisputable proofs of that matter. I

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<sup>35</sup> For this inscription I am following Tyrrell's translation (2006).

<sup>36</sup> The English translation is my own.

believe the evidence does suggest a strong connection between Sophocles and the cult of Asclepius. Whether Sophocles was the one who actually introduced the cult in Athens or not, as Farnell argues, the literary and epigraphic sources demonstrate that less than a century after Sophocles' death, Athenians continued associating him with the first stages of the installation of the cult in Athens and, in return, probably worshiped him because of that.

It has been suggested that Sophocles' word use reveals professional medical knowledge.<sup>37</sup> I do not believe that the evidence presented is sufficient to completely support such a statement. However, I think that Sophocles' use of technical vocabulary shows his awareness of the relatively new scientific medicine. The medical imagery that we can find in his plays through medical vocabulary is further enriched with cultic elements (probably due to his close connection with the Asclepius cult) that reflect the two approaches to healing that co-existed in late fifth-century Athens (i.e. the religious and scientific approaches; see below p.36). Moreover, I will attempt to demonstrate that the medical imagery is not necessarily restricted to passages where Sophocles uses what has been considered medical vocabulary.

The analysis in the following chapters aims to provide a deeper understanding of the place of medical thought in the work of Sophocles. I will consider two surviving plays which deal with the theme of illness and healing. These plays share a mythological context (the story of Oedipus) and were written on either side of the introduction of the cult of Asclepius in Athens. I will trace the medical metaphor in both plays from the standpoint of the doctor-patient relationship. The passages of the Hippocratic Corpus discussed above in section 1.1 have outlined a set of recommendations for both the physician and the patient which they must follow

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<sup>37</sup> Collinge (1962: 46-47) asserts that "with Sophocles we meet for the first time a personal connexion with the profession [...]. Sophocles was, medically, an insider."

in order for their relationship to be successful. I believe that the behavior guidelines for the physician found in *Decorum* and *Physician* represent a more detailed version of the concern for the patient's well-being found in the *Oath* and the main precept of "to help, or to do no harm" present in *Epidemics* I. Since the latter are usually dated to the fourth century BCE,<sup>38</sup> I will focus more on these two works throughout my analysis of the plays, for they better correspond to the timeframe of Sophocles' life.

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<sup>38</sup> For the dating of *Epidemics* I and III see n.13 above p.8. Edelstein (1943) has dated the *Oath* to fourth century BCE (reprinted in Temkin and Temkin 1967: 3-65). Nittis suggests the specific year of 421 BCE (1940). Carrick remains more cautious and suggests the wider span of sixth century BCE to third century BCE (2001: 99).

Chapter 2: *Oedipus Tyrannus*: doctor, patient, and disease.



Figure 2. Oedipus and the Priest. By Larissa Rivero Akirov

*Oedipus Tyrannus* was performed at the City Dionysia in Athens in the mid-420s BCE.<sup>39</sup> Although the scholarly work on this play is extensive, there have been few studies wholly devoted to relating the play to medical thought. Most of those studies are approaches to medical vocabulary in Sophocles' works and are not exclusively devoted to *OT*. An early study by Miller (1944) provides an extensive list of technical and non-technical medical vocabulary in tragedy. Miller states that the way in which Greek tragic poets make use of certain terms suggest that "they are derived ultimately [...] from the vocabulary of Ionic medicine" (1944: 156). Miller's criterion is to include terms which occur mostly in tragedy and the Hippocratic writings and not in earlier literature. For this reason, Miller leaves out words like νόσος, νοσέω, ἰατρός, and ἰάομαι from his list because he considers them part of daily language from very early times (Miller 1944: 157, n. 5).<sup>40</sup> Likewise, Collinge (1962) analyzes medical vocabulary in tragedy. However, he devotes most of his study to medical vocabulary related to psychopathology in *Ajax* and *Antigone* (49-52).<sup>41</sup> Finally, medical vocabulary in Sophoclean fragments is studied by Craik (2000). She divides the medical vocabulary of the fragments in six categories: general medical imagery, correct medical usage, anatomy, pathology, psychology, and erotic physicality.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, Mitchell-Boyask (1998: 56-66) analyzes the theme of the plague through the fluctuation of nosological discourse in the play. He focuses on the terms φθίνειν and

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<sup>39</sup> There is not enough external evidence to indisputably date the play. Knox (1956) gives as a possible date the Dionysia of 426 or 425 BCE, based on internal evidence. Müller (1984) on the other hand, dates the play to 433 BCE.

<sup>40</sup> For Sophocles, Miller lists the following terms: αἰμορραγῆς φλέψ, *Phil.* 825; ἀμφήμερος, *Fr.* 507; ἀνώδυνος, *Aj.* 554, *Phil.* 883; ἄργεμον, *Fr.* 233; ἄρθρον, *Tr.* 769, 779, *Phil.* 1202, 1208; ἀρτηρία, *Tr.* 1054; δυσθυμία, *Fr.* 663; ἔμπυος, *Phil.* 1378; ἐπιέπται νόσῳ, *Ant.* 732; ἴασις, *OT.* 68; κουφίζω, *Phil.* 735; λιποψυχεῖν, *Fr.* 496; βρυχώμενον σπασμοῖσι, *Tr.* 805, 1082; πικρὰν χολήν, *Fr.* 854; φλέψ, *Phil.* 825.

<sup>41</sup> To the terms listed by Miller, Collinge adds θρομβώδης, *Tr.* 702; δυστρέπελος, *Aj.* 914; ὑπερπίπλασθαι, *OT.* 779; ἐκθερμαίνεσθαι, *Tr.* 368; μυελός, *Tr.* 781; δύσπνους, *Ant.* 819; πλάνοι, *Ant.* 224; μαλάσσεσθαι, *Phil.* 1334.

<sup>42</sup> A few examples of Craik's medical vocabulary: fr.201g, ὕπνον ἰατρὸν νόσου (general medical imagery); fr. 65, μαλάσσεται (correct medical usage); fr. 500, χροός (anatomy); fr. 647, ἀμβλυφαεῖ δ' ὄμμ' ὑπὸ γήρωσ (pathology); fr.648 situates passionate ἔρωσ in the ψυχῇ (psychology); fr. 421, ἀναστῦσαι (erotic physicality).

νόσος and traces how their uses throughout the play convey the effects of the plague on different characters, either literally or metaphorically.

The most direct approach to medical thought in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is found in Bernard Knox's book *Oedipus at Thebes* (1957). Knox describes how Oedipus shifts between being a physician, a patient, and ultimately, a disease at different stages of the play (1957: 139-147). Knox supports these role shifts by comparing some of the vocabulary of selected passages in the tragedy with their occurrence in the medical writings of the Hippocratic Corpus. At the beginning of the play, the priest addresses Oedipus as someone would on "behalf of a sick patient" (Knox 1957: 140). One of the terms of the priest's speech Knox highlights is ἀνακουφίσαι ('raise up,' 'be relieved,' *OT* 23). He argues that this term is commonly used throughout the books of *Epidemics*<sup>43</sup> to describe relief or improvement on the part of the patient (140-141). In addition, ἀγόνος (*OT* 27), the word used by the priest for "sterile" does not occur anywhere else in Sophocles "and is a standard term of the Hippocratic writers and also for the later medical literature" (Knox 1957: 141). Furthermore, the priest appeals to Oedipus as ἐμπείροισι (*OT*, 44) which is the "highest term of praise the Hippocratic writers can bestow on a physician" (Knox 1957: 141).<sup>44</sup>

Creon also addresses Oedipus in terms which, according to Knox, are "unmistakable [*sic*] medical" (1957: 142). Creon tells Oedipus that his nature is most painful to bear (αἰ δὲ τοιαῦται φύσεις αὐταῖς δικαίως εἰσὶν ἄλγιστα φέρειν, 674-75). Knox states that the use of φύσις here in plural is unattested elsewhere in Sophocles and does not occur in Aeschylus. The whole phrase

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<sup>43</sup> *Epidemics* I, 7; Case VI; Case X.

<sup>44</sup> ὧν πάντες ἐμπειροὶ πολλάκις ἤδη ἐσμέν τε καὶ ἐσόμεθα: [symptoms] which all of us are often experienced with and will continue to be, *Ancient Medicine* 18; Οὐ μὴν οὕτως ἀφρόνων οἱ ταύτης τῆς δημιουργίης ἐμπειροὶ οὔτε μωμητῶν οὔτ' ἐπαινετῶν δέονται: Those experienced in this craft do not need such foolish blames or praises, *De arte* 8.

Creon uses (αἰ δὲ τοιαῦται φύσεις) is frequent in the Hippocratic Corpus.<sup>45</sup> Creon's words become a diagnosis and Oedipus shifts from being the doctor to being the patient (Knox 1957: 143). Furthermore, this shift is made clearer when the Chorus urges Jocasta to take Oedipus inside the house (678). This appeal points out that "the solicitous tone of the [Chorus'] request suggests that they think of Oedipus as a sick man" (1957: 143). Knox concludes that at the end, Oedipus "stands revealed not as the physician but as the sick man - in fact as the disease, for his presence in Thebes is the cause of the plague" (1957: 147).

I agree with Knox' suggestion that Oedipus shifts roles throughout the play. However, I believe that those shifts represent a deeper connection with medical thought that goes beyond the level of vocabulary. One way to approach those role shifts is from the standpoint of the doctor-patient relationship. The author of *Epidemics* states that the medical art exists through three elements: the disease, the patient, and the physician (I, 11). We have seen that throughout the medical writings it is possible to trace recommendations for the physician on how to interact with patients. The guidelines provided observe the principle of 'ὠφελῆειν, ἢ μὴ βλάπτειν' presented in *Epidemics* (I, 11), and in accordance with this principle, they preserve the patient's well-being. The recommendations do not only intend to preserve the integrity of the patient, but also monitor the physician's behavior.<sup>46</sup>

The patient has responsibilities towards the physician as well. Once more, the author of *Epidemics* (I, 11) points out that the patient must defeat the disease along with the physician, and the author of *The Surgery* (3) takes for granted the fact that the patient will help the physician

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<sup>45</sup> Τὰς δὲ τοιαύτας φύσεις [...] ἀσθενεστέρας εἶναι τῶν ἑτέρων: "such natures [...] are most weak than the rest, *Ancient Medicine* 12; ἀνάγκη τὰς τοιαύτας φύσεις εἶναι, καὶ οὐ πολυπότας: "such natures are not necessarily much-drinking," *Airs, Waters, Places*. 4, just to mention a couple of occurrences.

<sup>46</sup> For details regarding these guidelines, see discussion above pp.18-19.

with the part of the body that is not being operated. This set of guidelines for both the physician and the patient will be a key element for understanding how the physician, the patient, and the disease get reconfigured throughout the play, and will help identify whether or not the doctor-patient relationship is successful.

First, it is necessary to establish how the three elements of the medical art as stated by the author of *Epidemics* (i.e., disease, patient and physician, I, 11), are represented in the drama. At the beginning of the play, those elements are represented by the plague (disease), the city of Thebes (patient), and Oedipus (physician). The priest addresses Oedipus in supplication, begging him to intervene as the city suffers from a “most hateful plague” (λοιμὸς ἔχθιστος, 28)<sup>47</sup> which is killing its cattle, women and children (22-28). He calls Oedipus “first among men” (ἀνδρῶν δὲ πρῶτον, 33), and asks for his help directly, “for the land calls you her savior” (ὡς σὲ νῦν μὲν ἦδε γῆ σωτήρα κλήζει, 47-48). At this stage, the priest, speaking for Thebes and its citizens, clearly considers Oedipus the person capable of helping the city find a cure for this dreadful plague. He expresses his trust in Oedipus when he speaks of him as “first of men” and “savior” of the city. In other words, the priest’s speech “suggest[s] that he is appealing to a physician on behalf of a sick patient” (Knox 1957: 140).

