THE EARLY GREEK MEDICAL VOCABULARY OF INSANITY

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The aim of this study is to offer a review of Greek general terminology of insanity as it is used in fifth- and early fourth-century medical texts.\(^1\) By ‘general’ I indicate here terminology which signifies insanity without strong specifications of features, or circumstances that distinguish it from other phenomena. These terms are usually translated into English with interchangeable and overlapping terms such as ‘derangement’, ‘delirium’, etc.

This is a list of the relevant terms found in our corpus:

\[\text{παράνοος, παρανοέω, παράνοια, (οὐ) κατανοέω, ἄγνοια, ἀγνοέω, ἀγνόια; ὑπομαίνομαι, μανικός, ἀγνοέω, ἀγνόια, ἀγνοέω, ἀγνοία, ἀγνόια, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖν, ἀγνοεῖ

First of all, our category of ‘general terms’ calls for discussion. I have excluded from the review the two groups of vocabulary based around phrenitis (φρεν-) and melancholia (μελαγχ-, while I have included the mania (μαν-) group).\(^2\) One of the reasons behind this choice is practical: melancholia and phrenitis have already received a great deal of scholarly attention, as opposed to the terms and concepts I wish to discuss here.\(^3\) In addition, the

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1 This includes most of the text of the so called ‘Corpus Hippocraticum’. I exclude the texts of the Corpus generally considered as belonging to the Hellenistic or to a later period, with limited exceptions (see list on pp. 93–94). I include in this statistic only instances relevant to mental insanity of patients (excluding, e.g., hyperbolic instances where ‘mad’ should mean ‘incompetent’ or ‘misjudged’, with reference to physicians or to the ways of man, etc.). The complete list of occurrences for these terms is found at the end, pp. 83–95.

2 I adopt the latinized version of the names when referring to a general concept of phrenitis, melancholia, or mania as object of scholarly attention; I use the Greek to highlight the individual historical instance in respect for the linguistic distinction between substantives, adjectives and verbs.

different statuses of these three concepts in fifth- and early fourth-century medical texts, where the first two appear to have a more evidently specified and construed meaning (and the first considerably more than the second) supports my choice. μανίη (and cognates), although more specified than the other terms in our list above, remains in the early medical texts a general term, also by virtue of its traditional use to identify ‘madness’ in other genres and linguistic contexts. In our corpus of reference, only phrenitis is a disease recognized and discussed as such, while melancholia and mania are harder to qualify in the same way, as I will discuss shortly. Rather, the two appear intermittently as inbuilt dispositions of character or constitution, ways of being, what seem to be momentary affections or degenerations of other pathologies. There is then a further distinction between the status of melancholia and that of mania, which ultimately justifies my choice of excluding also the first from a list of ‘general terms’. The melancholia group displays in fact greater characteristics of specification in contrast to mania.

To illustrate this I must engage briefly with the discussion and problems posed by Hippocratic melancholia. We will see that the status of melancholia remains obviously much more opaque than that of phrenitis; but it is also in turn more construed and composite than that of mania. We scrutinise now

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4 See e.g. the dedicated discussion in Aff. 6.216–218, Morb. I 6.200; 204 (= Wittern 30; 34), where the word φρενῖτις is used as a header.

5 E.g., in Vict. I 6.518.4 (= Joly-Byl 35.17) μανίη can be of different types, and characterize different blends of the soul: ἢ μανίη τοιούτων ἢ τὸ βραδύτερον, or be of a lesser ‘degree’, ὑπομαίνεσθαι (Vict. I. 6.520.19 = Joly-Byl 35.9.20).

6 See Epid. III 3.981–2 (= Kühlwein 14.15.16), τὸ μελαγχολικόν καὶ ὕφαιμον· οἱ καῦσοι καὶ τὰ φρενιτικὰ καὶ τὰ δυσεντεριώδεα τούτων ἥπτετο, where the melancholic constitution is prone to fever, phrenitis and dysenteric troubles.

7 E.g. in Aph. 6.23, 4.568.11 (= Magdelaine 6.23.2), ἢν φόβος ἢ δυσθυμίη πολὺν χρόνον ἔχουσα διατελῇ, μελαγχολικὸν τὸ τοιοῦτον, ‘fear or depression that is prolonged means/generates a melancholic affection’; Coan Pren. 5.602.11, τῶν ἐξεσταμένων μελαγχολικῶς, ‘those who are out of themselves in a melancholic way’; Epid. VII 5.374.18 (= Jouanna 5.6.7), ‘on the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth [they behave?] μανικῶς’.

8 In Morb. III, 7.134.1 (= Potter 3.13.22), about opisthotonus: ‘sometimes [during an attack] they become somehow manic or melancholics’, μανικοί τι ἢ μελαγχολικοί; in Epid. III, 3.112.11–12 (= Kühlwein 17, case 2, 6): at the end of a list of temporary aspects of the illness (κώμα, aversion to food, irritability et similia) we find τὰ περὶ τὴν γνώμην μελαγχολικά; in Epid. VI, 5.272.2 (= Manetti-Roselli 1.11), ‘in autumn ... ἡ μελαγχολικά’.

9 For example, in the second constitution in Epid. I, 2.638.6 (= Kühlwein 12.19), τὰ μανικά is one of the complications in those ‘whose natural heat is failing’; in Epid. VI, 5.354.19–356.1–3 (= Manetti-Roselli 6.31) ‘melancholics tend to become epileptics, and epileptics melancholics’, οἱ μελαγχολικοί καὶ ἐπιληπτικοί εἰώθασι γίνεσθαι ὡς ἐπὶ τὰ πουλῦ, καὶ οἱ ἐπιληπτικοὶ μελαγχολικοί.

10 Kazantzidis 2011, 31 n. 18 (I thank him for his remarks in conversation about this