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AHAN7011: COSMOLOGY, MAGIC AND DIVINATION 2018
Seminar 7, Dr Dorian Greenbaum
18 June 2018

Magic, Medicine, Religion and Divination in the Graeco-Roman World

The Abaton at the Asklepieion, at Epidauros, 5th c. BCE

Themes to be Considered

- Magic and medicine: connections and links
  - The use of *pharmaka*
  - Incantations and amulets
  - Medical and magical practice
  - Hippocratic medicine, magic and religion
- Astrology and medicine
- Healing cults, oracles and incubations
  - Healing centres of Asclepius
  - Healing, Sarapis and Isis

Magic and Medicine (1)

- Procedures used in 'magical'/medical practices
- *pharmaka*
  - In Greek, can mean both 'drugs' or 'poisons'
  - Used alone, a 'charm' or 'enchantment'
  - Range of effects, from healing to toxic
- Incantations
  - In Greek, *epōdē* (Ionic *epaoidē*); Latin *incantare*, *praecantare*
- Wrapping of substances and amulets
  - In Greek *periamma* or *periapton*; Latin *amuletum*

Magic and Medicine (2)
Examples of Medical and 'Magical' Practices

- Homer, *Odyssey*, 19.449-58 (trans. Fagles, 404-5):

'…but the boar struck faster, lunging in on the slant, a tusk thrusting up over the boy's knee, gouging a deep strip of flesh but it never hit the bone – Odysseus thrust and struck, stabbing the beast's right shoulder – a glint of bronze – the point ripped clean through and down in the dust he dropped, grunting out his breath as his life winged away. The sons of Autolycus, working over Odysseus, skillfully binding (δῆσαν) up his open wound – the gallant, godlike prince – chanted an old spell that stanched the blood and quickly bore him home to their father's palace.'

Magic and Medicine (3)
Examples of Medical and 'Magical' Practices

- Pindar: ***Pythian Ode***, 3.47-53, trans. Race (mod.), 255-57

Now all who came to him (Asclepius) afflicted with natural sores or with limbs wounded by gray bronze or by a far-flung stone, or with bodies wracked by summer fever or winter chill, he relieved of their various ills and restored them; some he tended with calming incantations (μαλακαῖς ἐπαοιδαῖς), while others drank soothing potions (προσανέα πίνοντας), or he wrapped (περάπτων φάρμακα) remedies round all parts of their bodies; still others he raised up with surgery.

Magic and Medicine (4)
Examples of Medical and 'Magical' Practices

- Plato: ***Republic*** 462b, trans. R. Waterfield, 131: [Until a patient decides not to continue in behaviour that leads to illness] '...no medicine or cautery or surgery, and no incantation (ἐπῳδαι) or amulet (περίαπτα) or anything like that either, is going to do them the slightest good.'
- ***Charmides*** 155e, trans. W.R.M. Lamb: …when he (Charmides) had asked me if I knew the remedy (φάρμακον) for headache, I somehow contrived to answer that I knew. Then what is it? he asked. So I told him that the thing itself was a certain leaf, but there was a charm (ἐπῳδὴ) to go with the remedy; and if one uttered the charm at the moment of its application, the remedy made one perfectly well; but without the charm there was no efficacy in the leaf.

Magic and Medicine (5)
Examples of Medical and 'Magical' Practices

- Greek Magical Papyri

PGM VII.193-96 (tr. Scarborough) : For scorpion sting: On a clean piece of papyrus, write the characters and place it on the part which has the sting; wrap the papyrus around it, and the sting will lose its pain immediately (characters follow)

- PGM VII.197-98 (tr. Scarborough): For discharge of the eyes: Write [this] on a piece of papyrus and attach it as an amulet: ROURARBISAROURBBARIASPHRĒN

Student Activity for Week 7

- ‘Life is short, but the art is great, the opportune moment fleeting, experimentation perilous, discernment difficult.’ (my trans.)
- ὁ βίος βραχὺς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὀξὺς, ἡ δὲ πεῖρα σφαλερὴ, ἡ δὲ κρίσις χαλεπή.

Aphorisms I, 1, in Littré, Émile, ed. *Hippocrate. Oeuvres complètes*. 10 vols. Paris: J.-B. Baillière, 1839-1861. Reprint, 1962, here vol. 4, 458.