In order for the doctor-patient relationship to be successful, the patient needs to trust the physician and fight the disease together (*Epidemics* I, 11). Oedipus has already won the patient’s trust by his “previous zeal” (τῆς πάρος προθυμίας, 48) which earned him the appellation “savior.” He accepts the responsibility of the physician when he expresses his empathy towards

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<sup>47</sup> This is the only appearance of λοιμός in Sophocles. Fifth-century authors avoided this term, probably due to superstition and in the last three decades of the century it “virtually disappears as part of fifth-century literary vocabulary” (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 24). For more on the absence of λοιμός in fifth-century literature see Mitchell-Boyask, 2008: 23-28.

the people and the situation: εὖ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅτι / νοσεῖτε πάντες, καὶ νοσοῦντες ὡς ἐγὼ / οὐκ ἔστιν ὑμῶν ὅστις ἐξ ἴσου νοσεῖ... ἢ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πόλιν τε κάμει καὶ σ' ὁμοῦ στένει (“for I know well that you all are sick, and though you are sick, there is no one among you as sick as I... But my spirit grieves equally for the city, for you and for me,” 59-64).<sup>48</sup>

In the frame of the doctor-patient relationship Thebes represents the patient and the effects of the plague upon the city represent its symptoms. When the priest explains those symptoms to Oedipus, he confesses that he has been worried and crying while trying to find a solution:

ἀλλ' ἴστε πολλὰ μὲν με δακρῦσαντα δῆ,  
πολλὰς δ' ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις·  
ἦν δ' εὖ σκοπῶν εὕρισκον ἴασιν μόνην,  
ταύτην ἔπραξα· παῖδα γὰρ Μενουκίεως  
Κρέοντ', ἐμαντοῦ γαμβρόν, ἐς τὰ Πυθικὰ  
ἔπεμψα Φοίβου δώμαθ', ὡς πύθοιθ' ὅ τι  
δρῶν ἢ τί φωνῶν τήνδε ῥυσαίμην πόλιν (66-72).<sup>49</sup>

But know that I have cried a lot going on many paths in wanderings of the mind, and after a good examination I found this remedy only, which I carried out: I sent the son of Menoecus, Creon, my wife's brother, to the Pythian residence of Phoebus, so that he might learn what to do or what to say so I might save the city.

Here Oedipus is proceeding in the manner of a Hippocratic physician. The main source of information the physician has is the patient and whatever the physician can observe. The possible course of the disease and the best way to treat it can only be determined through a thorough

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<sup>48</sup> Miller (1944: 157) omits νόσος as a specialized term because he considers it a part of everyday language. Mitchell-Boyask argues against this standpoint and states that Miller is making “fairly substantial assumptions about everyday let alone poetic, language in fifth-century Athens” (2008: 19) by leaving νόσος out of his study of specialized medical language in Greek tragedy. For more on νόσος in fifth-century drama, see Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 28-31; 3436. Although Oedipus claims to be sick, he is not directly suffering the effects of the plague. He is “sick at heart” (Lloyd 2003: 86).

<sup>49</sup> For uses of the word ἴασις in the Hippocratic Corpus see Knox 1957: 141, n.105. Miller (1944: 161) notes that Sophocles uses this term also in *Electra* (876), and that it is very common in the Hippocratic Corpus but not elsewhere in fifth-century literature.

examination of the patient. In lines 66-67, Oedipus acknowledges that he has considered the situation closely going on many paths in wanderings of the mind (πολλὰς δ' ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις, 67) and devised a remedy after a good examination (εὖ σκοπῶν, 68). At this stage of the play, Oedipus, acting as a physician, devises a religious course of action: Oedipus' ἵασις is to send Creon to consult the oracle. I do not consider it coincidental that the oracle to be consulted is the one at Delphi; not only because of the renown and popularity of this oracle, but also because its direct association with Apollo brings to the forefront the prophetic and healing facets of the god.<sup>50</sup> These two facets are present throughout the play. Apollo's prophetic side is represented by his oracle at Delphi, and the healing aspect is brought up by the Chorus' first appeal to the god as 'Delian healer' (154). This appeal is a generic refrain in paeans and further reinforces Apollo's healing facet in the play.<sup>51</sup> In the frame of the medical metaphor, this is significant since it could evoke the co-existence of the two approaches to healing in late fifth-century Athens: the religious approach and the secular. Healing cults such as that of Asclepius provided an important alternative to rational 'scientific' medicine (Kosak 2004:3). The medical writings provide evidence that suggest that Hippocratic writers did not oppose religious medicine.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Paeon was the first healing god already mentioned in Homer (τῶ δ' ἐπὶ Παιήων ὀδυνήφατα φάρμακα πάσσων / ἠκέσατ', *Il* 5.401; Ὡς φάτο, καὶ Παιήων' ἀνώγειν ἰήσασθαι. / τῶ δ' ἐπὶ Παιήων ὀδυνήφατα φάρμακα πάσσων / ἠκέσατ', *Il* 5. 899-900). Apollo later became equated with him as did Asclepius. The hymn commonly dedicated to Apollo probably took its name from the exclamation ἰέ Παιάν (Hart 2000: 19, n.1; Rutherford 1995: 113; *OCD*). Furthermore, although Asclepius gradually became more popular as a healing god, Apollo never lost his healing functions (Nutton 2004: 108).

<sup>51</sup> Lines 154-166 have been classified as a paeon since the context in which they are uttered is related to healing and averting danger (Rutherford 1995: 113; Haldane 1963: 54). Haldane, suggests that the paeon to Hypnos in *Philoctetes* (827-832) could have prompted the audience to recall the recently introduced cult of Asclepius in Athens. He states that this type of hymn in which the Chorus "addresses a god appropriate to the local background of the play" was frequently used by Sophocles (1963: 56).

<sup>52</sup> The author of *The Sacred Disease* rejects a certain type of religious/magical practices performed by unskilled individuals who held the gods accountable for the death of patients when the incantations and purifications

According to Knox (1957: 141), when Creon returns from the oracle, the cause of the plague as well as its treatment is revealed:

KP. Λέγοιμ' ἄν οἱ ἤκουσα τοῦ θεοῦ πάρα.  
Ἄνωγεν ἡμᾶς Φοῖβος ἐμφανῶς ἄναξ  
μίασμα χῶρας ὡς τεθραμμένον χθονὶ  
ἐν τῆδ' ἐλαύνειν μηδ' ἀνήκεστον τρέφειν.

OI. Ποίῳ καθαρωῶ; τίς ὁ τρόπος τῆς ξυμφορᾶς;

KP. Ἀνδρηλατοῦντας, ἢ φόνῳ φόνον πάλιν  
λύοντας, ὡς τόδ' αἶμα χειμάζον πόλιν. (95-101)

Cr. I will tell you the thing I heard from the god. Lord Phoebus clearly commands us to drive the pollution from the country, the one that has been nourished in this land, lest it grows to be incurable.

Oe. With what kind of purification? What is the guise of this misfortune?

Cr. Banish the man, or pay murder back with murder, as this blood is storming the city.

When Oedipus finds out about the murdered Laius, he insists on finding the killer since that is the only thing that can provide the cure for the city. He is determined to do everything in his power to clarify the incident:

ὄστ' ἐνδίκῳς ὄψεσθε κάμῃ σύμμαχον  
γῆ τῆδε τιμωροῦντα τῷ θεῷ θ' ἅμα. (135-136)

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implemented by them were unsuccessful (εἰ δὲ ἀποθάνοι, ἐν ἀσφαλεῖ καθισταῖντο αὐτῶν αἱ ἀπολογίαί καὶ ἔχοιεν πρόφασιν ὡς οὐκ αἰτιοί εἰσιν αὐτοὶ, ἀλλ' οἱ θεοί, *The Sacred Disease* 2, Jones' edition 1923b). Furthermore, the author suggests that for certain patients suffering from night terrors and delirium, it is best to take them into sanctuaries and beg the gods with sacrifices and prayer (οὓς ἐχρῆν τάναντία τούτοισι ποιέειν, θύειν τε καὶ εὐχεσθαι καὶ ἐς τὰ ἱερά φέροντας ἱκετεύειν τοὺς θεοὺς, *The Sacred Disease* 4, Jones' edition 1923b). Likewise, the author of *Regimen* IV actually recommends praying to certain gods when receiving good signs after changing a regimen, and to others when receiving adverse signs (ρῆ γινώσκοντα προμηθέεσθαι καὶ ἐκδιατηῆσθαι καὶ τοῖσι θεοῖσιν εὐχεσθαι, ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖσιν ἀγαθοῖσιν Ἥλιῳ, Διὶ οὐρανίῳ, Διὶ κτησίῳ, Ἀθηνᾶ κτησίῃ, Ἑρμῇ, Ἀπόλλωνι, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖσιν ἐναντίοισι τοῖσιν ἀποτροπαίοισι, καὶ Γῆ καὶ ἦρωσιν, ἀποτρόπαια γενέσθαι τὰ χαλεπὰ πάντα, *Regimen* 4, 89, Jones' edition 1931). The clearest evidence of the relationship between religious and secular medicine is found at the beginning of the *Oath*, where Apollo, Asclepius, Hygieia and Panacea are summoned as witnesses of the oath (Ὅμνυμι Ἀπόλλωνα ἱητρὸν, καὶ Ἀσκληπιὸν, καὶ Ὑγείαν, καὶ Πανάκειαν, καὶ θεοὺς πάντας τε καὶ πάσας, *Oath* 1-3, Jones' edition 1923a).

So that rightfully you will see me as an ally, an avenger for this land and for the god as well.

ἄλλος δὲ Κάδμου λαὸν ὧδ' ἀθροίζετω  
ὡς πᾶν ἐμοῦ δράσοντος· (144-145)

Let someone gather the people of Cadmus here, as I will do everything.

This persistence could be interpreted as Oedipus' honest interest in restoring Thebes' physical health, which is one of the main concerns expressed in different Hippocratic writings regarding the doctor-patient relationship (*Oath*, 16-21, 24-28; *Physician*, 4; 5). In order to succeed in the endeavour of freeing Thebes from the plague, Oedipus needs the help of the citizens of Thebes:

Ὅστις ποθ' ὑμῶν Λαΐον τὸν Λαβδάκου  
κάτοιδεν ἀνδρὸς ἐκ τίνος διώλετο,  
τοῦτον κελεύω πάντα σημαίνειν ἐμοί·  
κεί μὲν φοβεῖται, τοῦπίκλημ' ὑπεξέλοι  
αὐτὸς καθ' αὐτοῦ· πείσεται γὰρ ἄλλο μὲν  
ἀστεργές οὐδέν, γῆς δ' ἄπεισιν ἀσφαλής.  
Εἰ δ' αὖ τις ἄλλον οἶδεν ἢ 'ξ ἄλλης χθονὸς  
τὸν αὐτόχειρα, μὴ σιωπάτω· τὸ γὰρ  
κέρδος τελῶ 'γὼ χὴ χάρις προσκείσεται. (224-232)

Whoever of you knows by whom Laius son of Labdacus was killed, I order that person to show everything to me, and if he is afraid, he should take away the accusation against him, for he will not suffer anything intolerable, but will leave the land safe. But if someone knows that the murderer is a stranger from another land, do not keep it secret, for I will grant him profits and gratitude will lie beside him.

By representing their sick city, the citizens of Thebes function temporarily as the patient, and as such, they are expected to collaborate with the physician if they want to defeat the disease (ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι τῷ νοσήματι τὸν νοσεῦντα μετὰ τοῦ ἱητροῦ χρή. *Epidemics* I, 11). Oedipus' expectations go too far when he begins to threaten them if they do not cooperate:

Εἰ δ' αὖ σιωπήσεσθε, καί τις ἢ φίλου  
δείσας ἀπώσει τοῦπος ἢ χαυτοῦ τόδε,  
ἄκ τῶνδε δράσω, ταῦτα χρή κλύειν ἐμοῦ.  
Τὸν ἄνδρ' ἀπαυδῶ τοῦτον, ὅστις ἐστί, γῆς

τῆσδ' ἧς ἐγὼ κράτη τε καὶ θρόνους νέμω  
μήτ' εἰσδέχεσθαι μήτε προσφωνεῖν τινα,  
μήτ' ἐν θεῶν εὐχαῖσι μήτε θύμασιν  
κοινὸν ποιεῖσθαι, μήτε χέρνιβος νέμειν·  
ὠθεῖν δ' ἀπ' οἴκων πάντα, ὡς μιάσματος  
τοῦδ' ἡμῖν ὄντος, ὡς τὸ Πυθικὸν θεοῦ  
μαντεῖον ἐξέφηεν ἀρτίως ἐμοί. (233-243)

But if he will keep silent, and if someone fearing for a friend or for himself rejects this command, you must hear these things from me, what I will do: I will forbid this man, whoever he is, from this land of which I hold the throne and power, to be received or addressed by anyone, or to make sacrifices or prayers to the gods in common, or use the holy water. Everyone should throw him out of their houses, as he is pollution for us, as the Pythian oracle of the god clearly revealed to me.

