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Empedocles the Sorcerer and his Hexametrical *Pharmaka*

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ABSTRACT

In one of his fragments, Empedocles addresses his protégé Pausanias, predicting or promising that he will learn *pharmaka*, a word that is usually understood to mean herbal 'drugs' or 'remedies' for disease, an interpretation that in turn seems to have been encouraged by a modern understanding that Empedocles was an empirically minded medical doctor. An alternate interpretation is suggested, however, by the recently published Getty Hexameters which use the word *pharmaka* several times to refer to hexametrical incantations that will protect a group of houses or a city from danger. These hexameters, moreover, are inscribed on a lead tablet of late-classical date that most probably came from the Sicilian city of Selinus, a date and a provenance that put its composition in close proximity to Empedocles himself.

Keywords: Empedocles, *pharmakon*, Gorgias, incantation, Plato, Getty Hexameters, Paean, protection, magic, magician, sorcerer, sorcery, drugs, wind, necromancy, rain, Sicily, Selinus.

In one of his longer hexametrical fragments, Empedocles addresses his protégé Pausanias, predicting or promising that he will learn *pharmaka*, a word that is usually understood to mean herbal 'drugs' or 'remedies' for disease, an interpretation that in turn seems to have been encouraged by a modern understanding that Empedocles was an empirically minded medical doctor.[1] To be sure, the metaphorical extension of the word from 'medicine' or 'remedy' to 'charm' or 'spell' is a natural one,[2] but there is more at stake here, because Empedocles' *pharmaka* seem to have a protective, rather than curative function and they seem to have the power to control the weather and summon souls from the underworld. An alternate interpretation is

[1] Zuntz (1971) 182, famously suggested that we 'visualize him—the nobleman, the thinker, the physician—in his city'. For the reception of Empedocles as empirical physician and scientist, which begins in the Roman period, see also notes 6, 10, 33 and 49 below.

[2] See, e.g., LSJ II and Gregory (2013) 175, who notes that LSJ include in their definition 'enchanted potion, philtre: hence charm, spell'.

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suggested, then, by the recently published Getty Hexameters which use the word *pharmaka* several times to refer to hexametrical incantations that will protect a group of houses or a city from danger. These hexameters, moreover, are inscribed on a lead tablet of late classical date that most probably came from the Sicilian city of Selinus, a date and a provenance that put its composition in close proximity to Empedocles himself.

The argument below begins with a close reading of the fragment in question (D-K 111) and the related passages in the Getty Hexameters, before proceeding in two movements: in the first, I will show that fragments of Empedocles' biographical tradition, two of which go back at least to third-century BCE Sicily (Timaeus and Satyrus), reveal him to be a performer of sorcery or incantations aimed at protection; and in the second, I will add further support to the argument that the Empedoclean *pharmaka* are 'incantations', rather than 'drugs', by adducing some crucial, but neglected evidence, from Plato's *Laws* and from Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*. I should also say at the outset that the debate set in motion by the publication of the Strasbourg papyrus concerning the number or titles of Empedocles' poems need not detain us, because in what follows I give a close reading of only two fragments of his poetry, without any discussion of their place in his corpus.[3]

Empedocles' *Pharmaka* and the Getty Hexameters

We begin with D-K B111:[4]

> φάρμακα δ' ὅσσα γεγᾶσι κακῶν καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ
> πεύσῃ, ἐπεὶ μούνῳ σοὶ ἐγὼ κρανέω τάδε πάντα.
> παύσεις δ' ἀκαμάτων ἀνέμων μένος οἵ τ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν
> ὀρνύμενοι πνοιαῖσι καταφθινύθουσιν ἀρούρας·
> καὶ πάλιν, ἢν κ' ἐθέλῃσθα, παλίντιτα πνεύματ' ἐπάξεις·
> θήσεις δ' ἐξ ὄμβροιο κελαινοῦ καίριον αὐχμόν
> ἀνθρώποις, θήσεις δὲ καὶ ἐξ αὐχμοῖο θερείου
> ῥεύματα δενδρεόθρεπτα, τά τ' αἰθέρι ναιετάουσι,[5]
> ἄξεις δ' ἐξ Ἀίδαο καταφθιμένου μένος ἀνδρός.
>
> *Pharmaka*, however many are a defense against evils and old age,
> you will learn, since for you alone I shall accomplish these things.
> You will (i.e. for example) stop the strength of the weariless winds, which
> rise up along the earth and lay waste to cultivated lands with their blasts,
> and again, if you want, you will lead the winds back.

[3] For the debate, see, e.g., Martin and Primavesi (1999), the second edition of Inwood (2001) 8–21, and Kingsley (2002).

[4] Diels-Kranz 111 = Wright 101 = Inwood 15 is quoted in full by Diogenes Laertes 8.59. The translation is by Kingsley (1995) 217, with some changes in the last half of line 8.

[5] I print the conjecture by Bollack 1965–69, fr. 12.8. The best MSS have τά τ᾽ αἰθέρι ναιήσονται. Wilamowitz and Gallavotti print: τά τ᾽ αἰθέρ(ι) ἀίσσονται

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> And out of black rain you will make a timely drought
> for men, and out of a summer drought you will make
> tree-nourishing streams, that dwell(?) in the air.
> And you will lead from Hades the strength of a dead man.

Diels admitted that one could sum up the contents of this fragment as 'magic' and then he proceeded to bury it at the very end of his edition; others have followed suit.[6] Van Groningen, for his part, described it as 'pure magie', and he even declared it a forgery.[7] And at least one ancient author designated such activities as 'magic': the author of the Hippocratic diatribe *On the Sacred Disease* condemns 'magicians, purifiers, charlatans, and quacks' (μάγοι τε καὶ καθάρται καὶ ἀγύρται καὶ ἀλαζόνες, *Morb. sacr.* 4.1) who 'profess to know how to bring down the moon, to eclipse the sun, to make storm and sunshine, rain and drought, the sea impassable and the earth barren, and all such wonders'.[8] Empedocles's boasts, then, are in partial accord with those of other itinerant 'sorcerers' of the fifth century BCE.[9]

The syntax of the fragment deserves closer scrutiny. Empedocles begins this passage by claiming that the addressee of his poem, who is elsewhere named Pausanias (literally 'He who stops grief or troubles'),[10] will learn *pharmaka*, an important word, as its placement emphasizes at the very start of the passage. Translators and commentators, taking their cue from Homeric usage and relying on a somewhat limited modern view of Empedocles as a doctor or physician dispensing medicinal herbs, usually translate *pharmaka* as 'potions' or 'remedies', to take a recent example: 'All the potions, which are a defense against evils and old age, you shall learn.'[11] According to this approach, the word *pharmaka* refers only to

[6] Diels (1969) 138. Diels claimed, however, that the fragment 'suggests nothing more than what science promises to give to its adepts today: information about the laws of nature which will enable one to become their master'. Kingsley (1995) 217–18 gives a thorough and justly critical description of the cool reception that modern scholars gave D-K 111. The fragment does not, for example, appear in the selection printed in Kirk and Raven (1963), a popular textbook for both undergraduates and graduate students.