Hippocratic Medicine, Magic and Religion: *On Sacred Disease*

- *On the Sacred Disease* (epilepsy)
- The Hippocratic writer says that this disease is no more divine than any other – all diseases are divine and also natural
- The Hippocratic corpus concentrates on the natural causes and remedies for disease
- But…
- *Prognostic* I (in Edelstein 1967, 216) : [doctors should] '…learn the natures of such diseases, how much they exceed the strength of mens' bodies, besides whether there is any divine influence in them and to learn how to forecast them.'

Hippocratic Medicine, Magic and Religion: Astronomy

- *Airs, Waters, Places*: connecting the phenomena in the sky (called 'meteorology') with conditions on earth (such as seasons), and how these can be used in the practice of medicine
- 2.10-15, trans. Greenbaum: 'For knowing both the changes of the seasons and the risings and settings of the stars, in what manner each of these occurs, [the doctor] may foreknow what kind of year is going to come to pass. Thus someone who has searched out and perceived the seasonal times beforehand would know quite well about each of these concerns, and would have both the greatest of health and carry it correctly, in no small measure, into the [medical] craft.'

Hippocratic Medicine, Magic and Religion: Astronomy

• *Airs, Waters, Places*, 2.15-18: The first appearance of the word *astronomiē* in the extant corpus of Greek texts is in this text:

'If someone supposes that these things only belong to meteorology, he might change his mind if he comes to understand that astronomy contributes not a small, but a very great part, to medicine.' (Trans. Greenbaum)

Hippocratic Medicine, Magic and Religion: Dreams

• *On Regimen IV*, 89.1-8, trans. W. S. Jones:
To see the sun, moon, heavens and stars [in a dream] clear and bright, each in the proper order, is good, as it indicates physical health in all its signs, but this condition must be maintained by adhering to the regimen followed at the time. But if there be a contrast between the dream and reality, it indicates a physical illness, a violent contrast a violent illness, a slighter contrast a lighter illness. The stars are in the outer circuit, the sun in the middle circuit, the moon in the circuit next to the hollow.

• Later healers continued to use dreams for diagnosis

Medicine and Astrology (1)
Iatromathematics: Medical Astrology

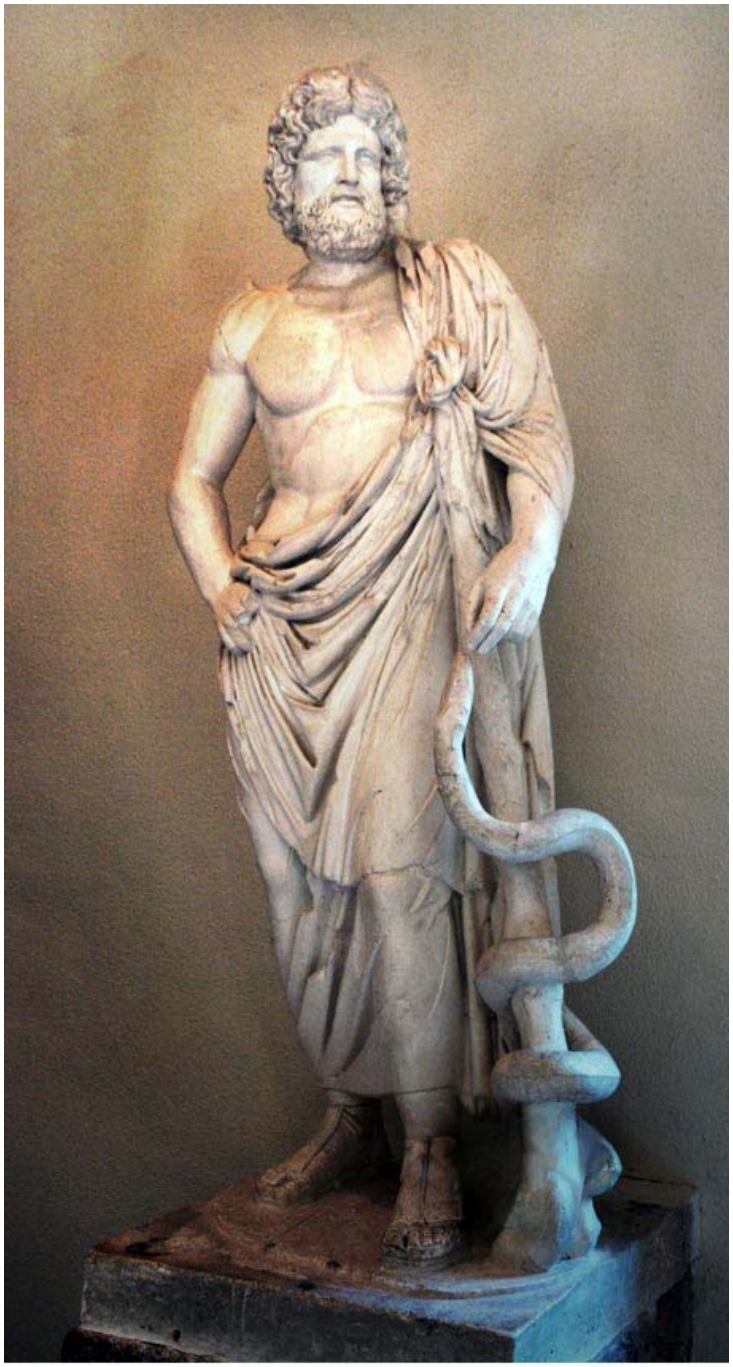
- Previous scholarly opinion on astrology in medicine: '…an aberration, best left outside accounts of mainstream medicine.' (Nutton 2008, p. 19)
- 'Iatromathematics' from Greek *iatros*, doctor, healer; and *mathēmatikos*, 'mathematician', but commonly used to mean 'astrologer'
- 'the Egyptians have completely joined together prognostication through astronomy and the medical [art]' (Ptolemy, *Tetr*. I, 3.18, my trans.)
- Iatromathematical practices include the use of critical days for illness, conception and birth, melothesia, decumbiture