This threat changes the dynamics of the doctor-patient relationship that was developing thus far. As a physician, Oedipus is obliged to use his knowledge and ability to help Thebes get rid of the plague, as the author of the *Oath* states (χρήσομαι ἐπ' ὠφελείῃ καμνόντων κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ κρίσιν ἐμήν, 16). Likewise the physician must abstain from wrongdoing (ἐπιδηλήσει δὲ καὶ ἀδικίῃ εἴρξειν, 18). Therefore, this threat and the following ill wishes for the murderer (κακὸν κακῶς νιν ἄμορον ἐκτρῦψαι βίον, 248) represent a breaking point in Oedipus' role as a physician for this also compromises the premise of “to help, or to do no harm” (*Epidemics* I, 11). Nevertheless, he still manages to perform one last action in accordance with his role as a doctor. The Chorus suggests summoning Tiresias, for from him, someone examining a matter can learn things most clearly (παρ' οὗ τις ἂν / σκοπῶν τάδ', ὧναξ, ἐκμάθοι σαφέστατα, 285-286). Oedipus admits to having already done that and that it is just a matter of time for Tiresias to arrive (287-289).

Tiresias' entrance marks the starting point of a reconfiguration of the three main elements of the medical art, especially, of the physician. The first sign of this reconfiguration occurs when

Oedipus addresses Tiresias as a “savior,”<sup>53</sup> a term that was previously assigned to him by the priest (48): πόλιν μὲν, εἰ καὶ μὴ βλέπεις, φρονεῖς δ' ὅμως / οἷα νόσῳ σύνεστιν· ἧς σὲ προστάτην / σωτήρᾳ τ', ὦναξ, μούνον ἐξευρίσκομεν (“even if you cannot see, you nonetheless perceive what disease haunts the city, of which you, my lord, we found as the only appointed savior,” 302-304). Calling Tiresias a “savior” demonstrates that Oedipus is in the same situation the priest was at the beginning of the play. At that stage, the priest entreated Oedipus by addressing him as the savior of the city (47-48) relying on him to help Thebes. Therefore, by addressing Tiresias as “savior,” Oedipus is assuming the role of a spokesman, speaking on behalf of a sick patient (Thebes), as was the priest standing before Oedipus (14-57). Moreover, Oedipus explicitly transfers the physician’s responsibility to Tiresias:

ῥῦσαι σεαυτὸν καὶ πόλιν, ῥῦσαι δ' ἐμέ,  
ῥῦσαι δὲ πᾶν μίασμα τοῦ τεθνηκότος·  
ἐν σοὶ γὰρ ἐσμεν· ἄνδρα δ' ὠφελεῖν ἀφ' ὧν  
ἔχοι τε καὶ δύναιτο κάλλιστος πόνων. (312-315)

Save yourself and the city, save me, and drag away the whole pollution of the dead one; for we depend on you: the noblest of labors is for a man to help others as much as he can and is able.

This statement echoes what the *Oath* (16-21) tells us about the physician: he will help the patient according to his ability and judgement. By expressing himself in these terms, Oedipus is handing the features of the physician over to Tiresias.

It is somewhat problematic to clearly establish who is representing the figure of the physician in lines 316-377 of their interaction. Oedipus, speaking on behalf of the city, has

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<sup>53</sup> Although the term σωτήρ is not necessarily associated with physicians, I believe that when a character addresses another in these terms, he/she is recognizing in the other the ability to help him. See discussion below, p. 50.

clearly laid the physician's responsibility in Tiresias' hands (ἐν σοὶ γὰρ ἔσμεν, 314). Tiresias possesses knowledge that he is not willing to share (at least at first):

Φεῦ φεῦ, φρονεῖν ὡς δεινὸν ἔνθα μὴ τέλη  
λύη φρονοῦντι · ταῦτα γὰρ καλῶς ἐγὼ  
εἰδὼς διώλεσ'· οὐ γὰρ ἂν δεῦρ' ἰκόμην. (316-318)

Alas, alas! How terrible it is to know when it does not pay any services to the one who knows. Although knowing that well I forgot it, otherwise I would not have come.

Furthermore, he does not seem interested in assuming the responsibility he is being handed:

Ἄφες μ' ἐς οἴκουσ'· ῥᾶστα γὰρ τὸ σόν τε σὺ  
κάγῳ διοίσω τοῦμόν, ἢν ἐμοὶ πίθη. (320-321)

Send me home, for easily I will bear my burden and you yours, if you are persuaded by me.

Ἐγὼ οὔτ' ἐμαυτὸν οὔτε σ' ἀλγυνῶ· τί ταῦτ'  
ἄλλως ἐλέγχεις; οὐ γὰρ ἂν πύθοιό μου. (332-333)

I will not cause pain to you or myself. Why are you examining these things in vain? You won't learn it from me.

One striking aspect of Tiresias' first exchanges with Oedipus is that he fails to mention the very reason for which he has been summoned: the plague that is blighting the city (Ahl 1991: 80). Oedipus reproves Tiresias' for withholding crucial information from the city that has nurtured him (322-323). I believe that Oedipus' attitude reflects that, for him, Thebes is still the patient seeking the seer's help. On the other hand, Tiresias seems to engage exclusively with Oedipus and does not address the city's sufferings. In fact, the only time Tiresias refers to the city is when he accuses Oedipus of being the polluter of the land:

Ἄληθες; ἐννέπω σὲ τῷ κηρύγματι  
ᾧπερ προεῖπας ἐμμένειν, κάφ' ἡμέρας  
τῆς νῦν προσαιδᾶν μήτε τούσδε μήτ' ἐμέ,  
ὡς ὄντι γῆς τῆσδ' ἀνοσίῳ μιάστορι. (350-353)

Really? I order you to abide to the proclamation you made, and from this day do not speak to them or to me, as you are the unholy polluter of this land.

When the priest addressed Oedipus in search of help for Thebes, Oedipus admitted that he was troubled by the situation and that, after close consideration, he had devised a course of action (66-72). Oedipus assumed the responsibility handed to him by the priest and immediately tried to address the situation affecting Thebes to the best of his abilities. Tiresias, on the other hand, does not seem to accept the responsibility Oedipus is transferring to him and refuses to share the knowledge he obviously has (316-318). Tiresias does not engage with Thebes' situation and only seems interested in interacting directly with Oedipus. Furthermore, if we accept the notion that a physician is supposed to use his knowledge for the benefit of the patient (*Oath* 16-21), then Tiresias cannot assume the figure of the physician since he fails to comply with this condition.

Oedipus has separated himself (temporarily at least) from the figure of the physician by attempting to transfer this responsibility to Tiresias. After the seer accuses him of being the polluter of the city, Oedipus tries to discredit him and his words, accusing Tiresias and Creon of plotting against him (359-403).<sup>54</sup> The examination of Thebes' sickness is set aside for the moment while Oedipus diverts the attention from himself by accusing Creon of trying to dethrone him (367-633). The medical imagery is resumed with Jocasta's entrance. She reminds Oedipus that Thebes is still sick: Τί τὴν ἄβουλον, ὦ ταλαίπωροι, στάσιν / γλώσσης ἐπήρασθ', οὐδ' ἐπαισχύνεσθε γῆς / οὔτω νοσοῦσης ἴδια κινουῦντες κακά; ("Why, oh wretched ones, do you raise this ill-advised dispute of words, aren't you ashamed of stirring up you own troubles when

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<sup>54</sup> Lloyd duly notes the similarities between Oedipus' reaction towards Tiresias with the way the author of *On the Sacred Disease* characterizes the opponents of the medical art (2003: 87). Oedipus calls Tiresias a μάγος (387) and ἀργύτης (388), which are the same terms used by the author of *On the Sacred disease* (II.3-4).

the land is so sick?” 634-6236). Likewise, the Chorus expresses that it is further afflicted by the dispute between Oedipus and Creon while the land suffers: Ἀλλά μοι δυσμόρφῳ γὰ φθίνουσα τρύχει / ψυχάν, τάδ' εἰ κακοῖς κακὰ / προσάψει τοῖς πάλαι τὰ πρὸς σφῶν (“But the land, wasting away, consumes my ill-fated soul if these troubles, coming from you, will be added to the old ones,” 665-667). When Jocasta learns what the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon is about, she relates the oracle to Oedipus in an attempt to ease his mind, for she believes that nothing the oracle predicted has come true: Laius was supposed to be killed by his son but was killed by strangers instead (707-725).<sup>55</sup>

This revelation sets Oedipus’ mind on the quest for Laius’ murderer again, which was the first course of action commanded by the oracle. Here begins the second reconfiguration of the physician figure as Oedipus gradually reassumes those features. As he continues to examine the circumstances of Laius’ death, Oedipus starts feeling fear as he suspects the stranger he killed at the crossroads is related to Laius: Εἰ δὲ τῷ ξένῳ / τούτῳ προσήκει Λαῖῳ τι συγγενές, / τίς τοῦδέ γ' ἀνδρὸς νῦν ἔτ' ἀθλιώτερος; (“But if some kinship exists between this stranger and Laius, who is more miserable now than this man?” 813-815). If his suspicions turn out to be true, he realizes that he will be the object of his threats and will receive the treatment he prescribed earlier (233-243):

τίς ἐχθροδαίμων μᾶλλον ἂν γένοιτ' ἀνήρ;

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<sup>55</sup> At lines 977-978 Jocasta tells Oedipus: Τί δ' ἂν φοβοῖτ' ἄνθρωπος, ᾧ τὰ τῆς τύχης / κρατεῖ, πρόνοια δ' ἐστὶν οὐδενὸς σαφής; Knox notes that this is the only occurrence of πρόνοια in Sophocles and that it is an essential notion in the Hippocratic Corpus as it is “one of the key words in the Hippocratic discussions of the function of the doctor” (1957: 143). The author of *Prognostic* opens his work stating how excellent it is for the physician to practice foresight: Τὸν ἱητρὸν δεκεῖ μοι ἄριστον εἶναι πρόνοιαν ἐπιτεδεύειν (1.1). Good foresight will allow the physician to be successful when applying treatment; thus the paramount importance of πρόνοια for the medical art.

ὅ μὴ ξένων ἔξεστι μηδ' ἀστῶν τινα  
δόμοις δέχεσθαι, μηδὲ προσφωνεῖν τινα,  
ὠθεῖν δ' ἀπ' οἴκων. Καὶ τάδ' οὔτις ἄλλος ἦν  
ἢ γὼ 'π' ἐμαυτῷ τάσδ' ἀρὰς ὁ προστιθείς. (816-820)

Who could be more hated by the gods than this man? Whom no stranger or citizen is allowed to receive in their houses, or talk to him, but throw out from their homes? And no other than I have put these curses over my head.

One more thing needs to be examined before Oedipus can make a final diagnosis: the only surviving witness of Laius' death has to be questioned again. In the meantime, a messenger from Corinth arrives with news about Polybus and Merope's death. In addition, the messenger reveals to Oedipus that neither Polybus nor Merope were his real parents (942-1020).

The information from the Corinthian messenger will change the course of the examination Oedipus has been carrying out thus far. He will turn his attention to an inquiry about his origins. Oedipus learns how the messenger received him from a herdsman and wants to summon him (1021-1050). The Chorus points that the herdsman has already been summoned for he is the only surviving witness of Laius' death, the same man Oedipus wants to see (1051-1053). Jocasta (who at this stage already made the connections and realizes Oedipus is her son) begs Oedipus to stop his inquiry: Μή, πρὸς θεῶν, εἴπερ τι τοῦ σαυτοῦ βίου / κήδη, ματεύσης τοῦθ'· ἄλις νοσοῦσ' ἐγώ ("Do not, by the gods, if you care at all about your life, inquire this for I am suffering enough," 1060-1061). The fact that Jocasta explicitly tells Oedipus that she is suffering (νοσοῦσα) could put her in the role of a patient. However, this does not occur since Oedipus ignores her and insists on knowing the truth. The medical cases presented throughout the *Epidemics* demonstrate that the Hippocratic physician treated men, women and children alike. Oedipus thus fails to behave in the manner of a Hippocratic physician. Once again, as in

his argument with Tiresias, Oedipus disregards the possibility of not doing harm and pursues his objective regardless of Jocasta's supplications (1062-1072).