[7] Van Groningen (1956) 49: 'la doctrine … est de pure magie: le disciple apprendra à régler les vents, le beau temps et la pluie, à appliquer des rémèdes efficaces contra tous les maux, la décrépitude sénile incluse, et même à rappeler à la vie ceux qui sont déjà entrés dans l'Hades.'

[8] See also *Morb. sacr.* 4.31–32: 'if a man by incantations and sacrifice will bring the moon down, eclipse the sun, and cause storm and sunshine'.

[9] Kingsley (1995) 220. For the Hippocratic attacks on traditional and popular healing, see Laskaris (2002) 33–43 and 97–108 and Carastro (2006) 43–53.

[10] The name is formed from παύειν and ἀνίη. In the Roman period it was interpreted as an appropriate name for a doctor as 'he who stops pain', but in the archaic and classical periods the second term ἀνίη usually does not connote physical pain in the body, but rather emotional or mental pain, such as grief or sadness; see Gheerbrant (2017) 617–19.

[11] Inwood (2001) 219. See also Lloyd (1979) 34 and Chitwood (2004) 42 ('You will learn medicines of all kinds'), but Kingsley (1995) 218 is more cautious: 'And all the remedies that exist as defense against sufferings and old age: These you will learn.' Most recently

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the first two verses and the deictic pronoun τάδε at the end of the second line, refers back to the *pharmaka* mentioned in the preceding verse. But it is unclear how these 'potions' or 'drugs' can be protective, rather than curative, because the word ἄλκαρ at the end of the first verse never means 'cure' in Greek, but rather 'protection' or 'defense'.[12] A better approach, I suggest, is to understand that τάδε πάντα looks forward, rather than backwards: 'since for you alone I shall accomplish these (i.e. the following) things'. In this case the pronoun refers, as it is translated above, to all of the activities that follow, which are therefore to be accomplished by means of *pharmaka*.[13] The traditional reading also does not explain why Empedocles composed lines 3–9 as a complete unit bounded by ring composition:[14] the first and last actions are concerned with manipulating the μένος of the winds (3) and the μένος of a dead man (9), a parallel that is underscored by the repetition in the same line position of the words καταφθινύθουσιν (4) and καταφθιμένου (9).

Empedocles, then, posits a general category of *pharmaka* that are 'a defense against evils and old age' and then he lists a number concrete examples of evils (destructive winds, drought, and floods) in the verses that follow as well as the puzzling reference to leading up the strength of a man who has perished. We might have expected Empedocles to boast in line 1 that his teaching will overcome death, in addition to old age, and indeed scholars have noted how this verse seems to challenge the claim made by the composer of the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* (192–93), that mortals are *unable* to find 'a cure for death or a defense against old age' (θανάτοιό τ' ἄκος καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ).[15] The problem in our text at the end of the preceding verse (8) may hint, in fact, that something dropped out at this point, a common enough occurrence in lists. In the final verse, modern scholars have, in fact, seen a specific reference to the story that Empedocles revived a woman after thirty days in a coma, but it is clear that Pausanias will learn *pharmaka* not to revive nearly dead people, but rather to lead up from Hades a person 'who had (i.e. already) died'.[16]

Gregory (2013) 175 suggested 'remedies' as a translation, rather than 'potions', because this 'leaves open the possibility that different types of therapy were involved.' Both Inwood and Kingsley rightly take all of ὅσσα γεγᾶσι κακῶν καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ as a relative clause, unlike Laks and Most (2016) loc. cit who limit the relative clause to ὅσσα γεγᾶσι κακῶν: 'As many as are the remedies for ills, and protection against old age—You will learn them, since for you alone I myself will accomplish all this.'

12 Kingsley (1995) 222 notices that the word *pharmakon* also had the broader connotation of 'charm' or 'spell', but he thought that Empedocles was referring only to incantations used during the collection of curative herbs.

13 Obbink (1993) 91–92 and Carastro (2006) translate *pharmaka* here as 'spells'. See the previous note for Kingsley's understanding.

14 Chitwood (2004) 42.

15 Kingsley (1995) 222–23 calls it a 'flagrant challenge' to the standard Greek view.

16 As Van Groningen (1956) 49 emphasized.

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But if Empedocles does indeed teach herbal *pharmaka*, how might Pausanias use them to control the weather or return the dead to the living? The Hippocratic diatribe mentioned earlier describes some people who 'by acting as a *magos* and sacrificing' (μαγεύων καὶ θύων) could 'bring down the moon, eclipse the sun, and create both storm and calm' (σελήνην καθαιρήσει καὶ ἥλιον ἀφανιεῖ καὶ χειμῶνα καὶ εὐδίην ποιήσει, *Morb. sacr.* 4.31–32). It is, of course, difficult to imagine accomplishing any of these actions by means of drugs or potions, a herbal understanding of Empedocles' *pharmaka* has in the past been encouraged by Homeric usage, where *pharmaka* are always herbal, described either as 'helpful', in which case we understand them to be curative drugs or remedies, or as 'baneful', in which case they are 'poisons'. Homer, moreover, says they were the expertise of the god Paean, who on different occasions cured Hades and Ares by 'smearing on pain-killing *pharmaka*' (*Il.* 5.401 and 900), and who, in the description of the powerful drug (*pharmakon*) given to Helen by an Egyptian woman named Polydamna, is said to have been the ancestor of the people of Egypt, where everyone is a skilled healer (*Od.* 4.227–32).[17]