Medicine and Astrology (2) Decumbiture

• *kataklisis* (lit. lying down in bed); Latin *decubitus*, from which the English term derives
• First attested in Dorotheus of Sidon, *Carmen Astrologicum*: V, 31.1: 'If you want to know the condition of a sick [man] for whom death and misfortunes are feared, then at the time of his taking ill look at his nativity, in which sign[s] the benefics were and in which sign[s] the malefics were.'
• Early attestation confirmed by Hephaestio's quotation of Dorotheus, at Heph., *Apotel*. III, 31.12-13
• Techniques of decumbiture rely on importance of the moon, critical days, and relationships with benefic and malefic planets

Medicine and Astrology (3)
Doctors and Astrologers

- Both doctors and astrologers practice a 'stochastic' art, which relies on conjecture (Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* Book I)
- Rely on rhetorical skill to gain clientele
- In the astrological assignment of professions, doctors are often grouped with astrologers, dream interpreters, diviners, philosophers and mystics
- Doctor-astrologers: Crinas of Marseilles 'practised medicine by uniting two arts, as he was very careful and scrupulous, surpassed [Thessalus] in authority by assigning diets according to the motions of the stars from the astrological ephemerides and watching for the proper times, and recently left 10 million sesterces...'. (Pliny, *Natural History*, 29.V.9, trans. Greenbaum)
- Antigonus of Nicaea (Heilen)