When the herdsman arrives, Oedipus begins to interrogate him. As the herdsman refuses to provide a straight answer, Oedipus threatens to force the answers out of him: Σὺ πρὸς χάριν μὲν οὐκ ἔρεῖς, κλαίων δ' ἔρεῖς (“You won’t speak out of goodwill, but you will speak crying,” 1152). As with Tiresias and Jocasta, Oedipus once again does not comply with the “to help, or to do no harm” premise of *Epidemics* (I, 11). Oedipus continues with his examination (which is part of the course of action commanded by the oracle for finding Laius’ murderer in order to get rid of the plague) until he gets the information he thinks he needs (1152-1185).

When Oedipus realizes that he is Jocasta’s son and all the prophecies given have come to pass, the last reconfiguration occurs. Oedipus can no longer represent the figure of the physician for he now recognizes himself as the evil that brought so much ruin: οἶον ἄρά με / κάλλος κακῶν ὕπουλον ἐξεθρέψατε / νῦν γὰρ κακός τ' ὦν κάκ κακῶν εὐρίσκομαι. (“You, beautifully, brought me up, such festering of evils, but now I find myself evil born from evils,” 1395-1396). Oedipus has lost every feature of the physician and this statement is a confirmation of that.

Knox suggests that at this stage of the play, Oedipus becomes the disease itself: “The festering sore of his hidden past has finally burst up, and Oedipus stands revealed not as the physician but as the sick man –in fact as the disease, for his presence in Thebes is the cause of the plague” (1957: 147). I believe instead that his situation is also that of a carrier of a disease. As such, he has the ability of transmitting it. The notion of carrier and contagion is found already in Thucydides. He describes the plague as a disease that can be transmitted from one person to another: οὔτε γὰρ ἰατροὶ ἤρκουν τὸ πρῶτον θεραπεύοντες ἀγνοία, ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ μάλιστα ἔθνησκον ὅσῳ καὶ μάλιστα προσῆσαν, οὔτε ἄλλη ἀνθρωπεῖα τέχνη οὐδεμία (“for physicians were not

enough help at first, treating [it] with ignorance; but they died often as they were often close to such people; and no other human art was of any help,” 2.47.4). Thucydides also records how people were aware of the fact that they could get infected by being in contact with the sick: καὶ ὅτι ἕτερος ἀφ' ἐτέρου θεραπείας ἀναπιμπλάμενοι ὥσπερ τὰ πρόβατα ἔθνησκον (“and they died as cattle after they were infected through helping each other,” 2.51.4).<sup>56</sup> Therefore, when Oedipus identifies himself as a festering of evils (κακῶν ὕπουλον), he acknowledges more than that he is a sick man, he is also a source of increased contagion.

In these new circumstances, Oedipus asks the Chorus to apply the treatment he prescribed earlier in the play: Ἀπάγετ' ἐκτόπιον ὅτι τάχιστα με, / ἀπάγετ', ὦ φίλοι, τὸν ὄλεθρον μέγαν, / τὸν καταρατότατον, ἔτι δὲ καὶ θεοῖς / ἐχθρότατον βροτῶν (“Quickly, take me away from this land, drive away, friends, this great ruin, the most accursed and heated of mortals for the gods,” 1340-1346). As a carrier of the disease affecting Thebes, the only thing left for him is to prevent further infection to those who come near him by going into exile.

This chapter has so far traced the presence of medical imagery throughout the play, and shown that it is a dynamic metaphor that allows its elements (disease, patient, and physician) to shift as the story progresses. At the beginning of the play, the disease is represented by the plague; Thebes stands as the patient, and Oedipus as the physician. The doctor-patient relationship between Oedipus and Thebes seems promising as the city trusts its doctor thanks to his previous service. After examining his patient's symptoms, Oedipus devises a course of action: the oracle at Delphi needs to be consulted. Once he knows what the oracle commands, he

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<sup>56</sup> Longrigg explains that although Thucydides “certainly observed and recorded the *fact* of contagion, this is not to say that he anticipated the achievement of nineteenth-century biological science and clearly enunciated the *doctrine* of contagion or possessed ‘an *understanding* of contagion and immunity’ or had any conception at all of their true cause. *Observation of the phenomena of contagion is very different from comprehension of it*” (1993: 58).

must see it through and use this knowledge for the benefit of his patient (*Oath* 16-21). In the process of fulfilling the oracle's commands, Oedipus tries to gain the patient's collaboration by asking the citizens of Thebes to give him information about Laius' murderer. However, Oedipus goes too far and threatens the patient (i.e., the Chorus, as citizens of Thebes). This represents a breaking point in Oedipus' role as a physician for his behavior is contrary to the guidelines regarding the preservation of the physical integrity of the patient (*Oath* 16-21; *Physician* 4; 5).

The first reconfiguration occurs when Tiresias is summoned. Oedipus attempts to transfer the physician's responsibility to Tiresias by directly addressing him as the "savior" of the city (a term applied earlier to Oedipus himself by the priest). Oedipus temporarily becomes the spokesman of a sick patient (Thebes) handing the responsibilities of the physician over to Tiresias (312-315). This reconfiguration is somewhat problematic since Tiresias does not seem to accept the responsibility. He does not engage with Thebes' sufferings and, at first, is not willing to share the knowledge he has. Tiresias only releases information after Oedipus' relentless insistence, accusing the king of being the polluter of the land (350-353). I believe the doctor-patient relationship is sentenced to failure since Tiresias does not use his knowledge and abilities for the benefit of the patient (*Oath* 16-21), that is, because he does not acknowledge Thebes as the patient. Thus, in this first reconfiguration of the three elements of the medical art, the plague remains as the disease, Thebes as the patient, but the figure of the physician is not clear. Oedipus tries to hand over the physician's responsibility to Tiresias, the seer does not seem to accept it and the examination of Thebes's sickness is set aside temporarily. The medical imagery will be resumed with Jocasta's entrance.

The second reconfiguration takes place after the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon. Oedipus gradually reassumes the figure of the physician as he continues to look for Laius' murderer, which is what the oracle commanded in order to get rid of the plague. In the meantime, the Corinthian messenger arrives with news about Polybus and Merope's death. This news forces Oedipus to add a new element to the initial course of action: the inquiry into the truth about his birth. At this stage of the second reconfiguration, Oedipus maintains the role of the physician, and, at least from his perspective, the city of Thebes is still the patient and the plague is the disease he is trying to cure. When the herdsman arrives, Oedipus begins to interrogate him. When the herdsman refuses to tell what he knows, Oedipus forces the answers out of him, disregarding once more the maxim of "to help or to do no harm" of *Epidemics* (I, 11), and the guidelines regarding the physician's behavior (*Physician* 1; *Decorum* VII).

Once the herdsman confesses everything and Oedipus realizes the truth about his birth, the third reconfiguration occurs. Oedipus still represents the physician figure as he is still the one conducting the examination commanded by the oracle. His inquiries about Laius' murderer finally lead him to find the cause of Thebes' sufferings: the pollution he carries. Once he acknowledges that fact, Oedipus leaves the physician figure to assume the role of the disease, and more specifically, the carrier of the disease. While acting as a physician, Oedipus has acquired the appropriate knowledge to get rid of the plague. When he realizes he is the carrier of the disease, he knows what treatment needs to be administered. Just before the play ends, Oedipus momentarily stands between two figures: that of the physician and of the disease (as a carrier).

Oedipus can no longer represent the figure of the physician once he acknowledges that he is the cause of Thebes' ruin. He has become the representative of the disease, as its carrier. Oedipus then turns to Creon to administer the cure by sending him into exile. By the end of the play, the medical metaphor loses its force and becomes somewhat unclear. With the ending of the play that has come down to us we cannot know whether Creon actually sends him into exile or not.<sup>57</sup> Three major scenarios have been suggested by recent scholarship regarding the end of *OT*:

- 1) After line 1423 the play has suffered major modifications (Dawe 2001). One of the most significant one is Creon's order to send Oedipus to the house (1429). This modification "may have been partially dictated by the plot of Euripides' *Phoenissae* [...]. But more likely is the hypothesis that an Oedipus on Mt. Cithaeron could not be squared with the requirements of the plot of *O. C.*" (Dawe 2001: 12).

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<sup>57</sup> Eight lines after Oedipus' speech on his blinding and misfortunes (1369-1415) we reach the highly debated end of the play. Recent scholarship on the issue of *OT*'s ending mainly reacts to Dawe (2001). Dawe questions the authenticity of *OT*'s ending, specifically from line 1423 onwards. After a very thorough linguistic analysis, Dawe concludes that the end of *OT* has been "extensively refashioned from 1423 onwards" (2001: 20) and that these modifications must have taken place when *OT* was restaged together with *Oedipus at Colonus* at a later date. For Finglass, the linguistic issues addressed by Dawe are "illusory" and, he does not think there is a good case for deletion in the text (2009: 55). Kovacs (2009) divides the ending of the play in two groups: lines 1424-1467 (which he identifies as A), and lines 1468-1530 (which he identifies as B). After analyzing both groups from verbal and dramaturgical perspectives, he concludes that B is probably an interpolation and that A is "almost certainly Sophoclean" (2009: 63). Budelmann (2006) on the other hand, accepts the ending as authentic. He explains *OT*'s last scene following the approach of mediating endings suggested by Henri Schmidt. Budelmann states that this last scene approach of mediating endings for his analysis in order to explain how *OT*'s last scene "mediates in a number of ways between the extraordinary events of the play that culminate in Oedipus' recognition and the report of his self-mutilation and Jocasta's suicide, and the ordinary world of day-to-day life" (2006: 45-46). According to Budelmann, although the sight of blind Oedipus in the last scene must have been very painful, there are no new shocking elements and the spectators "get some breathing space before they return to their own world or start watching the next play." Thus, this break from new shocking elements is for Budelmann a form of mediation (2006: 46). In addition, he suggests that inconsistency in the interpretation of oracles, stories beyond the end and uncertainty about the future is characteristic of Sophoclean endings (e.g. *Trach.*, *Phil.*, and *OC*) (2006: 58).

- 2) The ending is authentic (Budelmann 2006) or, at least, there is not enough linguistic evidence to completely dismiss the passage after line 1423, or to fully assert its genuineness (Finglass 2009).
- 3) Lines 1424-1467 are “almost certainly Sophoclean” and the last 63 lines of the play are an interpolation (Kovacs 2009: 63).

These scenarios have implications for the configuration of the medical metaphor. With the ending as it stands (scenario 2), I suggest that at the end of the play, Creon assumes the figure of the physician since Oedipus identifies him as the only person who can complete the instructions of the oracle (regardless of whether he will actually carry them out or not). At the beginning of the play, the priest identified Oedipus as the person able to help the city get rid of the plague. Oedipus, in turn, did the same when Tiresias arrived (despite the fact that their doctor-patient interaction was unsuccessful). Thus, I suggest that a character functions as the physician when another identifies in him the source of salvation or help. That identification allows us to recognize the doctor-patient relationship metaphor in the text.