This traditional understanding of both *pharmaka* and the god Paean was, however, recently upended by the Getty Hexameters, a series of protective incantations preserved in dactylic hexameters on a lead tablet of late fifth-century date, which is presumed to come from Selinus.[18] The different incantations are divided by refrains or rubrics clearly referring to Paiēōn (i.e. Paean) as the creator of verbal, rather than botanical, *pharmaka*, which are primarily used to protect, rather than heal:[19]

> Παιήων—σὺ δὲ παντόσ' ἀλέξιμα φάρμακα πέμπεις
> καὶ τάδε φωνήσας ἔπε' ἀθάνατα θνητοῖσιν· (6–7)
>
> Paiēōn—(I invoke your name) because[20] you send protective incantations in every direction, after indeed you uttered[21] the following immortal verses for the sake of mortal men (followed by a hexametrical incantation, lines 8–20)

[17] Rutherford (2013) 161.

[18] Jordan and Kotansky (2011) and Faraone and Obbink (2013).

[19] Faraone and Obbink (2013) ad loc.

[20] The syntax here is admittedly cramped and telegraphic: a vocative followed by a separate sentence introduced by 'explanatory δέ', as is shown by the versions in lines 23 and 49, where the δέ is replaced by γάρ. See Race (2000) for the use of explanatory δέ.

[21] There are two ways to divide the words in the first half of this verse: (i) καὶ τάδε φωνήσας ἔπε' (as above), where καὶ is adverbial and φωνήσας is an aorist participle; or (ii) καὶ τάδ' ἐφώνησας ἔπε', where καὶ introduces a new sentence: 'and you uttered these verses'. The first possibility makes slightly better sense of the present tense of πέμπεις in line 6: 'you are sending protective charms, after/because you uttered (i.e. orally composed/invented) them for the sake of humankind.' The second possibility is less attractive: 'Paiēōn—(I invoke your name) because you send protective incantations in every direction and (because) you (once) uttered … '

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[Παιήων,] σὺ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀλεξιμὰ φάρμα[κα πέμπεις]. (23)

[Paiēōn,] for you yourself send protective incantations! (followed by a hexametrical incantation, lines 24–31)

[Παιήων σὺ δ]ὲ πάντοσ' ἀκεσσφόρος ἐσσὶ καὶ ἐσθ[λός] (32)

[Paiēōn, for you] in every direction are cure-bringing and excellent (followed by a prose incantation, lines 33–41)

[Πα]ι[ή]ων ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀλεξιμὰ φάρμακα πέ[μπει]. (49)

[Pa]i[ē]ōn, for he himself sends protective incantations! (followed by an incomplete hexametrical incantation formula, line 48)

Each of these refrains, then, claims Paean as the composer of the incantatory verses (*pharmaka*) that follow. This is especially clear in the first instance, where the added verse says specifically that he did so after he 'uttered the following immortal verses (τάδε φωνήσας ἔπε' ἀθάνατα) for the sake of mortal men.' Here again, we see the common deictic use of τάδε that looks forward to the dactylic hexameters that follow. These refrains also explain that these *pharmaka* are (like Empedocles') generally protective, not curative: in three cases, they are described as ἀλέξιμα, a word which means 'protective' or 'aversive' and implies that they ward off dangers and troubles when spoken aloud or inscribed on an amulet. In the third case Paean himself is described differently as an excellent 'bringer of cures' (ἀκεσσφόρος), suggesting that in this case, at least, the text that follows was curative.

These verses dramatically alter, of course, our traditional thinking about Paean, who as we saw earlier is closely aligned with herbal *pharmaka*. But as Rutherford has stressed, Paean is also a patron and an embodiment of an early genre of protective compositions, sometimes in hexameters, that ask Apollo to protect young men in times of plague and other disasters.[22] The Getty Hexameters, then, encourage us to pursue the idea that the *pharmaka* that Empedocles promised to teach Pausanias were indeed verbal *pharmaka* or 'incantations', perhaps accompanied by some ritual action, as we saw in the case of those condemned by the Hippocratic author, who accomplished similar marvels by 'acting as a *magos* and sacrificing' (μαγεύων καὶ θύων). It is important to note as well that the hexametrical form of the incantations preserved in the Getty Hexameters is the same form that Empedocles composed all of his poetry.[23] The early biographical tradition, as we will see below, supports this claim, when it describes Empedocles himself performing similar acts of sorcery and links these descriptions closely to the poet's boasts in D-K 111.

[22] Rutherford (2013).

[23] For the importance of the Getty Hexameters in reconstructing the early history of hexametrical incantations, see Faraone (2006 and 2011).

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Empedocles the Sorcerer in the Earliest Biographies

Because of the practice in critical editions of separating biographical information from Empedocles' actual fragments, scholars sometimes miss the fact that some of Empedocles' ancient biographers understood that the *pharmaka* in D-K 111 were indeed incantations and they were able to cite episodes from the poet's life to back up these assertions, episodes that (they claimed) were also narrated in his poems. Indeed, just before Diogenes Laertius quotes the fragment in full, he reports the following:

> φησὶ δὲ Σάτυρος ἐν τοῖς Βίοις ὅτι καὶ ἰατρὸς ἦν καὶ ῥήτωρ ἄριστος. Γοργίαν γοῦν τὸν Λεοντῖνον αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι μαθητήν, ἄνδρα ὑπερέχοντα ἐν ῥητορικῇ καὶ Τέχνην ἀπολελοιπότα· .... τοῦτόν φησιν ὁ Σάτυρος λέγειν ὡς αὐτὸς παρείη τῷ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ γοητεύοντι. ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων ἐπαγγέλλεσθαι τοῦτό τε καὶ ἄλλα πλείω, δι' ὧν φησι· "φάρμακα δ' ὅσσα γεγᾶσι κακῶν καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ …"
>
> Diog. Laert. 8.58–59 [= Satyr. fr. 12 *FHG* 3.162]

> Satyrus in his *Lives* says that he (i.e. Empedocles) was also a healer and an excellent orator: at all events Gorgias of Leontini, a man pre-eminent in oratory and the author of a treatise on the art, had been his pupil. . . . Satyrus quotes this same Gorgias as saying that he himself was present when Empedocles performed *goēteia*. Nay more: he contends that Empedocles in his poems lays claim to this power and to many more, when he says: "all the *pharmaka*, that are a defence to ward of ills and old age …"
>
> Translation by Hicks (1925), slightly modified.

