

Decanal Iconography and Natural Materials in the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius*

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IN HIS POLEMICAL WORK against Christianity, written in 178, the Greek philosopher Celsus (in Origen *C.Cels.* 8.58) wrote that according to the Egyptians every part of the human body has been put under the charge of 36 daemons or heavenly gods, whose names are invoked in times of sickness in order to treat the sufferings of their subordinate parts. Celsus assuredly is referring to the decans (Gk. δεκανός). In Egyptian astronomy the decans were single stars or clusters of stars which were used to mark the hours of the night and divide the 360-day Egyptian year into ten-day intervals, with the exclusion of the five epagomenal days.¹ During the Ptolemaic period the 36 decans were assimilated into Hellenistic astrological doctrines and were assigned by threes to the twelve

¹ On the decans of later times see the seminal work of O. Neugebauer and R. A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts III Decans, Planets, Constellations and Zodiacs* (Providence/London 1969) (hereafter *EAT*); and L. Kákosy, “Decans in Late-Egyptian Religion,” *Oikumene* 3 (1982) 163–191. On the decans and their reception see W. Gundel, *Dekane und Dekansternebilder. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sternbilder der Kulturvölker*² (Darmstadt 1969). On the Egyptian decanal tradition in Gnosticism see J. F. Quack, “Dekane und Gliedervergottung. Altägyptische Traditionen im Apokryphon Johannis,” *JbAC* 38 (1995) 97–122. The work of J. F. Quack, *Beiträge zu den ägyptischen Dekanen und ihrer Rezeption in der griechisch-römischen Welt* (diss. Freie Univ. Berlin 2002), dealing with the reception of decans in the Graeco-Roman era, is in preparation for publication. I would like to thank Dr. Quack, who kindly sent me a section of his unpublished work (all citations are from the section at my disposal).

zodiacal signs² and individually to the seven planets (decanal “faces”).³ However, as Celsus indicates, these stars stood for something more than a time-measurement system and impersonal astronomical elements. They were personalized entities with names, physical features, and healing or, conversely, malevolent powers over their dominions, which had to be summoned or else averted, often by means of amulets.⁴

This worldview is essential to the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius*, a ritual manual on the making of finger-ring amulets, written in Greek most probably in early Roman Egypt.⁵ Its

² Each zodiacal sign of 30° length was further divided into three equal segments of 10°, the decans—whence the name δεκανός, from the numeral δέκα, “ten.”

³ The system of “faces” assigns each planet to a decan, according to the “Chaldean” order of the planets, on which it exerts its power and ‘character’. See A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L’astrologie grecque* (Paris 1899) 224–229; Gundel, *Dekane* 30–36, 248–256; O. Neugebauer and H. B. van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* (Philadelphia 1959) 11.

⁴ On the application of decans to healing practices see Gundel, *Dekane* 262–287; A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste I L’astrologie et les sciences occultes* (Paris 1944) 127–129, 139–143; J.-H. Abry, “Les tablettes de Grand: mode d’emploi à travers les écrits des astrologues,” in *Les tablettes astrologiques de Grand (Vosges) et l’astrologie en Gaule romaine* (Lyon/Paris 1993) 141–160, at 152–155; G. Adamson, “Astrological Medicine in Gnostic Traditions,” in A. D. DeConick et al. (eds.), *Practicing Gnosis. Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson* (Leiden/Boston 2013) 333–358.

⁵ The Byzantine manuscripts that preserve the tract have been published by J. B. Pitra, *Analecta sacra et classica spicilegio Solesmensi parata* V.2 (Paris/Rome 1888) 284–290, and by C.-E. Ruelle, “Hermès Trismégiste, Le livre sacré sur les décans,” *RPhil* 32 (1908) 247–277 (with French translation). See further A. Rigo, “From Constantinople to the Library of Venice: The Hermetic Books of Late Byzantine Doctors, Astrologers and Magicians,” in C. Gilly and C. van Heertum (eds.), *Magic, Alchemy and Science 15th–18th Centuries. The Influence of Hermes Trismegistus I* (Florence 2002) 77–84, at 79–81. In addition to the Byzantine manuscripts, there is the papyrus fragment *PSI* inv. 1702, dated to the fourth century, that is very similar to a passage of the *Sacred Book*: I. Andorlini, “Un anonimo del genere degli *Iatromathematikà*,” in A. Garzya and J. Jouanna (eds.), *Trasmissione e ecdotica dei testi medici greci*