The remaining two scenarios have further implications regarding the identification of Creon as the physician because of the possible two stage directions they suggest: either Oedipus goes into the house (scenario 1), or he goes into exile (scenario 3).<sup>58</sup> If Oedipus goes into exile, Creon has carried out his duties as a physician: he has applied the treatment that the situation required, a treatment that he himself knew since Creon was sent to consult the oracle in the first place (66-72). On the other hand, if Oedipus is locked up in the house, Creon fails at representing the figure of the physician in a successful manner. He has the knowledge of what needs to be

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<sup>58</sup> Kovacs, referring to Oedipus' exile, states that Oedipus' entrance into the palace “is only a retardation of the inevitable” (2009: 64).

done but does not appear to be determined to execute it. Furthermore, Creon's hesitation and insistence on consulting the oracle one more time (1438-1439) could be interpreted as inexperience on his part, and this inexperience will ultimately jeopardize the doctor-patient relationship between him and Oedipus.<sup>59</sup>

The elements of the medical art have gone through another (less clear) reconfiguration at the end of the play: Oedipus represents the disease (as a carrier), and Creon the physician. As for the patient, although it is true that, before the Chorus' closing lines (1524-1530), Thebes was last mentioned at line 1380 (κάλλιστ' ἀνὴρ εἶς ἔν γε ταῖς Θήβαις τραφεῖς) and references to the plague stopped at lines 685-686 (Ἄλις ἔμοιγ' ἄλις, γὰς προπονουμένας, / φαίνεται ἔνθ' ἔληξεν, αὐτοῦ μένειν), I believe that Thebes still remains as the patient. While Oedipus is carrying out the oracle's instructions to free Thebes from the plague, he comes to realize that he is the source of its ruin. Still attempting to follow the oracle's command, Oedipus turns to Creon to fulfill it as he is no longer able to do so. Therefore, since all the actions have the purpose of following the oracle's instructions to get rid of the plague, Thebes still represents the patient.

Oedipus' failure could have prompted the audience to think about Athens' own situation: the plague that affected the city for several years could not be treated or cured.<sup>60</sup> The fact that the Theban plague theme could be a Sophoclean innovation further supports this possibility.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> I have mentioned that the effectiveness of treatment also depends on the physician's ability to demonstrate that he has the knowledge and capacity to treat or cure the patient (see above, p.14). Although Creon has the knowledge of the treatment that needs to be applied, by ordering Oedipus to go into the house, Creon is showing that he is not able or willing to carry it out.

<sup>60</sup> For a more detailed discussion on how the audience could have interpreted the plague theme in *OT*, see Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 64-65.

<sup>61</sup> Knox demonstrated that there is no trace of a Theban plague in any of the earlier versions of the myth. He states that "the plague in Thebes seems to be a Sophoclean invention; to the extent that this is accepted, the connection between the Theban and the Attic plagues becomes more probable" (1956: 134-135). Mitchell-Boyask follows Knox's opinion on this matter (2008: 65).

Thucydides (2.47.4) relates how physicians were completely helpless when treating the disease because they did not know what to do. However, Oedipus does not fail because of lack of knowledge. He fails to be a successful physician because his behavior forces him to take the course of treatment that causes more pain to his patient. This attitude clearly constitutes a transgression of the set of guidelines given by different authors of the Hippocratic Corpus regarding the doctor-patient relationship. Ultimately, Oedipus is unable to carry on as a physician because he becomes the carrier of the illness he wants to cure.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Oedipus needs to be removed from Thebes so that it can be restored to health. In this role he has been compared to a φάρμακος, a scapegoat. For a list of the main studies on the subject see Lloyd 2003: 88, n. 1. Griffith firmly argues against this approach (1996: 29-44).

Chapter 3: *Oedipus at Colonus*: disease, patient, and doctor.



Figure 3. The misfortune of Oedipus. By Larissa Rivero Akirov

*Oedipus Tyrannus* is not the only Sophoclean drama where medical thought and imagery can be traced. Plays such as *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes* are famous for their depiction of diseased heroes and have been the subject of numerous scholarly works concerned with medical imagery and vocabulary.<sup>63</sup> It is therefore necessary to justify the less obvious choice of *Oedipus at Colonus* in a study tracing medical thought and imagery in Sophocles. The diseased Heracles portrayed in *Trachiniae* seems to present a case of a straightforward physical illness.<sup>64</sup> Though caused by poisoning, Heracles' physical disease is more likely to function within the same "Hippocratic" framework I applied for *OT*.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, *OC* appears to develop the doctor-patient-disease model described for *OT* regarding the treatment of disease. With Oedipus' supernatural death, however, the play seems to add a divine level for analyzing and understanding the disease theme. Oedipus' death will provide protection for Athens and defense against future troubles. The fact that Sophocles depicts Oedipus as a divine healer of sorts is suggestive given Sophocles' associations with the installation of the cult of Asclepius in Athens. On the other hand, *Philoctetes* provides a similar disease pattern to *OC* since the disease context is solved with divine intervention.<sup>66</sup> The main difference between these two plays in the treatment of the disease theme is the fact that *Philoctetes* describes a concrete physical illness whereas the only evident disease portrayed in *OC* is directly related to Oedipus' pollution.

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<sup>63</sup> E.g. Mitchell-Boyask (2008); Kosak (2006), (1999); Worman (2000); Biggs (1966).

<sup>64</sup> Mitchell-Boyask (2008: 97) suggests that Heracles is sick throughout the whole play. His first disease is metaphorical, represented by *eros*, and the second one is physical, represented by the effects of the poisoning.

<sup>65</sup> Mitchell-Boyask (2008: 67-104) has made a very convincing argument for dating the production of *Trachiniae* in the mid-420s BCE by showing how the language and imagery of the play could be a response to the great plague of Athens. If this is the case, the production of *Trachiniae* would share the same time frame as *Oedipus Tyrannus* and therefore their approach to the disease theme is more likely to be similar.

<sup>66</sup> Mitchell-Boyask (2008: 153-182) discusses the relevance of the location of Asclepieion in Athens for the performance of the play.

*OC* has been approached from different standpoints. Most of the scholarly work has focused on Oedipus' heroisation and the possible political connotations present in the play. Knox (1966) suggests that Oedipus' heroisation is the main theme of *OC* (1966: 148). In his view, Oedipus undergoes a transformation from human weakness into superhuman power. Oedipus begins as an old man who has learned acquiescence and that is patiently waiting for his death. Knox asserts that Oedipus' death will come as a recompense for his sufferings; he will die as a mortal, but will receive in exchange "power and immortality as something more than human, in fact as a protecting hero of the Attic soil" (1966: 143). Oedipus' strength resides in the fact that he has the power to choose where his final resting place will be, and in that way he can hurt his enemies and help his friends, as Apollo promised him (1966: 151).<sup>67</sup> According to Knox, the play's recreation of Colonus' landscape is also a recreation of that of Athens and it serves Sophocles as a means to portray the city's post-war decay and future immortality (1966: 154-155). In *OC* Sophocles presents his last hero as one who is recognized by the gods and accepted and welcomed to their presence. Sophoclean gods give Oedipus, who has suffered for a long time, "the death he longed for, immortal life and power" (1966: 162).

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<sup>67</sup> The broad ethical reach of the Help Friends and Harm Enemies principles is thoroughly studied by Blundell (1989). In the case of *OC*, Blundell states that "the whole play is thus structured around Oedipus' overwhelming desire and special power to help his friends and harm his enemies" (1989:227). She analyzes the play in terms of *philia* that develops between Oedipus and the rest of the characters, and whether the characters' attitudes comply or not with the moral system. Regarding Oedipus' heroisation, Blundell reacts to Burian's claims of Oedipus being out of reach of ordinary moral judgement to justify his actions, especially his curses and predictions (Burian 1974: 427). She argues that Oedipus' "emotions and actions are entirely explicable in human terms and are not exempt from human judgement" (Blundell 1989: 253). Blundell further explains that Oedipus' special powers constitute an "extension of the natural human desire, elevated by the Greeks into a moral code, to help one's friends and harm one's enemies" (1989: 254). Finally, she stresses the fact that Oedipus maintains his moral consistency throughout the play because he proves that his enemies deserve punishment and his friends, assistance. Furthermore, although Blundell states that *OC* contains probably the best representation of Help Friends/Harm Enemies as a coherent moral code (1989: 258), she also points out the conflicts that threaten the moral code throughout the play (e.g., Creon's self-interest, Polyneices' sacrifice of friendship to enmity, Antigone's attempt to modify the moral code in favour of family *philia*). The success of the moral code "depends on an irreconcilable breach of natural family *philia*" (1989: 259). For further connections between Oedipus' elevation to a cult figure and retributive justice, see Markantonatos 2007: 140-156.

Burian (1974) reads the play as Sophocles' adaptation of the suppliant drama, a model already present in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants*. He undertakes this approach as a response to the wide-spread opinion that Oedipus' heroic transformation is the main theme of the play. Burian does not conceive of *OC* as a disjointed set of episodes but rather as a sequence of events following the suppliant pattern. After Creon's defeat the action of the suppliant drama "is essentially complete," but Sophocles adapts it by adding a new element: a new suppliant played by Polyneices (1974: 421). This scene marks Oedipus' change of fortune and growth of his daemonic powers. In Burian's view, Oedipus daemonic powers are not granted to him as a reward for his sufferings but gained "by sheer force of character [...] there is nothing to suggest that he owes it to his innocence or to a just providence" (1974: 426). Finally, he interprets Oedipus' death as means to fulfill his σωτηρία and to provide σωτηρία for Athens (1974: 429).

More recent scholarship has addressed the same issues (i.e., Oedipus' heroisation, suppliant theme, political connotations) attempting to provide fresh perspectives on the play. Wilson (1997) takes on a different perspective regarding Oedipus' heroisation. He argues against Oedipus' transformation into a hero. For Wilson, Oedipus arrives at Colonus already a hero and throughout the play Oedipus will insist on his "own heroic stature (despite his sufferings) and the other characters' growing recognition, apprehended more or less readily, of that stature" (1997: 33). Wilson analyzes Oedipus' heroic features and finds parallels in Sophocles' portrayal of Ajax. They both have several features in common: none of them have immediate divine ancestry, they both attempt to take control of their final moments (Ajax puts himself out of time's reach with suicide; Oedipus hurries time and old age by blinding himself); and their hero status remains unaltered despite their misfortunes.

Andreas Markantonatos has two major studies devoted completely to *OC*. In *Tragic Narrative* (2002), the author approaches the play from the standpoint of narrative structure, outlining primary and secondary narrations and narrative threads shared or contested between characters. According to Markantonatos, Sophocles purposely sets barriers to information flow by playing with narrative discontinuities or irregularities which create gaps in the main narrative line. Such gaps make the narrative line move simultaneously forwards and backwards increasing the audience's interest in what will happen next. Throughout the play, the narrative practice of secrecy, complexity, surprise and gradual revelation evokes the atmosphere of ritualistic initiation. In Markantonatos' view, Sophocles "imbues Colonus with unprecedented importance by aligning the local community with Athens and Eleusis" (2002: 225). The secrecy of Oedipus' heroisation could have made the Athenian audience experience a relief not very different from the comforting feeling of initiation. Finally, Markantonatos stresses the fact that there is still much to be done in the context of tragic narratology to further enhance its applications to ancient drama.

In a more recent study, Markantonatos (2007) approaches the play from a more political standpoint although he acknowledges that *OC*'s thematic complexity makes it impossible to label it with just one main theme. In his view, the play deals with themes like Athenian supremacy, morality and divine power. Athenian political life at the end of the fifth-century is mirrored throughout the play by Sophocles' mythical innovations and adaptations, pattern of ritual regularity, intra-familial violence, and interstate confrontation. Furthermore, Markantonatos suggests that *OC* and the other two Theban plays are closely connected and that "in a way those plays constitute a typical Theban trilogy in consideration of their chronological and mythical relevance" (2007: 197). The author states that despite the fact that *OC* would be the middle play

in this trilogy, *OC* should be read as the culmination of a thread of central themes that are “inextricably connected with the mythic history of Thebes” (2007: 197).

The heroisation theme has been revised by Currie (2012). He suggests that Sophocles’ associations with cultic life (i.e. his own cult and the cult of Asclepius) could have influenced the play’s ancient reception by suggesting a direct connection with the playwright’s life. The author then analyzes the implications the hero cult theme has for social cohesion. According to Currie, the play is interested in heroisation not only in terms of the benefit to human society, but in terms of the hero’s relationship with the society of Olympian gods as well. In his view, there are “two dimensions in play. The elevation of the tragic hero to a cult hero is a matter between the hero and the gods before it is a matter between the hero and (human) society” (2012: 333). Furthermore, the author states that heroisation is not necessarily a blessing for everyone involved. It creates mixed feelings as Antigone and Ismene “experience Oedipus’ passing as unmitigated loss, his heroic transformation being harder for them to bear than natural death” (2012: 342). Thus, heroisation might bring society and the hero, or the hero and the gods closer, but it creates a distance between the hero’s family “and hence arguably between the hero and ourselves, the audience” (2012: 343).