It seems clear, therefore, that as early as the third century BCE, the Peripatetic biographer Satyrus believed that in D-K 111 Empedocles 'proclaims' (the verb is ἐπαγγέλλεσθαι) his expertise in sorcery. It is impossible to know from this passage precisely what kind of sorcery Gorgias watched Empedocles perform. The Greek verb γοητεύειν is cognate with the lament (γόος) for the dead and some have argued that γοητέια originally referred to incantations and rituals designed to either placate the spirits of the dead or to raise them up and use them for cursing or prophecy.[24] Although by the end of the fifth century BCE γοητέια was also used as blanket term, sometimes derogatory, for sorcery or magic, it seems possible, nevertheless, that Gorgias claimed to have seen Empedocles performing necromancy, which is yet another way to interpret the very last promise that Empedocles makes to Pausanias in D-K 111: that he will 'lead out from Hades the strength of a dead man.'[25]

[24] Johnston (1999).

[25] Gregory (2013) 175 suggests that the last promise 'appears to assert … the possibility of necromancy'. Kingsley (1994) 188–89 and 225–27 goes further, when he champions Dodds' theory that Empedocles was a shaman figure; he interprets the last verse to mean that Pausanias will learn how to revive the body of a person who had already died. The verb ἄγειν ('to lead') that is used here is, however, commonly used to describe necromancy—that is the art of leading an incorporeal spirit or soul up from Hades for purposes

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The biographical tradition encourages us to look at another of the procedures that Empedocles promises to teach Pausanias—the control of the winds—because there is, in fact, much evidence that the Greeks did attempt such things with sympathetic actions, prayers, and incantations.[26] More importantly, Diogenes Laertius, directly after quoting D-K 111 cites the third-century BCE historian Timaeus, himself also a Sicilian, for the popular anecdote that Empedocles himself was thought to have 'prevented' dangerous winds in similar fashion:[27]

> καὶ γὰρ ἐτησίων ποτὲ σφοδρῶς πνευσάντων ὡς τοὺς καρποὺς λυμῆναι, κελεύσας ὄνους ἐκδαρῆναι καὶ ἀσκοὺς ποιεῖσθαι περὶ τοὺς λόφους καὶ τὰς ἀκρωρείας διέτεινε πρὸς τὸ συλλαβεῖν τὸ πνεῦμα· λήξαντος δὲ κωλυσανέμαν κληθῆναι.
>
> Timaeus *FHG* 1.215–16 apud Diog. Laert. 8.60

> For, when the Etesian Winds were once blowing violently enough to blight the crops, he commanded that asses be flayed and bags (*askoi*) be made (i.e. from the skins) and he distended them along the hills and ridges in order to capture the *pneuma* (i.e. of the winds). And after it ceased, he was called "He who prevents the winds".
>
> Translation by Hicks (1925) loc. cit.

Some scholars suggest that the biographers fabricated this incident from the boast in D-K 111 that Pausanias will master the winds,[28] but the final two words in Satyrus' account κωλυσανέμαν κληθῆναι would have nicely filled the second half of a dactylic hexameter and suggest that Empedocles himself may have described this incident elsewhere in his poetry. It also may be significant that Nicomachus of Gerasa preserves, as an alternate version of the Empedocles' title κωλυσανέμας, the title 'He who averts the winds' (ἀλεξανέμας), which is metrically very similar and suggests that in the oral or manuscript tradition at least two different versions of the episode survived.[29]

of divination, a ritual we see enacted already in archaic poetry in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* and in Aeschylus' *Persians*, where the spirit of the dead king Darius appears at the top of his grave. This is, for example, a common understanding of ψυχαγωγία, literally the 'leading of souls'. If Empedocles were claiming to bring a body back to life, however, he would have boasted that Pausanias will learn how to put the strength or breath of a man back into a corpse, but there is no mention of a body in the passage. The persons that Odysseus interviews are incorporeal, as he learns by trying to embrace his mother, and in Aeschylus' *Persians*, it is clear that only the ghost of king Darius appears at the top of his tomb. Both of these necromantic encounters are triggered, moreover, by special sacrifices and speech acts; see Eitrem (1928) and Broadhead (1960) 302–309.

26 Translation by Jones (1918) loc. cit., with the important discussion of Cook (1940) 103–104, to which much of the next two pages is indebted.

27 Timaeus does not specify where this incident took place, but Clement (*Strom*. 6.3, p. 445.11ff. Stählin) places it at his hometown, an obvious conjecture. On the dates of Empedocles, see Wright (1981) 1–5.

28 See most recently Chitwood (2004) 42–46.

29 Cook (1940) 105 n. 1 and Van Groningen (1956) 48 n. 4.

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The process that Empedocles deploys in this anecdote is not at all clear.[30] Some modern commentators, relying on the older understanding of Empedocles as an early scientist, suggest a kind of massive engineering project, which involved stretching an untold number of donkey-skins as a physical barrier to prevent the winds from reaching the agricultural crops,[31] but this is not, in fact, what the passage says: the ass-skins were fashioned into ἀσκοί, a kind of sack that was commonly used as a wine-skin, and we are never told that these sacks were then stitched together as a continuous barrier or wall. Therefore, when Timaeus says that Empedocles 'distended' the bags (the verb is διατείνειν) along the hills, he probably means that the bags were set up on hills in such a way that the wind filled them up with air, somewhat like the 'wind-socks' used at modern airports to test wind direction. Such wine-skins would not, of course, physically prevent the winds from reaching the crops of Akragas and it seems that Empedocles was credited with some kind of metonymic ritual that was also apparently known in Homeric times and later. In the *Odyssey*, for example, we hear of a mortal man named Aeolus, who gave Odysseus a leather *askos* to control the winds:[32]

> δῶκε δέ μ' ἐκδείρας ἀσκὸν βοὸς ἐννεώροιο
> ἔνθα δὲ βυκτάων ἀνέμων κατέδησε κέλευθα·
> κεῖνον γὰρ ταμίην ἀνέμων ποίησε Κρονίων.
> ἠμὲν παυέμεναι ἠδ' ὀρνύμεν, ὅν κ' ἐθέλῃσι.
>
> Hom. *Od.* 10.19–22

> He gave me an *askos* made of the hide of a nine-year old bull
> and in it he bound the paths of the blustery winds
> for the son of Kronos had made him a keeper of the winds,
> both stopping and rousing, whichever one he wished.