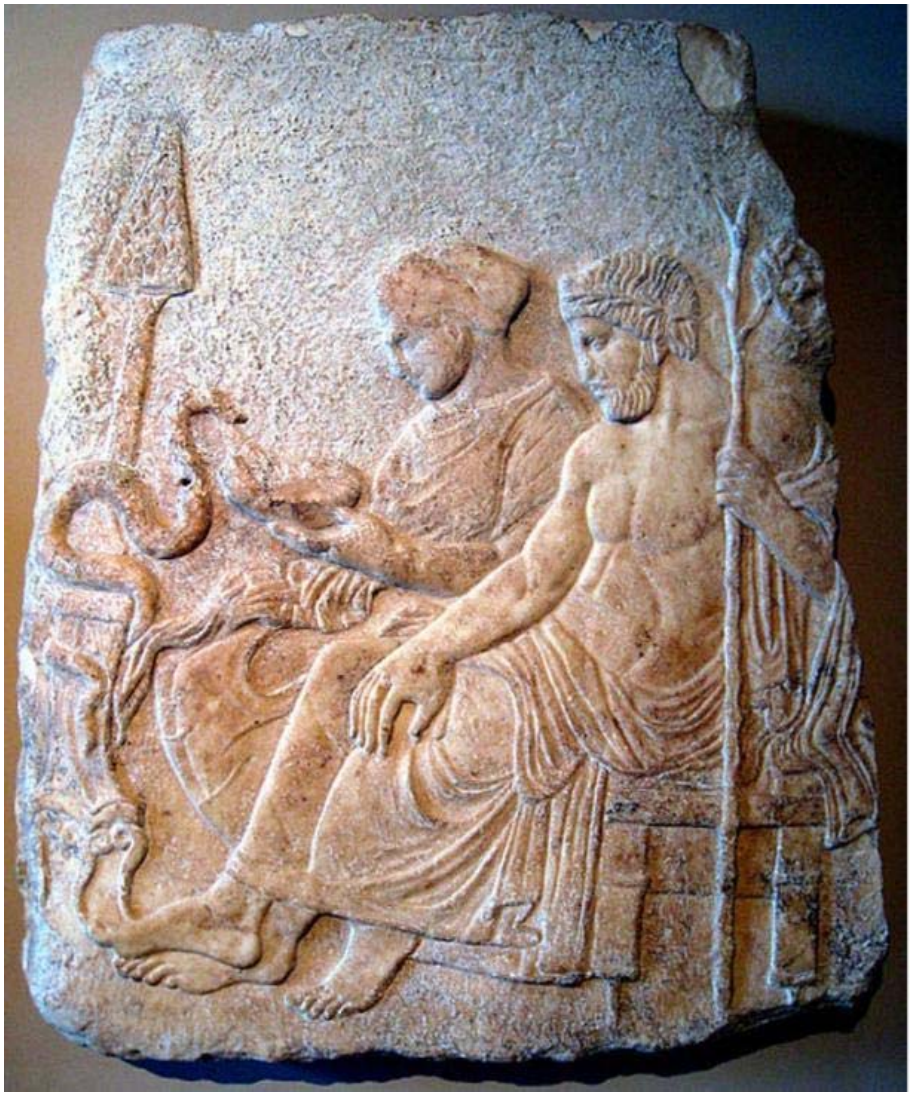
Asclepius

I wish that Chiron—if it is right for my tongue to utter that common prayer— were still living, ... I would have him be as he was when he once reared the gentle craftsman of body-strengthening relief from pain, Asclepius, the hero and protector from diseases of all sorts.

- Pindar, *Pythian Ode* 3, 1-3, 5-7; trans. Race

Asclepius and his famous serpent-entwined staff. Archaeological Museum at Epidauros

Asclepius: Origins



Asclepius and Hygeia, his daughter.
Therme, Greece, end of 5th c. BCE
Istanbul Archaeological Museum

- Asclepius: according to Pindar, the son of Apollo and Coronis
- Trained by Chiron the Centaur in the art of medicine
- Flourishing by mid-fifth c. BCE: oldest healing centre at Epidauros
- Sanctuary with Hygeia on south side of Acropolis
- Considered to be the first doctor, not just the god of medicine

Asclepius and his Healing Cult

- By the middle of the 4th c. BCE his cult was established throughout the Greek-speaking world
- Not the only god of medicine; Apollo retains his status as a healing god; also semi-divine beings such as the hero Amphiaraus
- Other deities also invoked to cure afflictions
- Connections in Egypt with the Egyptian Imhotep (Imouthes in Greek): proficient both in medicine and astrology

Incubation and Dream Oracles

- Incubation: ritual practice of sleeping and dreaming to obtain an oracle from the god to cure an illness
- Sleeping in a temple
- Sleeping in caves or subterranean chambers
- The Cave of Trophonios at Lebadea in Boeotia
- Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.39.4-14, describes the *katabasis* (descent)
- Amphiaraos, famous seer and hero, also had a dream incubation oracle at Oropos in Boeotia and a shrine near Thebes
- Temple of Asclepius at Epidauros

Incubation, Dreams and Asclepius

- **The incubation ritual**

- Epidauros provides examples on stelae placed on sanctuary walls
- Preparation for incubation: bathing, purification, offering sacrifices to the god and other deities
- the Abaton, special hall built for the incubation
- Patient lies on floor on a pallet, sleeping opposite the statue of Asclepius
- When asleep would receive a vision and often an oracle from Asclepius; the god could appear to them and cure them in the dream

Incubation and Dream Oracles: Examples

A man with an abscess within his abdomen. When asleep in the Temple he saw a dream. It seemed to him that the god ordered the servants who accompanied him to grip him and hold him tightly so that he could cut open his abdomen. The man tried to get away, but they gripped him and bound him to a door knocker. Thereupon Asclepius cut his belly open, removed the abscess, and after having stitched him up again, released him from his bonds. Whereupon he walked out sound, but the floor of the Abaton was covered with blood.