Finally, Van Nortwick (2012) discusses the play as Sophocles’ final vision of the tragic hero, focusing on the stranger/hero opposition. The author explains how the Oedipus of *OC* breaks most of the traditional features of the traditional heroic story (2012: 142-143). Furthermore, Van Nortwick shows how Sophocles explores a new heroic agency through Oedipus’ inability to express traditional heroic features (i.e., heroic will, *kleos*), by making Oedipus “a locus and conduit for the power of the gods” (2012: 144). Van Nortwick also touches upon the issue of biographical correspondences between the play and the playwright’s life (e.g.

the fact that it takes place in Colonus does not seem coincidental). Finally, he suggests that Sophocles conceived *OC* as the culmination of his art, a farewell, since the playwright “was probably a very old man when he wrote it” (2012: 150).

I agree with Markantonatos that *OC*’s thematic complexity makes it hard to label it in just one parcel. The different standpoints from which it has been approached prove the play to be multi-faceted. The absence of scholarly work approaching *OC* in search of medical imagery has made me believe that a medical approach should be attempted from the standpoint of the doctor-patient relationship. Furthermore, Sophocles’ strong connection with the introduction of the cult of Asclepius in Athens and the new divine level present in *OC* constitute the main reasons behind the selection of this play for this chapter.

Following Knox’ remarks (1957: 143), in the previous chapter I approached the different configurations of the three elements of the medical art in *OT* from the perspective of the doctor-patient relationship. Winnington-Ingram (1980: 256) suggests that *OC* is “a sequel to the *Tyrannus* in the sense that not only events of the earlier play but, in some measure, the characteristics of the earlier Oedipus are taken from granted.” Therefore, I believe it is possible to continue with my previous approach of analyzing 1) how the three elements of the medical art (i.e., disease, patient, and physician; *Epidemics* I, 11) are represented throughout *OC*; and 2) the reconfiguration of those elements. I will also consider the guidelines regarding the doctor-patient relationship provided in different medical writings (*Oath* 16-21, 24-32; *Physician* 1, 4, 5; and *Decorum* VII), paying special attention to the passages of *Epidemics* I and the *Oath* when accounting for the reconfiguration of the main elements of the medical art.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See discussion above, p.29.

The play opens with Oedipus and Antigone arriving at Colonus. Oedipus sits down to rest while he asks Antigone where they are (1-21). Soon enough they learn from a passer-by that they are in Colonus and that Oedipus unknowingly has trespassed holy ground (36-37). After interrogating the stranger, Oedipus finds out he is in the sacred grove of the Eumenides and refuses to leave (45-47), for this is the place that marks the end of his sufferings as was revealed by an oracle a long time ago (84-110). Oedipus is aware that his situation is difficult. He is an exile and a bearer of pollution from his previous misdeeds. Being polluted means that the person affected is “ritually impure, and thus unfit to enter a temple: it is contagious: it is dangerous, and this danger is not of familiar secular origin” (Parker 1983:3). As such a bearer of pollution, Oedipus is aware that he is a sick man and that he will be considered “a polluted being in the eyes of the world” (Parker 1983: 316). However, when he learns that the king of the land is Theseus, he asks the stranger if the king can be summoned, alleging that by doing this small service for him the king will gain a great benefit (ὡς ἂν προσαρκῶν μικρὰ κερδάνη μέγα, 73). The fact that Oedipus offers the stranger a benefit in exchange for his help, demonstrates Oedipus’ awareness of the delicate situation in which he is putting the stranger by having contact with a carrier of such pollution.

When the Chorus arrives, Oedipus’ awareness of his pollution surfaces one more time when he refuses to reveal who he is:

ΟΙ. μή, μή μ' ἀνέρη τίς εἶμι,  
μηδ' ἐξετάσης πέρα ματεύων.  
ΧΟ. Τί τόδ'; ΟΙ. Αἰνὰ φύσις. ΧΟ. Αὔδα.  
ΟΙ. Τέκνον, ὦμοι, τί γεγώνω;  
ΧΟ. Τίνος εἶ σπέρματος, ὃ  
ξένε, φώνει, πατρόθεν;  
ΟΙ. Ὦμοι ἐγώ, τί πάθω, τέκνον ἐμόν;  
ΑΝ. Λέγ', ἐπεὶ περ ἐπ' ἔσχατα βαίνεις.  
ΟΙ. Ἄλλ' ἐρῶ· οὐ γὰρ ἔχω κατακρυφάν.

ΧΟ. Μακρὰ μέλλετον, ἀλλὰ τάχυνε.  
 ΟΙ. Λαΐου ἴστε τιν' ἔκγονον; ΧΟ. Ἰού.  
 ΟΙ. Τό τε Λαβδακιδᾶν γένος; ΧΟ. Ὡ Ζεῦ.  
 ΟΙ. Ἄθλιον Οἰδιπόδαν; ΧΟ. Σὺ γὰρ ὄδ' εἶ;  
 ΟΙ. Δέος ἴσχετε μηδὲν ὄσ' αὐδῶ.  
 ΧΟ. Ἰώ, ὦ ὦ. ΟΙ. Δύσμορος. ΧΟ. Ὡ ὦ.  
 ΟΙ. Θύγατερ, τί ποτ' αὐτίκα κύρσει;  
 ΧΟ. Ἐξω πόρσω βαίνετε χώρας. (210-225)

Oe. Do not, do not ask who I am, do not enquire, searching any further.  
 Ch. Why is this? Oe. Terrible nature. Ch. Speak!  
 Oe. Oh child, what should I say?  
 Ch. Of what descent are you, stranger, tell us who is your father?  
 Oe. Alas! What should I suffer, my child?  
 An. Speak! Since you are standing at the very end.  
 Oe. Then I will speak, for I do not have means of concealment.  
 Ch. You are delaying too much, hurry!  
 Oe. Do you know the child of Laius? Ch. Oh!  
 Oe. And the race of the Labdacidae? Ch. Oh Zeus!  
 Oe. Miserable Oedipus? Ch. Are you that person?  
 Oe. Do not fear the things I say.  
 Ch. Oh, oh, oh! Oe. Miserable me! Ch. Oh, oh!  
 Oe. Daughter, what will happen now?  
 Ch. Go out, far away from this land!

Oedipus' fear and the Chorus' reaction are clear signs of their awareness of the pollution Oedipus is carrying. Oedipus tries to convince the Chorus to receive him by calling upon Athens' reputation of being the only city that can protect and help a wronged stranger like him (...μόνας δὲ τὸν κακούμενον ξένον / σώζειν οἴας τε καὶ μόνας ἀρκεῖν ἔχειν, 261-262). Not content with that plea, Oedipus further addresses the Chorus begging them to save him:

Ἄνθ' ὧν ἱκνοῦμαι πρὸς θεῶν ὑμᾶς, ξένοι,  
 ὥσπερ με κἀνεστήσαθ', ὧδε σώσατε [...]  
 ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἔλαβες τὸν ἰκέτην ἐχέγγυον,  
 ῥύου με κἀκφύλασσε· μηδέ μου κάρα  
 τὸ δυσπρόσοπτον εἰσορῶν ἀτιμᾶσης.  
 Ἦκω γὰρ ἱερὸς εὐσεβῆς τε καὶ φέρων  
 ὄνησιν ἀστοῖς τοῖσδ'· (275-288)

Facing these things I beg you by the gods, strangers, as you made me stand up, in the same way, save me [...] But as you took me as a suppliant having

received a pledge, save me and guard me; do not dishonor me when you look at my dreadful face. For I come holy and pious bringing favour to this city.

Although this appears to be a typical suppliant's request, Oedipus is not exactly the typical suppliant.<sup>69</sup> The pollution he is carrying will likely cause rejection from those around him (as the Chorus already expressed). This is the reason why Oedipus feels the need of promising once again to be a benefit for the whole city while asking the Chorus for help. Since Oedipus identifies the Chorus as his source of help, this identification could prompt the medical metaphor by placing the Chorus in the role of the physician and Oedipus in that of the patient.<sup>70</sup> The figure of the disease in this configuration is not very clear, though. Oedipus is polluted and the Chorus is aware of that. Nonetheless, Oedipus does not approach the Chorus to ask for a cure from his pollution. He asks the Chorus for help. Oedipus is asking for protection and the permission to remain in the premises since according to the oracle he knows that he has arrived at the place where he will finally rest from his sufferings (84-110). If Oedipus needs to stay in the sacred grove of the Eumenides to put an end to his sufferings, then in this new configuration of the elements of the medical art the disease could be represented by Oedipus' sufferings.

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<sup>69</sup> Convincing the host to receive a one as a suppliant is one of the first tasks a suppliant has to perform (Burian 1974: 411-412). This scene constitutes one of the type-scenes present in a suppliant drama pattern (Burian 1974: 209). Wilson (1997) argues against Burian's reading of the play as a suppliant drama. He states that "no genuine supplication takes place at all" (1997: 34) and that there are significant differences between the suppliant drama plot and *OC* that were overlooked by Burian (1974). The main difference is that all the suppliant dramas set as a model for *OC* have their suppliant character deliberately arriving at a specific destination and "with the specific intention of claiming from their hosts the rights of suppliants" (1997: 42). According to Wilson, none of these circumstances apply to Oedipus, "who has simply stumbled by accident into the district of the Eumenides" (1997: 45). Finally, Wilson highlights the fact that none of the paradigmatic suppliant dramas have any type of exchange involved "except the satisfaction of having honored the gods," whereas in *OC* Oedipus repeatedly states the advantage he can provide to his hosts (1997: 46).

<sup>70</sup> On the identification of a character as a source of help and how this could indicate the presence of a medical metaphor, see above p.50.

In the meantime, Ismene arrives with news from Thebes. She lets her father know about the strife between his two sons and that Creon will come to take him back to Thebes (389-419). Outraged at this news, Oedipus curses his sons and Creon for not helping him when he needed them the most (421-454). Once again he addresses the Chorus asking for help, reminding them of the great benefit they will gain if they comply with his request:

[...] ἐὰν γὰρ ὑμεῖς, ὦ ξένοι, θέλητέ μου  
σὺν ταῖσδε ταῖς σεμναῖσι δημούχοις θεαῖς  
ἀλκὴν ποεῖσθαι, τῆδε μὲν πόλει μέγαν  
σωτῆρ' ἀρεῖσθε, τοῖς δ' ἐμοῖς ἐχθροῖς πόνους.

XO. Ἐπάξιος μὲν, Οἰδίπους, κατοικτίσαι,  
αὐτός τε παῖδες θ' αἰδ'· ἐπεὶ δὲ τῆσδε γῆς  
σωτῆρα σαυτὸν τῶδ' ἐπεμβάλλεις λόγῳ,  
παραινέσαι σοι βούλομαι τὰ σύμφορα.

OI. ὦ φίλταθ', ὡς νῦν πᾶν τελοῦντι προξένει.

XO. Θεοῦ νῦν καθαρμὸν τῶνδε δαιμόνων, ἐφ' ἃς  
τὸ πρῶτον ἵκου καὶ κατέστειψας πέδον.

OI. Τρόποισι ποίοις; ὦ ξένοι, διδάσκετε. (457-468)

Oe. [...] For if you, strangers, along with these holy goddesses of your land, want to provide me some help; you will take a great savior for this city.

Ch. Oedipus, you are worthy of pity, you and your daughters and since you offer yourself as a savior of this city with your speech; I want to recommend you profitable things.

Oe. Dearest! Guide me so that I can see everything through.

Ch. Perform now a purification for these goddesses to whom you came first stepping on their ground.

Oe. In what manner? Oh strangers, show me!

This passage demonstrates that, as the patient, Oedipus is willing to cooperate with his potential physician, the Chorus. This attitude reminds us of the expectation the Hippocratic physician had

regarding the patients in fighting the disease along with them: ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι τῷ νοσήματι τὸν νοσεῦντα μετὰ τοῦ ἱετροῦ χρή (*Epidemics* I, 11). Oedipus is willing to do whatever it takes to get the help he needs. His willingness to collaborate provides a propitious starting point for the doctor-patient relationship to develop with the Chorus.