Empedocles, I suggest, had this passage in mind when he boasted to Pausanias: 'You will stop (παύσεις) the power of the weariless winds … and again, if you want (ἢν ἐθέλῃσθα), you will lead the winds back.' In this case, Aeolus binds Euros (East Wind), Notos (South Wind) and Boreas (North Wind), in order to allow Zephyros (West Wind) alone to

[30] Fiedler (1931) 33–36.

[31] See e.g. Wright (1981) 261: '[the wind] is checked by stretching asses' skins along hill (or cliff) tops.' This is also an ancient understanding of the passage, as we can see, for example, in a passing comment in Plutarch's *Moralia* (515c): 'And Empedocles, the natural philosopher (φυσικὸς), by blocking up a certain mountain gorge, which permitted the south wind to blow a dire and pestilential draught down upon the plains, was thought to have shut plague out of his country.' Timaeus, however, writing about a half a millennium earlier and presumably using Sicilian sources, says the wind was causing damage to crops, not plague. Cook (1940) 105 n. 2 notes the tendency of Plutarch and other second Sophistic authors 'to minimize the marvelous' with respect to Empedocles.

[32] The meaning of the adjective ἐννεώροιο is unclear, but 'nine-year old' is the customary translation. The adjective βυκτάων means 'swelling', is connected with the blasts of a trumpet and may imply violence, e.g. 'hurricane winds'.

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carry Odysseus' ship homeward. And like Empedocles, Aeolus creates his *askos* out of a special leather (the skin of a nine-year old ox) and he also receives an important title: ταμίης ἀνέμων ('Controller of the winds'). At an earlier point in the wanderings, Athena, because she wished to move Odysseus' ship in a different direction, bound (the verb is again κατέδησε) many other winds and commanded them to stop (παύσασθαι), but exempted Boreas.[33] These Homeric passages suggest, then, two possibilities for restraining contrary breezes, in order to help people traveling on ships:[34] (i) that a mortal could acquire special knowledge about trapping a wind metonymically within an *askos* made of the skin of a special animal; or (ii) he could pray to a divinity like Athena, who could perform the same benefit without an *askos*.

According to much later sources, Greek farmers, worried like Empedocles about their crops, also bound destructive winds in effigy in a consecrated sack of the same type (*askos tetelesmenos*) that was made in this case from the skin of a dolphin.[35] Here the use of a special skin—like Empedocles' ass-skins—that had been 'consecrated' points again to some kind of ritual action aimed at metonymically restraining the wind and thereby preventing it from damaging the crops. None of these ancient sources explicitly mentions, however, the mortal use of incantation or prayer with these wine-skins, but it is extremely likely that, in addition to his metonymic action, Aeolus also employed some kind of speech act directed against the winds, and indeed we do hear elsewhere of prayers or incantations used for protection against similar dangers. Aristophanes, for example, refers to a special prayer that Samothracian initiates knew, by which they 'turned aside' dangerous storms at sea,[36] and Pausanias (2.34.3) mentions persons at Methana, who try to avert hailstones from crops with sacrifices and incantations (ἐπωιδαί). We also find brief notices in the lexicographers to clans or hereditary priesthoods at Athens, Eleusis and Corinth, whose names, Heudanemoi ('Those who lull the wind') and Anemokoitai ('Those who put the wind to sleep') suggest that they also pacified the

[33] Hom. *Od.* 5.382–87: 'But Athene … bound down the paths of the other winds (τῶν ἄλλων ἄνέμων κατέδησε κελεύθους) and commanded them all to stop and be lulled to rest (παύσασθαι δ' ἐκέλευσε καὶ εὐνηθῆναι ἅπαντας); but she roused the swift North Wind, and broke the waves before him, to the end that Zeus-born Odysseus might come among the Phaeacians, lovers of the oar, escaping from death and doom.'

[34] See Strömberg (1950) 82–84, for a full discussion.

[35] Eust. *Od.* 1646.8–11, quoted by Cook (1940) 107 along with Eust. *Od.* 1645.59–60 and the scholiast ad *Od.* 10.2, who seems to refer to written recipes. More precise descriptions of similar rituals are preserved in the later Greek and Roman agricultural handbooks, most notably the burial of a toad in effigy in a ceramic pot, to protect a farmer's field from harmful storms or winds. We find a similar use in late antiquity of binding-spells to prevent hailstorms from harming vineyards and grain fields. See, e.g. Ohrt (1929) for a Latin *defixio* from Tragurium, which bids Gabriel to bind the hail-storm demon in 'fiery chains', and Audollent (1939) for a lead cross, which refers to itself as a *defixio*.

[36] Aristophanes, *Peace* 276–79, with the discussion of Faraone (2004).

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winds by some kind of soothing chant. In light of these titles, we can better understand the monikers mentioned earlier: 'Controller of the winds' given by Zeus to Aeolus and 'He who prevents the winds' given to Empedocles, presumably by the people of Akragas. Nor is it difficult to connect the Corinthian 'Wind-lullers' with the secret rituals performed annually at Corinth in Pausanias' time at the Altar of the Winds, on which 'the priest sacrifices to the winds one night in every year … [and] performs other secret rites (ἀπόρρητα) at four pits, soothing the fury of the blasts; and he chants, they say, Medea's spells (ἐπωιδαί).'[37] Here the four pits were probably oriented to the four points of the compass and allowed for individualized treatment of the winds, as we saw in the *Odyssey*, restraining some, so others could blow more freely. The multiplicity of the Corinthian pits may also explain why Empedocles used more than one *askos* and set them up at different locations.

