

These lines which Clytemestra speaks to Agamemnon upon his return, “I know no pleasure nor reproachful speech from another man any more than I know the dipping of bronze,” present scholars with a reference whose origins are obscure and difficult to interpret. Scholarly debate over what is meant by the “dipping of bronze” has a long history, but has still led to no clear outcome. The point of the metaphor seems clear — Clytemestra is asserting her fidelity during her husband’s absence —, but the significance of the allusion has so far never been satisfactorily explained.

This paper aims to illustrate the inadequacy of previous attempts to interpret the reference as, for example, the quenching of iron (first offered by the scholia) or of bronze (an alternative given equal weight by modern commentators including Fraenkel, and Denniston and Page), even though the quenching of bronze was not practiced in antiquity (v. Blümner). Instead the paper takes advantage of some relatively new evidence from scholarship on ancient Japanese techniques of dyeing bronze art objects a deep red color known as *shakudo* (v. Craddock) to support the interpretation that the “dipping of bronze” refers to dyeing (as suggested by Welcker in 1826). Thus the phrase can be seen as an allusion to an ancient technique of manufacturing a certain type of Corinthian bronze which has been described by Pliny the elder (*Hist. Nat.* 34.3.8).

Once the interpretation of dyeing is accepted, the phrase becomes much more suited to its metaphorical purposes, both explicit and implicit, and enriches the reading of the play in numerous ways. First, the manufacture of Corinthian bronze was mysterious even in ancient times and the process of its manufacture was as unknowable to Clytemestra as she claims her knowledge of other men to be. Thus it is perfectly suited to her explicit meaning, far more so than the other interpretations. In addition, given the invariable use of the word “dipping” (βαφῆ / , βα/πτω) in drama to mean “dyeing” (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 960, *Eum.* 1028, and *Pers.* 316) and in particular a “dyeing in blood” (cf. Aesch. *Prom.* 862 and *Choe.* 1010-1013, *Soph. Aj.* 95, and Eurip. *Phoen.* 1578), this metaphor also serves as an ominous foreshadowing of the murder to come. The reference to this purple bronze also contributes to the tone established by the set with its many blood-colored features: the purple robes about to be walked upon and Cassandra’s crimson costume. In addition to the image of a sword stained in blood, there is also a sexual connotation to the act of dipping a sword or the like which ironically suggests Clytemestra’s actual infidelity. The masculinity of the act is also representative of the devices of her *androboulon kear*. In all these ways the reading of “dyeing bronze” is preferable to previous interpretations.