On the other hand, the Chorus does not seem to fully assume the figure of the physician. It seems as though the Chorus needs more information before developing its interaction with Oedipus any further:

XO. Δεινὸν μὲν τὸ πάλαι κείμενον ἤδη  
κακόν, ὧ̃ ξεῖν', ἐπεγείρειν·  
ὅμως δ' ἔραμαί πυθέσθαι

OI. Τί τοῦτο;

XO. τᾶς δειλαίας ἀπόρου φανείσας  
ἀλγηδόνοσ, ἧ̃ ζυνέστας.

OI. Μὴ πρὸς ξενίας ἀνοίξης  
τᾶς σᾶς· γέγον' ἔργ' ἀναιδῆ.

XO. Τό τοι πολὺ καὶ μηδαμὰ λῆγον  
χρήζω, ξεῖν', ὀρθὸν ἄκουσμ' ἀκοῦσαι.

OI. Ὡμοι.

XO. Στέρξον, ἱκετεύω (510-519).

Ch. It is a terrible thing, stranger, to stir up an evil already laid to rest; nonetheless I desire to learn.

Oe. What is this?

Ch. About that wretched pain, appearing unmanageable, in which you stand.

Oe. For the sake of your hospitality, do not disclose the shame which I had suffered.

Ch. The rumour is strong and does not cease. I need, stranger, to hear it straight.

Oe. Alas!

Ch. Accept, I beg you.

The Chorus' interrogation about Oedipus' past misfortunes is clearly a source of discomfort for Oedipus (515-516). This contravenes the recommendations given by the author of *Physician* (4; 5) regarding causing undesirable pain for the patient, and ultimately transgresses the 'to help or to do no harm' guideline of *Epidemics* (I, 11). Furthermore, the Chorus' harsh attitude towards Oedipus could be interpreted as a reflection of its initial fears of being in contact with a polluted person (210-225). Therefore, the Chorus fails to assume the figure of the physician and the doctor-patient relationship cannot progress.

The medical imagery will become clearer when Theseus arrives, as he is the only character capable of fully assuming the role of the physician. Although Theseus knows the story of Oedipus and the pollution he is carrying, he is nonetheless willing to help him. Theseus himself was an exile once and sympathizes with Oedipus:

ὄς οἶδα καὶ τὸς ὡς ἐπαιδεύθην ξένος,  
ὥσπερ σύ, χάς τις πλεῖστ' ἀνὴρ ἐπὶ ξένης  
ἤθλησα κινδυνεύματ' ἐν τῷ μῶ κάρᾳ·  
ὥστε ξένον γ' ἂν οὐδέν' ὄνθ', ὥσπερ σὺ νῦν,  
ὑπεκτραποίμην μὴ οὐ συνεκσῶζεν· (562-566)

I know that I myself was brought up an exile, like you, and as a man in exile I went through many dangers against my life, therefore I won't turn aside from helping any stranger, as you are now.

This statement echoes Oedipus' when he expressed his empathy for the citizens of Thebes (*OT* 59-64). At that stage in *OT*, I established that Oedipus was starting to assume the role of the

physician. Likewise, Theseus is here accepting the responsibilities of the physician by showing sympathy for Oedipus' situation.<sup>71</sup>

Theseus proceeds to examine his patient as a Hippocratic physician would. He inquires about Oedipus' intentions (575-628) and he starts gathering as much information as possible to better devise a course of action:

ΘΗ. Δίδασκ'· ἄνευ γνώμης γὰρ οὐ με χρῆ λέγειν.  
ΟΙ. Πέπονθα, Θησεῦ, δεινὰ πρὸς κακοῖς κακά.  
ΘΗ. ἼΗ τὴν παλαιὰν ξυμφορὰν γένους ἐρεῖς;  
ΟΙ. Οὐ δῆτ', ἐπεὶ πᾶς τοῦτό γ' Ἑλλήνων θροεῖ.  
ΘΗ. Τί γὰρ τὸ μείζον ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον νοσεῖς; (594-599)<sup>72</sup>

Th. Instruct me; for without judgement I must not speak.  
Oe. I have suffered, Theseus, terrible evils upon evils.  
Th. Will you speak about the old misfortune of your family?  
Oe. Not indeed, for all Greeks speak of that.  
Th. Then what are you suffering from that is greater than mankind?

Oedipus warns Theseus about the future strife between Athens and Thebes and he insists that if Theseus keeps his word about helping him, in exchange he will provide protection for him and Athens once he is dead (607-628). Theseus confirms his willingness to set a place for him as a citizen, to help and protect him (631-641).<sup>73</sup> Thus far, the relationship between Oedipus and Theseus is reasonably strong for it is grounded on bonds of trust:

ΟΙ. εἰ σοί γ' ἄπερ φῆς ἐμμενεῖ τελοῦντί μοι.  
ΘΗ. Θάρσει τὸ τοῦδ' ἄνδρός· οὐ σε μὴ προδῶ  
ΟΙ. Οὗτοι σ' ὑφ' ὄρκου γ' ὡς κακὸν πιστώσομαι. (647-650)

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<sup>71</sup> Kirkwood defines Theseus and Oedipus' relationship in terms of sympathy between them (χάρις): "In his opening speech Theseus at once declares his sympathy with Oedipus: he was reared in exile, like Oedipus, and has been tried by bitter experience" (1958: 151).

<sup>72</sup> Miller (1944) considers νόσος and νοσεῶ to be part of everyday language and not pertaining to medical vocabulary. However, I believe that the medical metaphors that are traceable in Sophocles are not restricted to the presence of medical or technical vocabulary.

<sup>73</sup> I am following Kamerbeek and Jebb's reading of ἔμπολιν (fellow-citizen) instead of ἔμπαλιν. For a reading in favor of ἔμπαλιν, see Wilson 1997: 63-90, especially 87.

Oe. If you stand by the things you said, fulfilling them for me  
Th. Do not be afraid of this man; I won't betray you  
Oe. I will not bind you with an oath as if you were a bad man

Once trust is firmly established, Oedipus as the patient and Theseus as the physician will be able to fight the disease together (ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι τῷ νοσήματι τὸν νοσεῦντα μετὰ τοῦ ἱετροῦ χρή, *Epidemics* I, 11).<sup>74</sup>

The importance of establishing bonds of trust is depicted in similar circumstances in *Philoctetes*. When the almost unbearable pain from the wound strikes Philoctetes again, he begs Neoptolemus not to betray him: μή με ταρβήσας προδῶς (“Do not be frightened and betray me,” 757). As the pain persists, Philoctetes constantly seeks for Neoptolemus’ reassurance that he won’t leave his side:

ΦΙ. Ἄλλ', ὦ τέκνον, καὶ θάρσος ἴσχυ' ὡς ἦδε μοι  
ὀξεῖα φοιτᾷ καὶ ταχεῖ' ἀπέρχεται.  
Ἄλλ' ἀντιάζω, μή με καταλίπης μόνον.  
NE. Θάρσει, μενοῦμεν. ΦΙ. Ἥ μενεῖς; NE. Σαφῶς φρόνει  
ΦΙ. Οὐ μὴν σ' ἔνορκόν γ' ἀξιῶ θέσθαι, τέκνον.  
NE. Ὡς οὐ θέμις γ' ἐμοί 'στι σοῦ μολεῖν ἄτερ.  
ΦΙ. Ἐμβαλλε χειρὸς πίστιν. NE. Ἐμβάλλω μενεῖν. (807-813)

Phil. But take courage, child. As it returns to me, piercing, and swiftly leaves.  
But I entreat you, do not leave me alone.  
Ne. Have courage, we will stay. Phil. Will you stay indeed? Ne. Know it clearly.  
Phil. I do not consider it worthy to put you under oath, child.  
Ne. And it is not lawful for me to leave you.  
Phil. Give me your hand as a pledge. Ne. I give my pledge to stay.

This passage demonstrates the need for Philoctetes, as a sick hero, to trust Neoptolemus as his physician. This scene will lead Neoptolemus to confess that he has tricked Philoctetes into trusting him, and after his confession, the doctor-patient relationship between them will end

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<sup>74</sup> On the importance of trust between physician and patient, see above p. 14.

(*Phil.* 897-920). In Theseus' case, on the contrary, the exchange of vows of trust will set an even more propitious context for the doctor-patient relationship to develop.

Creon's arrival and following actions (728-885) represent a new source of suffering for Oedipus. Oedipus insists on confirming Theseus' support because he knows Creon will come to take him back to Thebes (652-653). Theseus once again reassures Oedipus that he will protect him, even in his absence: ὅμως δὲ κάμοῦ μὴ παρόντος οἶδ' ὅτι / τοῦμόν φυλάξει σ' ὄνομα μὴ πάσχειν κακῶς ("nevertheless, even if I am not present, I know that my name will guard you so that you won't suffer any harm," 666-667). As a physician, Theseus is obliged to use his abilities for the benefit of his patient (χρήσομαι ἐπ' ὠφελείῃ καμνόντων κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ κρίσιν ἐμήν, *Oath* 16). Facing this new situation, Theseus abides by his promises of help and protection made earlier:

σὺ δ' ἡμῖν, Οἰδίπους,  
ἔκηλος αὐτοῦ μίμνε, πιστωθεὶς ὅτι,  
ἦν μὴ θάνω ἔγὼ πρόσθεν, οὐχὶ παύσομαι  
πρὶν ἂν σε τῶν σῶν κύριον στήσω τέκνων. (1038-1041)

but you, Oedipus, stay here in peace, being confident that, unless I die before, I will not stop until I put you in possession of your children.

Once Theseus frees Antigone and Ismene from Creon's custody and restores them to Oedipus, he feels deeply thankful as he sees Theseus' promises kept and fulfilled. Nevertheless, although Oedipus is grateful for the help he has received thus far, he prompts Theseus to remain true to his former pledge for the time to come: σὺ δ' αὐτόθεν μοι χεῖρε, καὶ τὰ λοιπά μου / μέλου δικαίως, ὥσπερ ἐξ τόδ' ἡμέρας ("But you, greet me from where you are, and in the time to come care for me justly, as you have until this day," 1137-1138). Theseus once more reiterates to Oedipus his commitment, since he has consistently stayed true to his word: δείκνυμι δ' ὅν γὰρ ὄμοσ' οὐκ ἐψευσάμην / οὐδὲν σε, πρέσβυ· ("But I can show you, for I did not lie in any of the things I

swore to you, old man,” 1145-1146). Thus, Theseus’ constant presence and willingness to persevere throughout Oedipus’ sufferings, adapting to changing circumstances and monitoring every step in the progress of the disease, comes to resemble the follow-up the Hippocratic physicians performed. Such careful monitoring of the progress of a disease in the course of several days is broadly documented in the clinical cases of *Epidemics*.

There will be another adverse situation that will challenge the doctor-patient relationship that has developed thus far between Theseus and Oedipus. Theseus learns that there is a suppliant at Poseidon’s altar asking to speak to Oedipus. Oedipus realizes this man is his son Polyneices and refuses to speak to him. Theseus and Antigone earnestly entreat Oedipus to consent and listen to what Polyneices has to say (1160-1203). He reluctantly agrees to receive Polyneices and once again asks for Theseus’ protection: μόνον, ξέν', εἴπερ κεῖνος ᾧδ' ἐλεύσεται, / μηδεὶς κρατεῖτω τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς ποτε (“Only that, if that man comes here, my friend, let no one ever lay hold over my life,” 1206-1207). Likewise, Theseus reminds him again that nothing will happen to him under his protection: κομπεῖν δ' οὐχὶ βούλομαι· σὺ δ' ὦν / σῶς ἴσθ', ἐάν περ κάμῃ τις σῶζῃ θεῶν (“I do not want to boast, but know that you are safe, as long as one of the gods saves me as well,” 1209-1210). Once more, when facing yet another difficulty, the doctor-patient relationship between Theseus and Oedipus is reinforced by Theseus’ constant reassurance of his pledge to help and protect Oedipus.