Finally, there is a very late reference to another action of Empedocles that also seems to have been accomplished by incantation. According to an anecdote preserved by Iamblichus, Empedocles was once in the midst of performing some other kind of song at the home of his friend Anchitos, when suddenly an angry young man burst into the room:[38]

> Ἐμπεδοκλῆς δὲ σπασαμένου τὸ ξίφος ἤδη νεανίου τινὸς ἐπὶ τὸν αὐτοῦ ξενοδόχον Ἄγχιτον, ἐπεὶ δικάσας δημοσίᾳ τὸν τοῦ νεανίου πατέρα ἐθανάτωσε, καὶ ἀίξαντος, ὡς εἶχε συγχύσεως καί θυμοῦ, ξιφήρους παῖσαι τὸν τοῦ πατρὸς καταδικαστήν, ὡσανεὶ φονέα, Ἄγχιτον, μεθαρμοσάμενος ὡς εἶχε τὴν λύραν καὶ πεπαντικὸν τὸ μέλος καὶ κατασταλτικὸν μεταχειρισάμενος εὐθὺς ἀνεκρούσατο τὸ "νηπενθές τ᾽ ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἁπάντων" κατὰ τὸν ποιητὸν, καὶ τὸν τε ἑαυτοῦ ξενοδόχον Ἄγχιτον θανάτου ἐρρύσατο καὶ τὸν νεανίαν ἀνδροφονίας.
>
> Iambl. *VP.* 113

> Empedocles, when a certain youth indeed drew his sword against his host Anchitos, because, as a judge, he (i.e. Anchitos) had publicly condemned the youth's father to death, and when he (i.e. the youth) with sword in hand rushed—since he was confused and angry—to strike his father's condemner, as if he were a murderer, he (i.e. Empedocles), as he was holding his lyre, changed the mode, administered a soothing and sedating strain, and immediately began the "soother of grief and wrath, oblivion of all ills" (*Od.* 4.221) as the Poet has it (i.e. Homer) and he rescued his host Anchitos from death and rescued the young man from committing murder.

Traditionally scholars have either assumed that Empedocles is quoting a single Homeric verse as an incantation[39]—a habit that only begins in the

[37] Paus. 2.12.1. Strömberg (1950) passim.

[38] Text: Dillon and Hershbell (1991) 136–37.

[39] See e.g., Heim (1892) no. 115 ad loc.

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Roman period[40]—or that Iamblichus, here in the midst of a discussion of Pythagoras' use of different musical strains to affect the emotions, is only describing Empedocles' lyre-playing and not the words he performed, an interpretation that yields strained translations such as: 'Empedocles … struck up *what Homer calls* "pain-dissolving, anger-reducing" music "which makes one forget everything bad."'[41] Nowhere, however, do the ancients discuss the lyre-playing talent of Empedocles, but only his hexametrical verses. The Homeric verse quoted by Iamblichus was, moreover, the incipit of the famous description of the herbal *pharmakon* that Helen mixed into the wine of Telemachus and Menelaus to stay their grief, a reference that presumably explains why Empedocles deploys it against the angry and grief-stricken youth who attempts to kill Anchitos. But how can we understand the effect of Empedocles 'quoting' Homer's verses at this point? Are we to believe that in quick succession the murderous young man recognized the Homeric source of the quote, remembered the noble Telemachus and suddenly became ashamed over what he was about to do? It is more likely, I suggest, that Empedocles, at this dangerous moment in time, simply recalled a well-known hexametrical charm, which began, as did the description of Helen's *pharmakon* with the words: 'soother of grief and wrath, oblivion of all ills'.

We have seen, then, that the boasts of Empedocles in fragment D-K 111 coincide well with three performances described in the biographical tradition:

Table 1
Empedocles' boasts and performances

Witness	Type	Effects
Empedocles boasts (B111 D-K)	Incantations	'Lead in' or 'stop' wind and rain; raise ghosts
Empedocles performs (Timaeus, early third c. BCE)	Makes *askoi* of donkey skins	'Stops' winds from destroying crops
Empedocles performs (Satyrus, third c. BCE citing Gorgias)	*Goēteia*	Sorcery, perhaps necromancy
Empedocles performs (Iamblichus, late third c. CE)	Hexametrical verses	Removes grief and anger from a homicidal young man

[40] Faraone (1996) 83–86.

[41] See, e.g., Wright (1981) 11 and Inwood (2001) 157, who translates (as his Testimonia A15): 'Empedocles … struck up what Homer calls "pain-dissolving, anger-reducing" music "which makes one forget everything bad."' The Greek is admittedly vague, but there are clearly three different actions described here: changing the mode or tuning (μεθαρμοσάμενος), playing the lyre (μεταχειρισάμενος), and starting up (ἄνεκρούσατο) something else, i.e. singing. The final verb ἄνεκρούσατο, originally used to indicate the beginning of lyre-playing (literally 'to strike up [the lyre]'), is used as early as Pindar to indicate the beginning of a song; see West (1982) 122 with n. 58 and Obbink (1993) 80 n. 67 for recent discussions.

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It is notable, moreover, that two of the three incidents from the biographical tradition are from relatively early and local Sicilian sources and that all three depict Empedocles performing actions that in one way or another seem to illustrate his claims in D-K 111, either by some kind of sympathetic action (restraining the wind in *askoi*), by performing hexameters, or perhaps by bringing up the 'strength of a dead man' for necromancy.

Explaining the Difference: Verbal vs. Herbal *Pharmaka*

Now we might be tempted to dismiss Empedocles and the Getty Hexameters as sources of a local Sicilian meaning of the word *pharmakon* unattested elsewhere in the Greek world, but in fact we see this same definition in an extraordinary, but neglected passage in Plato's *Laws*, in which one of his characters, the 'Athenian Stranger', wrestles with two very different concepts of criminal 'pharmacy':[42]

> A division in our treatment of pharmacy (φαρμακεῖα) is required by the fact that, following the nature of mankind, they are of two distinct types. The type that we have now expressly mentioned (i.e. poisoning) is that in which injury is done to bodies by bodies according to nature. Distinct from this, is the type which, by certain means of sorceries, incantations, and binding spells (μαγγανείαις τέ τισι καὶ ἐπῳδαῖς καὶ καταδέσεσι), as they are called, not only persuades (πείθειν) those who attempt to cause injury that they really can do so, but also persuades their victims that they certainly are being injured by those who possess the power to bewitch (γοητεύειν).
>
> Pl. *Leg*. 933a. Translations of Plato's *Laws* adapted from Bury (1942)

