

**Walter D. Penrose, Jr., Ph.D. *Courage as a Marker of Gender Variance: The Hippocratic
Ideology of Conception in On Regimen***

Courage (or lack thereof) was the prominent marker of gender fluidity in Hippocratic thought, the direct result of procreation. The text *On Regimen* describes a particular understanding of conception as a battle of the sexes of sperm. The outcome of this battle produced what the anonymous author of *On Regimen* believed to be “essential” characteristics of gender in each sex. These characteristics were not necessarily polarized in accordance with biological sex, however. Masculinity in women and femininity in men were perceived ultimately through their courageousness (or lack thereof, respectively) that took seat in the womb. The Hippocratic understanding of procreation is directly tied to a larger societal relationship between masculinity and courage. Scholarship on masculinity has clearly identified how *andreia* was essential to the construction of adult male identity in ancient Greece (e.g. John J. Winkler 1989, 1990: 178-179; Nick Fisher, 1998: 70-71; Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M. Rosen *Andreia* 2003). Less understood is the means by which the presence of courage in women signified a state of “female masculinity” in Hippocratic thought. Careful examination of *On Regimen* reveals that at least some Hippocratics adhered to an ideology where gender variance was considered to be imbued at birth due to the mixing of male and female seed, and was hence largely viewed as an essential rather than a socially-constructed trait. At the same time, the Hippocratic treatise prescribes a regimen wherein parents could potentially avoid creating a cowardly male or a courageous female child through diet and exercise. Comparison to other anecdotal evidence reveals that the Hippocratic ideology of gender variance as manifested through courageousness or lack thereof was not unique—the identity of the masculine, courageous woman was conceived of in a similar fashion to that of the better known perception of the *kinaidos* or otherwise timid male. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in Aeschylus *Agamemnon* stand out as a striking example of a pair of such deviants in Greek literature, where the chorus chastises Aegisthus for allowing Clytemnestra to take the man’s role in revenge (1633-35; 1643-45; see further Sarah B. Pomeroy *Goddesses, Wives, Whores, and Slaves* 98-99). Taken within a larger context, *On Regimen* demonstrates that courage (or lack thereof) was an integral way of gauging gender identity and variance from norms in ancient Greek thought, despite the Hippocratic understanding that such variance was essential from birth rather than socially-constructed during childhood.