Polyneices tries in vain to convince Oedipus to go back to Thebes with him (1284-1345). Regardless of Polyneices’ heartfelt pleas, Oedipus is not moved because he remembers that he did nothing when Oedipus needed him the most, and curses him to die at the hand of his brother (1349-1396). Oedipus’ characterization when facing Creon and Polyneices is very similar to that of Philoctetes. Both heroes have experienced long periods of solitude, and after many years they

face those responsible for their banishment (Jouanna 2007: 411). Both heroes have not forgotten the hardships they endured during their isolation and when encountering those who put them in that situation, they cannot but express their anger. Oedipus' curses against Polyneices have been interpreted as a way for Oedipus to get rid of "some kind of disease that [he] passes on to his son, who takes the contagion back to Thebes [...]. Once rid of it, Oedipus can turn toward his destined –and desired– end in the grove of the Eumenides" (Van Nortwick 2012: 151). The disease metaphor suggested by Van Nortwick accounts for the transition that will take place after Polyneices' departure and that will ultimately affect the medical metaphor. This transition will lead to the final reconfiguration of the three elements of the medical art and to Oedipus' final moments and the end of his sufferings.

Right after Polyneices leaves, thunder sounds and Oedipus interprets this as a clear sign of his coming death. The opportunity Oedipus has been waiting for to return Theseus and Athens the favours he has received has finally arrived: Ἀνθ' ὧν ἔπασχον εὖ, τελεσφόρον χάριν / δοῦναί σφιν ἦνπερ τυγχάνων ὑπεσχόμην ("In return for the benefits I received, I want to fulfil a favour to him, the one I promised," 1489-1490). When Theseus arrives, Oedipus reiterates his willingness to abide by the pledge he made to Theseus and Athens: Ῥοπή βίου μοι· καί σ' ἄπερ ξυνήνεσα / θέλω πόλιν τε τήνδε μὴ ψεύσας θανεῖν ("The turning-point of my life is here, and I want to die without deceiving you and this city regarding the things I agreed upon," 1508-1509).

Thus far, the three elements of the medical art have been represented by Oedipus' sufferings (disease), Oedipus (patient), and Theseus (physician).<sup>75</sup> Right before Oedipus dies, he gives Theseus instructions on how he should handle the knowledge he is about to receive (1519-

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<sup>75</sup> At the beginning of the play (275-288), Oedipus identified the Chorus as his source of help and that identification could have been an indication that the Chorus represents the figure of the physician. However, the Chorus does not seem to fully assume that figure. See above, pp.62-65.

1555). If Theseus does as he is told and never reveals Oedipus' burial site, he will always be protected:

ὥς σοι πρὸ πολλῶν ἀσπίδων ἀλκὴν ὄδε  
δορός τ' ἐπακτοῦ γειτόνων ἀεὶ τιθῆ. (1524-1525)

so that it [the place] could always stand as a defence for you instead of many shields and the foreign spear of neighbors.

Χοῦτως ἀδῆον τήνδ' ἐνοικήσεις πόλιν  
σπαρτῶν ἀπ' ἀνδρῶν [...]. (1533-1534)

Thus you will live in a city unharmed by the Sown-men [...].

These instructions seem to reveal a future disease that will affect Athens: the strife with Thebes. Oedipus has already warned Theseus about this: Καὶ ταῖσι Θήβαις εἰ τανῦν εὐήμερεῖ / καλῶς τὰ πρὸς σέ, μυρίας ὁ μυρίος / χρόνος τεκνοῦται νύκτας ἡμέρας τ' ἰών. / ἐν αἷς τὰ νῦν ξύμφωνα δεξιώματα / δόρει διασκεδῶσιν ἐκ μικροῦ λόγου (“and if now your affairs with Thebes have fair weather, countless time as it goes by produces countless nights and days in which, out of a small event, they will scatter with a spear the current friendly pledges,” 616-620). The only way Theseus will be able to protect his city in the future is to carry out Oedipus' instructions after he is dead.

By the time Oedipus' death approaches, the Hippocratic model applied thus far proves insufficient to account for the new configuration of the three elements of the medical art: Oedipus has assumed the role of the physician, Theseus as king of Athens and the city itself have become the patients, and the future strife with Thebes, the disease. The model proves insufficient because the doctor-patient relationship implied by this new configuration takes place in the future without the physical presence of the physician. A new analogy is introduced towards the end of the play. Both *OT* and *OC* deal with pollution. In the case of *OT*, when Oedipus realizes

he is the carrier of the pollution storming Thebes, he knows that he needs “to be removed from the plague-ridden city for it to be restored to health” (Lloyd 2003: 88). The pollution and its carrier are treated as symptoms of a disease and once those symptoms are identified, the treatment must be applied: Oedipus has to leave Thebes. Thus, through the different configurations of the elements of the medical art (disease, patient, and physician) the Hippocratic model is able to account for the process of restoring Thebes’ health.

The end of *OC* offers a somewhat different approach to the disease theme. Because of his pollution, Oedipus is reluctant to reveal to the Chorus who he is. However, Oedipus identifies the Chorus as a potential source of help for him (275-288). This identification could prompt the medical metaphor, placing the Chorus in the figure of the physician and Oedipus in that of the patient. As for the disease, Oedipus’ sufferings represent this element of the medical art, and the pollution Oedipus is carrying becomes just an obstacle for obtaining the help for which he is asking.<sup>76</sup> The Chorus does not fully assume the role of the physician. Its harsh behaviour towards Oedipus and its resistance to grant his request are an indication of the Chorus’ failure at assuming this role. Ultimately, the Chorus’ behavior reflects its initial fear of being in contact with a polluted person and, therefore, the doctor-patient relationship cannot develop. Theseus arrives and immediately assumes the figure of the physician. He thoroughly examines his patient, and is constantly willing to help him endure his sufferings. Theseus thus proves to be a competent physician, complying with several of the guidelines of the medical writings: he uses his knowledge to the benefit of his patient (*Oath* 16-21), he is gentle and tries to avoid causing undesirable pain (*Physician* 4; 5), and he shows kindness throughout his interaction with

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<sup>76</sup> See my discussion above, p.62.

Oedipus (*Physician* 1). In addition, Theseus' constant presence and monitoring of new circumstances in Oedipus' sufferings evoke the thorough documentation Hippocratic physicians performed of the course of a disease found in the clinical cases of *Epidemics*.

By the end of the play, Theseus' excellent qualities as a physician prove not to be enough to end Oedipus' sufferings and facilitate a transition to the next phase of the doctor-patient relationship. The Hippocratic model needs a complementary approach. Sophocles will provide that in the form of Oedipus' supernatural death.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Oedipus' death will demonstrate that a source of pollution can be a source of salvation (Lloyd 2003: 88) for Theseus and Athens.<sup>78</sup> His ultimate gift to Theseus and Athens is that of 'health,' understood as protection against the future strife with Thebes. Sophocles' strong connections with the cult of Asclepius and the fact that this play was performed at a time when the cult was already established in Athens lead me to believe that at the end of the play, Oedipus could stand as a metaphor for a healing god. Therefore, in order to put an end to Oedipus' sufferings the Hippocratic model needs to be complemented with a divine approach as well, and Sophocles provides both in the play. Ultimately, the two approaches present in the play –the Hippocratic and the religious/divine one– are a reflection of how Hippocratic medicine and religious medicine coexisted and complemented each other in late fifth-century Athens (Jouanna 1999: 195; Kosak 2004: 3).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Currie highlights the fact that on account of Sophocles' cultic involvement (his own and Asclepius'), several scholars have seen in *OC* and Oedipus' heroisation references for Sophocles' life: "the heroized Oedipus evoking Sophocles." He states that although Sophocles' biography does not shed much light on the plays, *OC* might be an exception as it indirectly offers "a metapoetic retrospective on the poet's career; certainly *OC* engages intertextually with other Sophoclean plays" (2012: 332).

<sup>78</sup> In certain ritualistic contexts "pollution acquires positive powers; the impure, normally shunned, becomes 'sacred' in the sense that it is marked out as powerful in contrast to the non-polluted objects of familiar use" (Parker 1983: 233).

<sup>79</sup> See my discussion above on the co-existence of two healing approaches, p.36, especially n.52.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that medical imagery and thought are present in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Furthermore, Sophocles' connection with the cult of Asclepius provided me with an additional means of analysis to approach the medical imagery in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

The first chapter established the grounds of the Hippocratic doctor-patient relationship in terms of a set of desirable behaviors which both physician and patient should observe in order for their relationship to be successful. This relationship constitutes a reflection of the interaction of the three elements of the medical art (i.e., disease, patient, and physician) as defined by the author of *Epidemics* (I, 11). The section on Sophocles and Asclepius provided enough evidence to support the idea that Sophocles was deeply involved with the cult and that, less than a century after his death, Athenians continued to associate him with the first stages of the introduction of the cult in Athens. Together, sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this chapter provided a framework that justified the examination of Hippocratic imagery in *OT* and *OC*.

In the second chapter, the frame of the Hippocratic doctor-patient relationship allowed me to analyze the disease theme in *OT* in terms of reconfigurations of the elements of the medical art throughout the play. Knox' study (1965: 139-147) analyzes the disease theme in *OT*, focusing on specific passages where medical vocabulary was present. The approach I have attempted in this chapter demonstrates that the play offers an alternative mechanism that helps identify medical imagery in addition to the presence of medical or technical vocabulary. The main action that brings to the forefront the medical metaphor of the doctor-patient relationship is the identification of a specific character as the source of help or cure. This is the case when the priest identifies Oedipus as the savior of the city, and likewise when Oedipus identifies Tiresias

as the only one who can help Thebes. As the play approaches its end, the reconfiguration of the three elements of the medical art prove to be somewhat unclear due to the textual issues of the play. My analysis demonstrates that when Oedipus is representing the figure of the physician, he constantly fails to provide proper treatment for curing Thebes' plague. The set of behavioral guidelines established in the first chapter permit me to account for Oedipus' failure as a physician. Moreover, I suggest that this failure could have prompted the audience into thinking about their own recent helplessness during the years of the plague.

In the third chapter, I proceed to trace the different configurations of the elements of the medical art in *OC*. The less obvious choice of *OC* for this study was justified by 1) the fact that the most obvious choices (i.e., *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*) provide cases of straightforward physical illness which clearly functions within the same "Hippocratic" framework implemented in *OT*; 2) the absence of scholarly work focusing on medical imagery in the play, and 3) Sophocles' strong connection with the cult of Asclepius and the new divine level present in the play as represented by Oedipus' heroisation. There are traceable reconfigurations of the three elements of the medical art. However, Oedipus' supernatural death proves that the Hippocratic model is insufficient to account for the new configuration at the end of the play (Oedipus as the physician, Theseus and Athens as the patient, and the future strife with Thebes as the disease). Therefore, based on Sophocles' deep involvement in the cult of Asclepius, I suggest that he introduced a new metaphor in which Oedipus was portrayed as a healing god. This metaphor could have served the purpose of demonstrating that in order to end Oedipus' sufferings the Hippocratic model needed to be complemented with a divine approach as well.

One of the main highlighted features of fifth-century Athens has been its rationalism. Hippocratic medicine is one example of this growing trend during that period. However, the

exaltation of the rational movement has sometimes been to the detriment of religious practices that were undergoing innovations. In the fifth century, new cults were introduced in Athens and this fact was not necessarily a sign of religious crisis but rather a “normal operation of polytheism” (Parker 1996:152-153). The cult of Asclepius was a part of that process. It was introduced in Athens c. 420 BCE and, as the first chapter demonstrates, Sophocles was strongly involved in the installation of the cult.

I suggest that in these two plays Sophocles displays his awareness of the changes that were taking place in late fifth-century Athens in both the scientific and religious domains. The medical imagery present in *OT*, and to a lesser degree in *OC*, is clear evidence of Sophocles’ knowledge of contemporary medical practices. On the other hand, Oedipus’ heroisation in *OC* represents the complementary religious approach to healing that co-existed along with Hippocratic medicine in late fifth-century Athens. At the end of *OC*, Oedipus is portrayed as a healing god who will provide health for Athens. Ultimately, this characterization of Oedipus as a healing god could be an indication of Sophocles’ involvement in the cult of Asclepius, a cult that reflects the religious innovations that also took place in late fifth-century Athens.

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