The Athenian Stranger, then, begins his disquisition on pharmacy by claiming that material *pharmaka*, such as drugs or poisons, act according to nature when they attack the physical body of the victim, but he does not go on to say (as we might expect) that verbal *pharmaka* attack some other, non-physical human part, such as the mind or the soul. But he does imply something of this sort when he says that the power of this second kind of *pharmaka* lies in the persuasion of both the performer and his victim.[43]

After describing these two very different kinds of crimes concerned with *pharmaka*, the Athenian Stranger quite naturally suggests two kinds of punishment:

> So this statement shall stand as the law about pharmacy: whosoever shall use *pharmaka* (ὃς ἂν φαρμακεύῃ) against any person so as to cause an injury not fatal either to the person himself or to his employees, or so as to cause an injury fatal or not fatal to his flocks or to his hives, if the agent be a doctor, and if he be convicted of pharmacy, he shall be punished by death. … And if it be held that a man is acting like an injurer by the use of binding-spells or

[42] See Carastro (2006) 185–86 for discussion.

[43] Such an interpretation might explain, moreover, why the physical *pharmaka* can harm herd animals and bees (i.e. which are unable to be persuaded by human language), but the verbal *pharmaka* apparently cannot.

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> attraction-spells or incantations (καταδέσεσιν ἢ ἐπαγωγαῖς ἤ τισιν ἐπῳδαῖς) or any such mode of pharmacy, if he be a prophet or diviner (μάντις ὢν ἢ τερατοσκόπος), he shall be put to death …
>
> Pl. *Leg*. 933d–e

Here the focus of the verbal *pharmaka* on the non-corporeal elements, as opposed to the bodily, is made clear by the notice that physical *pharmaka* can harm herd animals and bees, but the verbal *pharmaka* apparently cannot, presumably because they are unable to be persuaded by human language. Plato's Athenian Stranger would, moreover, condemn to death doctors who cause injury with material *pharmaka*, as well as seers and diviners, if they commit the same crimes with various sorts of verbal *pharmaka*. The general goal of this imaginary law is, of course, a sound one from a legal point of view, because it punishes those who have professional expertise in each of these very different kinds of pharmacy, if they should misuse their special knowledge to injure or kill.

Plato, thus, divides his 'pharmacy' into two distinct categories:

Table 2
Plato's pharmacy

	Herbal Pharmacy	Verbal Pharmacy
Examples	Drugs or poisons	Sorceries (μαγγανεῖαι) Incantations (ἐπῳδαί) Binding-spells (καταδέσεις) Attraction-charms (ἐπαγωγαί)
Effects	Injury to persons, flocks or hives	Persuades persons that they can injure or be injured
Professionals	Doctor (ἰατρός)	Prophet (μάντις) Diviner (τερατοσκόπος)
Explanation	Injury by bodies to bodies 'according to nature'	Persuasive power

Plato suggests, moreover, that in the fourth century, at least, 'prophets' and 'diviners' were thought to specialize in magical incantations, as well as their usual trade in oracles and divination.

In his rhetorical set-piece, the *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias, the younger Sicilian contemporary of Empedocles mentioned earlier, uses similar verbs to describe the power of incantations and, although he does not use the word *pharmaka*, Gorgias seems to know a two-fold division of drugs and incantations similar to that of the Athenian Stranger:

> [10] For inspired incantations (ἔνθεοι … ἐπῳδαὶ) by means of words are the "leaders-in" of pleasure (ἐπαγωγοὶ ἡδονῆς) and "leaders-away" of grief (ἄπαγωγοὶ λύπης), because the power of the incantation (ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἐπῳδῆς), by affecting (lit. "conversing with") the opinion of the soul, charms and persuades and transports it by means of sorcery (γοητείᾳ).

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> [14] The power of speech over the arrangement of the soul (πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς τάξιν) is analogous to the power of drugs (τῶν φαρμάκων) over the nature of the body. For, just as different drugs lead out (ἐξάγει) different humors from the body and some stop (παύει) it from being ill and others (i.e. stop it) from being alive, so, too, some words cause sorrow, some pleasure, some fear, some confidence for the listeners, and others—by means of a harmful kind of persuasion—thoroughly enchant and bewitch (ἐξεφαρμάκευσαν καὶ ἐγοήτευσαν) the soul.
>
> Gorg. *Hel.* 10 and 14

In these passages, as we can see more schematically below, Gorgias makes explicit the parallel that was implicit in Plato. Just as herbal *pharmaka* physically affect the body, spoken charms persuasively affect the soul:

Table 3
Gorgias' comparison of drugs and incantations

Agents:	Drugs (φάρμακα)	Incantations (ἐπῳδαι)
Effects:	Leads out (ἐξάγει) humors from the body and stops (παύει) it from being ill or alive	Leaders in (ἐπαγωγοὶ) of pleasure and leaders-away (ἄπαγωγοὶ) of grief, which affect the opinion of the soul

Although Gorgias does not use *pharmaka* to refer, as Plato does, to both drugs and incantations, he nevertheless theorizes the differences between the two in a similar manner. More importantly, perhaps, he describes their effects in ways that recall the language of Empedocles' boasts. As we can see in the right-hand column, he begins with the general term for incantations (ἐπῳδαι), which he then subdivides as 'leaders-in' and 'leaders-out' of human emotions. These awkward translations are crafted to highlight that fact that Gorgias is using nouns that are cognate with the compound verbs 'to lead in' (ἐπάγειν) and 'to lead away' (ἀπάγειν), language similar to Empedocles' boast that Pausanias 'will lead in the winds' (111.5: πνεύματ' ἐπάξεις) or 'lead' the strength of a dead man 'out of Hades' (111.9: ἄξεις δ' ἐξ Ἀΐδαο). And also on the left-hand side of the chart, note that, when Gorgias claims that 'drugs lead out (ἐξάγειν) humors from the body and they stop (παύειν) the body both from being ill and alive', he seems again to echo Empedocles' antithesis of stopping the force of the winds (111.3: παύσεις δ' … ἀνέμων μένος) and then leading them back again (111.5: παλίντιτα πνεύματ' ἐπάξεις). It would seem that we are dealing with similar models for understanding the human body and the cosmos as comparable organisms in which various forces—for example, violent storms or bodily humors—can be led in and out or simply stopped by using drugs on the body and incantations on the soul. In this light, it is interesting that the Epicurian philosopher