(Edelstein 1945, 1.235, no. 27)

Incubation and Dream Oracles: Examples

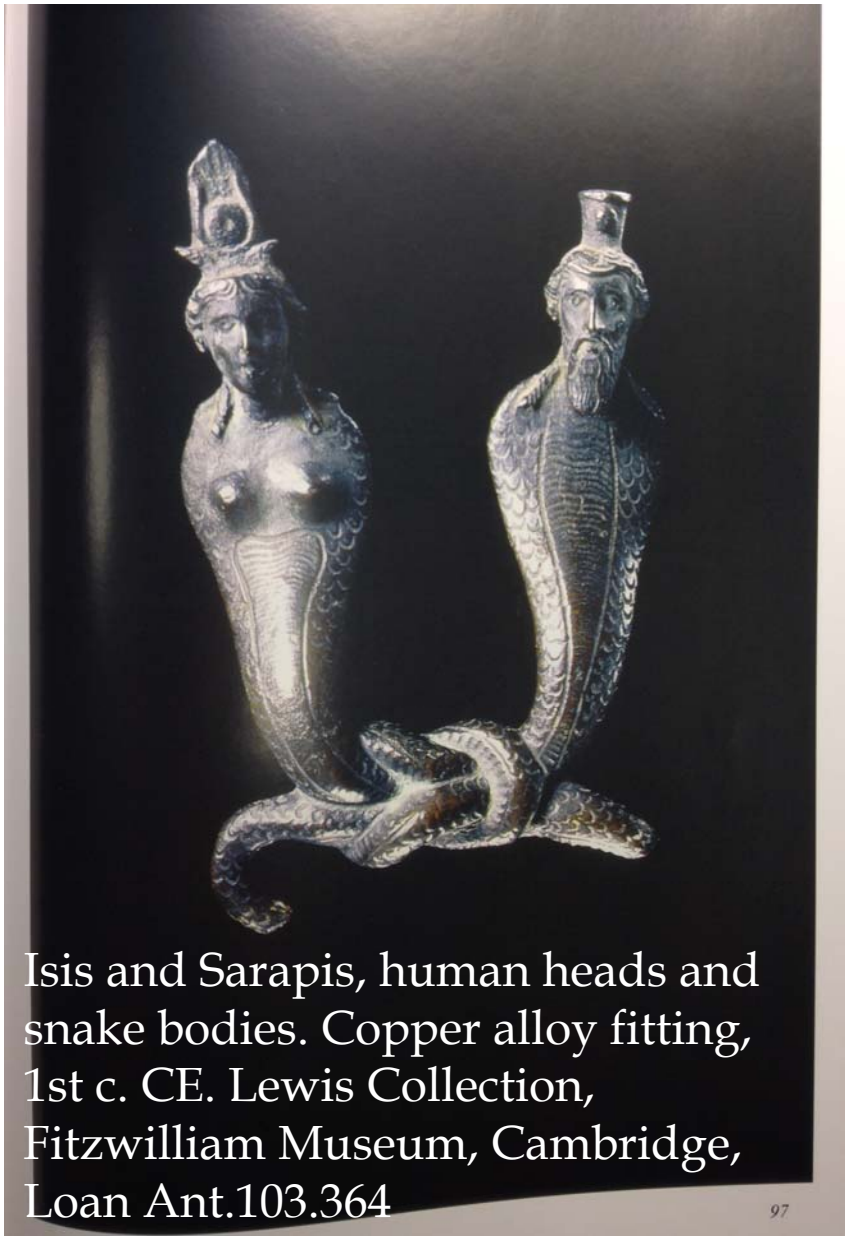
Hermodicus of Lampsacus was paralyzed in body. This one, when he slept in the Temple, the god healed and he ordered him upon coming out to bring to the Temple as large a stone as he could. The man brought the stone which now lies before the Abaton.

