

The theme of pollution/curse saturates *OT* which most scholars date to 429-425. My paper examines *OT*'s linguistic expressions of this theme and compares them with contemporary texts and events. Through these comparisons I offer additional evidence for 429, the favored but by no means generally accepted date.

Summary of *elaunein agos* in *OT*. A plague is *driving* the city [*loimos* + *elaunein*, 28]. Apollo's oracle commands Thebes to *drive out* her pollution [*miasma* + *elaunein*, 97] by *driving out* the guilty man [*andr-* + *elaunein*, 100] or murdering him. In the king/prophet *agôn*, Oed. mocks the conspirators' attempt to *drive* him *out* on the grounds that *he* is the pollution [*agos* + *elaunein*, 402]. Tiresias shoots back an oracular prediction that Oed.'s parents' terrible-footed curse will soon *drive* him from Thebes (*ara* + *elaunein*, 418).

Summary of *elaunein agos* in Herodotus / Thucydides. The historians evoke this same theme in regard to the ancient 'curse' (*agos*) on the Alcmeonids and in particular on Pericles, the sixth generation descendant of Alcmaeon's son, Megacles, the archon (ca. 632) on whose account the *agos* had originated after he murdered fugitive suppliants at Athena's sanctuary. Of this *agos* **Herodotus** uses the same rare verb that Oedipus uses of the 'curse' which Creon and Tiresias allegedly ascribed to him (*ag-êlatein* Hdt. 5.72 = *ag-êlatêsein*, *OT* 402). Herodotus explains that Sparta's king Cleomenes expelled 700 Athenian families because they were 'accursed' (*en-ageis*) as a result of their ancestor's bloody deed (*phonos*, 5.70) – the same charge Apollo levels at Laius' murderer (*phonôî phonon*, 100) and of which Oedipus turns out to be guilty (1288). About this Alcmeonid curse **Thucydides** digresses because of its relevance to Pericles' role in the war's outbreak. He notes that in 432/1 the Spartans urged Athens 'to drive out the curse of Athena' – namely Pericles himself. Thucydides uses *agos elaunein* four times of the Alcmeonid curse on Pericles.

Conclusion: Although we cannot be certain that *OT* post-dates 432, the clustering of *elaunein agos* in Hdt. around the Alcmeonids, in Thuc. around the Alcmeonids and esp. Pericles, and in *OT* around Oedipus suggests that Sophocles was playing off a contemporary hot-button issue – i.e. the Spartan attempt in 432/1 to drive Pericles from Athens on the basis of his ancestral *agos*. If this is so, I suggest that the first member of *OT*'s quadruple *elaunein agos* sequence, i.e. *elaunei loimos... polin* (27), refers to the *loimos* which 'swooped down' on Athens (*en-kata-skêpsai*, Thuc.2.47) just as it 'swooped in' on Oedipus' Thebes (*en...skêpsas*, 28); both plagues present an inscrutable *tychê* confounding human *technê*. Many Athenians thought the plague had been sent by Apollo in response to Pericles' hard-line war-policy (Thuc.2.54-64). Similarly Apollo appears to have sent the plague as a response to Oedipus' regicide (96-101). These parallels supplement earlier arguments that Sophocles' plague, seemingly his own invention, has Athens' plague in view (K.Hermann, Schadewaldt, Knox). Furthermore it has been argued persuasively that *Hippolytus* (428) provides a solid *terminus ante quem* for *OT* (Zielinski, Earle, Newton). In light of these various considerations, *OT*'s most probable production date appears to be 429 - a time just after Sparta, on the brink of war, had evoked Pericles' Alcmeonid *agos* as an potentially divisive issue at Athens, just 10 months after the plague's first onset in June 430 and 5 months before Pericles' plague-induced death in September 429.