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Philodemus, in a recently recovered passage of his *On Wealth*, uses a prose paraphrase of D-K 111 in a way that suggests he saw a moral allegory about quieting stormy emotions and achieving peace of mind.[44]

In the passage from the *Laws* quoted above, Plato suggested that the prophets or diviners were the professionals likely to engage in verbal *pharmaka* and this is not, in fact, an isolated claim in the Platonic corpus, because Adeimantus expresses a similar idea in the *Republic*:[45]

> Wandering priests and prophets (ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντεις) approach the doors of the wealthy and persuade them that …, if anyone wishes to injure any enemy of his, for a small outlay he will be able to harm the just and the unjust alike with certain attraction-spells and binding-spells (ἐπαγωγαῖς τισιν καὶ καταδέσμοις), because (i.e. in both cases) they are persuading the gods, so they say, to serve their ends.
>
> Pl. *Resp.* 364b–c

In both passages Plato uses the same technical terms, 'attraction-spells' (ἐπαγωγαί) and 'binding spells' (κατάδεσμοι), which like the *pharmaka* of Empedocles are designed either to impel action or prevent it, and in both passages he also implicates 'prophets' as possible performers, a crossover that is easy to explain if Plato is thinking about these prophets as people who can chant both oracles and incantations in dactylic hexameters.

We find a similar combination of prophecy and incantation in another well-known autobiographical fragment of Empedocles:[46]

> τοῖσιν ἅμ' εὖτ' ἂν ἵκωμαι ἐς ἄστεα τηλεθάοντα,
> ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναιξὶ σεβίζομαι· οἱ δ' ἅμ' ἕπονται
> μυρίοι ἐξερέοντες ὅπῃ πρὸς κέρδος ἀταρπός,
> οἱ μὲν μαντοσυνέων κεχρημένοι, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ νούσων
> παντοίων ἐπύθοντο κλύειν εὐηκέα βάξιν
> δηρὸν δὴ χαλεπῇσι πεπαρμένοι <ἀμφ' ὀδύνῃσι>.
>
> D-K B112.7–12 = Wright 102.7–12 = Inwood 1.7–12

> Whenever I enter the prospering towns,
> I am revered by men and women. They follow me
> in countless numbers asking where their advantage lies,
> some yearning for prophecies and others inquiring to hear
> a ritual-utterance that is good for healing all kinds of diseases,
> because they have long been pierced <on both sides> by harsh
> <pains>.

Empedocles claims, in short, that to a large degree his fame lies in his mastery of two kinds of speech-acts: prophecies and the ritual 'utterance that is

[44] Armstrong and Ponczoch (2011) 98–103 and (2013).

[45] Carastro (2006) 185–86.

[46] The first six verses of this fragment (not quoted here) address the citizens of Acragas, who were presumably the imagined audience. The restorations in diamond brackets are those of Bergk, based on Homeric parallels, and have no effect on the argument put forth here.

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good for healing' (εὐηκέα βάξιν). Those who in the past imagined Empedocles as a traditional physician have suggested that εὐηκέα βάξιν refers to medical diagnoses and other advice that Empedocles gave to the sick wherever he traveled.[47] The word βάξις, however, is quite rare in Greek and refers primarily to ritual speech, often in verse, such as oracles, prayers, or incantations. The phrase, in short, is best translated (as above) as a 'ritual utterance' (βάξις) that is 'good for healing' (εὐήκης),[48] and when combined with ἐπὶ νούσων may in fact be a poetic periphrasis for the most common Greek word for incantation (ἐπαοιδή), which is literally a song sung 'over' (ἐπί) a sick person or a diseased part. According to Empedocles, then, crowds of people in different cities expected two kinds of speech-acts from him—oracles and curative incantations—both of which were traditionally sung in dactylic hexameters, the same meter, of course, in which all of his poetic fragments are composed.[49]

Conclusions

It goes without saying that D-K B111 is a difficult text, but the new evidence of the Getty Hexameters has allowed us to see that Empedocles' *pharmaka* were most probably incantations composed in dactylic hexameters, the poetic medium in which all of his extant fragments are composed. Closer examination of a second fragment, D-K B112, and the early and local Sicilian biographical traditions has, moreover, shown that he was thought to have used these verbal *pharmaka* to accomplish some of the deeds that he promises to teach Pausanias. And finally, we saw, as well, how both Plato and Gorgias made use of an apparently traditional division between verbal and herbal pharmacy, a division that gives equal weight to the physical power of material *pharmaka* as well as to the persuasive power of incantations. Judging from the programmatic importance of D-K 111 and 112, it is clear that the verbal *pharmaka* were central to his calling both as a poet and as a sorceror.

[47] Kirk and Raven (1963) 321, for example, claim that Empedocles' 'fame as a doctor is suggested by his own words' in this fragment and they translate: 'while others, for many a day stabbed by grievous pains, beg to hear *the word that heals* all manner of illness.' Van Groningen (1971) 183 translates: 'les uns désirent des predictions, les autres désirent *un conseil salutaire* …'

[48] As Laín Entralgo (1970) 82 saw long ago, when he translated it as a 'curative word'. Lloyd (1979) 34 is inclined to this view: 'Whether "this word of healing" consisted of the sort of advice that we find in Hippocratic works … or whether it was simply a matter of of spells or charms—ἐπῳδαί—is not clear from the the text, but the fact that the term for "word" is βάξις—used of the pronouncements of oracles in particular—suggests that the latter is more likely.' Inwood (2001) 211 sees a two-fold reference to prophecy here, which he translates 'some in need of divinations and others in all sorts of diseases sought to hear a *healing oracle*'; Gregory (2013) 178 follows suit.

[49] There is one other passage in which Empedocles mentions prophets and singers (fr. 146): 'And in the end they are prophets (μάντεις), singers (ὑμνοπόλοι), healers (ἰητροί) and leaders among earth-dwelling men. Thence the most powerful sprout forth as gods in their honors.'

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