

Modern scholarship has given us a fuller picture of the medical marketplace in classical Greece but there is little research about how Hippocratic naturalist physicians differ in their practical therapy from the magical healing practiced by village wise-women and local *pharmakopôlai*, among others. This paper will chart the techniques used by practitioners of Hippocratic medicine and magical healing in the specific case of male sexual impotence.

The Hippocratic corpus provides scattered references to male sexual impotence: e.g. *Epi.* 7.122 declares that a water-carrier has become *eunouchos* from running and hunting; *Aer.* 21 discusses the causes for the female lifestyle of certain Scythians. These remarks on pathology, combined with the penile anatomy of *Oss.* 15, produce a unified understanding of male genital health. The Hippocratic treatises seem to advocate the possibility of an exclusively mechanistic model of male desire and correspondingly diagnose impotence either as the imbalance of bodily fluid or as the severing of tendons. Erection is the result of either the downward flow of sperm or the tightening of the tendons supporting the penis; orgasm is a tightening of the flesh, pulling seed through the vascular system (*phlebes*) to the penis. Hippocratic authors think of masturbation as a necessary stimulation for male bodily health. When a patient lacks not only the physical ability to ejaculate but also an psychologically erotic stimulus for masturbation or intercourse, as in the case of the Scythians in *Aer.* 21, Hippocratic therapy prescribes a regimen of exercise or masturbation, a purely physical treatment.

Although no practicing magician has left observations on treating a patient suffering from impotence, several examples from classical and archaic literary sources illustrate the techniques. Hipponax fragment 92 appears to be magical treatment at the hands of woman. Magical foreign words are pronounced; the patient's genitalia are beaten with a fig branch; his anus is covered in his own feces. Since the treatment technique parallels a treatment for impotence in Petronius' *Satyricon*, the protagonist of Hipponax fr. 92 seems to be unable to achieve erection. The magical treatment aims to impart the hardness of the fig branch directly to the flaccid penis. The story in Herodotus 2.181 of the Egyptian king Amasis, whose wife he believes has cursed him, is also instructive. Amasis would treat himself by removing the force of the curse – he threatens to kill his wife. In magical therapy, then, a cure is effected either by treating the impotent member itself or by addressing the source of the adverse magical force.

The case as a whole is an excellent example of the differing medical ideas available to patients. The Hippocratics practice a holistic treatment of impotence and advocate the transfer of bodily fluid away from excessive and toward deficient areas, a healing of opposites. Magical treatment, by contrast, focuses exclusively on the genitalia themselves; healing is accomplished *similia similibus*. But the main difference in therapy seems to be that Hippocratic medicine operates on the level of mechanistic forces whereas magical healing aims to diffuse the magical spell causing the impotence. Magical and naturalist healing do not treat alternate levels of the patient's emotional and physical well-being, but rather completely different causes for the disease.

Finally, it is important to note how, despite the widespread support for naturalist cures in antiquity, magical healing survives into the Roman period. Yet magical healing is preferred in only a few diseases, e.g. epilepsy and impotence. Since impotence is a disease which comes on suddenly and the afflicted may feel no other ill effects, I suggest that patients may be inclined to place impotence in the same category as epilepsy and like diseases.