(Edelstein 1945, I.232-3, no. 15)

Asclepius and Doctors

- Doctors may have been employed at Asclepius's temples to assist and advise the priests
- May have been priests themselves
- Asclepius the patron of physicians: doctors called themselves 'Asclepiads'
- Physicians in Athens (3rd c. BCE) sacrificed to Asclepius twice yearly as their 'ancestral custom'

Sarapis and Isis



Isis and Sarapis, human heads and snake bodies. Copper alloy fitting, 1st c. CE. Lewis Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Loan Ant.103.364

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- Sarapis: a composite Egyptian god, from Osiris and the Apis bull: Osor-hapi
- Becomes the consort of Isis because of Osiris connection
- God of the dead, fertility, connected with healing
- Isis becomes a universal goddess in the Greco-Roman period
- Associated with Agathos Daimon and Agathe Tyche; Sun and Moon; snakes; worshipped together

Sarapis and Isis: Healing Cults and Oracles

Agathos Daimon/Sarapis and Isis/ Thermouthis. No. 3180, Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria

Asclepius was not the only god able to heal through oracles and dream visions in his sanctuaries and temples.

- **Isis** and the Graeco-Egyptian god **Sarapis** could heal through incubation and oracles given in their temples.

Sarapis and Incubation

Delos, Temple of Sarapis

- Incubations could be sought from Osorapis at places like Saqqara: (3.)"Come to me my lord Osorapis and Osormnevis: /(4.)<come to me> my great lord Osorapis, the great god, and the gods who rest (in the) necropolis of the Sarapeum /(5.)and (the) necropolis of Ḥepnēbes, together with those who rest upon the sleeping-place (štr.t) [or, shety.t ("shrine")] (of) the House of Thoth /(6.) (in) Memphis (Renberg 2007, 652)
- The practice of *healing* incubations particularly may be imported from Greek practices and applied to Sarapis temples at Alexandria and possibly Canopus; also Isis healing centres at Dendara, Menouthis and other sites
- Strabo, Geography 17, 1.17 mentions Sarapis as providing temple and incubation cures

Sarapis and Dream Oracles

- Earliest mention of Sarapis as a healer is a report that Demetrios of Phaleron had his eyesight restored (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 5.5.76); found on Delos were gold and silver votive offerings in the form of pairs of eyes
- Also connected with dreams in Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 2, 39
- Oracle at Canopus: mentioned by Plutarch

(*On Isis and Osiris*, 361e-f) and Strabo *Geog*. 17.1.17, trans. H. L. Jones: 'Canobus…contains the temple of Sarapis, which is honoured with great reverence and effects such cures that even the most reputable men believe in it and sleep in it — themselves on their own behalf or others for them.'

- Aelius Aristides (a devoté of both Asclepius and Sarapis (b. 117 CE)

Vatican Museum, Rome

Sarapis/Pluto and Isis/Persephone

Isis/Persephone and Sarapis/Pluto.
Archaeological Museum, Heraklion, Crete

- Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 361e-f, trans. Babbitt: 'In fact, men assert that Sarapis is none other than Pluto and that Isis is Persephone, even as Archemachus of Euboea has said, and also Heracleides Ponticus who holds the oracle in Canopus to be an oracle of Pluto.'
- Note that Sarapis is associated also with Osiris, a god of the dead

Sarapis and Astrology

Mummy Portrait, 2nd c. CE, Hawara, Fayyum. British Museum

- Ca. 10 mummy portraits depict priests of Sarapis wearing 7-rayed stars (Goette in Evans 2004)
- We know that astrology was practised by priests in the temples, e.g. Narmouthis (Medinet Madi), temple of Thermouthis (associated with Isis); evidence of Demotic astrology there; horoscopic ostraca
- Evans (2004, 27-36) argues that this is a portrait of an astrologer; 7-rayed star represents the planets
- *Art of Eudoxus*: contains a zodiac circle within which is written 'Celestial circle, Oracles of Sarapis'

Further Questions for Discussion

•When religion is 'embedded' (i.e. thought to influence and underlie every aspect of human life and of the cosmos) and polytheistic, as Greek and Roman religion was, can there be a divide between secular and religious approaches towards phenomena such as healing?

•When a religion often seems to be pantheistic (or at least many ancient philosophers, cosmologists and thinkers imply that they thought it was pantheistic), i.e. that all phenomena and everything in the cosmos is seen as being full of the divine and the gods are in everything, can there be a divide between religious and medical approaches towards healing?

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