short introduction, ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus and addressed to Asclepius, expounds the doctrine of the zodiacal *melothesia*, the systematic attribution of parts of the body, from head to feet, to the twelve zodiacal signs. Then 36 entries on decans follow, arranged in the order of the zodiac, starting with the first decan in Aries and ending with the third in Pisces. Each entry displays the Egyptian name and iconography of a decan, its assigned disease or body part, depending on the zodiacal sign to which it belongs—in concordance with the zodiacal *melothesia*, its proper stone and plant, in a few cases a metal,⁶ and a dietary taboo. Wishing to thwart a particular disease, the aspiring practitioner had to search in the list for its corresponding decan. After that, he had to engrave the decan's name and especially its image⁷ on the astrally related stone and to place the decan's plant beneath the stone, setting them both in a ring (in a handful of cases made of a specific metal). Finally, a special type of food was to be avoided as a substantial prerequisite for the successful application of the ring. To the extent that the sufferings are caused by the zodiacal signs with respect to their *melothesia* rather than the decans themselves, the whole work is structured upon the concept of homeopathy. The amuletic materials—stones, metals, and plants—are connected to the decans through the bonds of *sympatheia*, while the dietary taboos are through those of *antipatheia*, although both are employed to attenuate the signs' malicious effects.

The selection of a specific set of objects of the physical world to be allotted to each decan is based upon several astrological

(Naples 2003) 7–23. German translation in Gundel, *Dekane* 374–379; further discussions in Gundel 270–273; Festugière, *La révélation* I 139–143; Adamson, in *Practicing Gnosis* 338–342, 350. In his forthcoming *Beiträge* Quack studies the text extensively.

⁶ In most of the cases, the selection of metals is up to the practitioner.

⁷ As noted by Festugière (*La révélation* I 141 n.4), the original text of the *Sacred Book* most probably included figural representations of the decans. See further Quack, *Beiträge*, section 2.4.2.

and conceptual schemes.⁸ Discussion of these falls outside the scope of this study: what is of interest here is another scheme embedded in the author's mental map that has received little attention. In several cases, the decanal images generate systems of signs that are in analogy with their corresponding materials.⁹ The aim of this article is to reconstruct the underlying logic and to shed light on its textual/ritual dynamics.

The first decan to be discussed is the first in Gemini. It is described as an ass-faced man with a knee-length garment, wielding a small key in his right hand, while his left hand is hanging down. This decan is likewise portrayed as a man with the head of ass in three other documents that preserve the names and images of decans: the first chapter of the *Liber Hermetis Trismegisti* (1.10)¹⁰ and the two ivory diptychs from Grand.¹¹ In Egyptian tradition the ass was one of the Sethian

⁸ On some examples of the logic see Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie* 316–317 n.5; Gundel, *Dekane* 272.

⁹ On the iconography of the decans in various traditions see Gundel, *Dekane* 82–225; D. Pingree, “The Indian Iconography of the Decans and Horâs,” *JWarb* 26 (1963) 223–254; J.-H. Abry, “Les diptyques de Grand, noms et images des décans,” in *Les tablettes* 77–112; Quack, *Beiträge*, section 2.4.2. See also the study of A. von Lieven, “Die dritte Reihe der Dekane, oder Tradition und Innovation in der spätägyptischen Religion,” *ARG* 2 (2000) 21–36.

¹⁰ The chapter sets out the decanal “faces,” the names and forms of the decans, the geographical regions that these stars rule, and in many cases their corresponding organs or diseases. The whole work is a fourth- or fifth-century Latin translation of an earlier Greek text. On the first chapter consult the editions of W. Gundel, *Neue astrologische Texte des Hermes Trismegistos* (Munich 1936) 19–23 (text), 115–123 (comm.), and S. Feraboli, *Hermetis Trismegisti De triginta sex decanis* (Turnhout 1994) 3–11.

¹¹ The diptychs are dated to the second century CE and were discovered in 1967 at Grand in France, near the Gallo-Roman sanctuary of Apollo Grannus. In the center of the tables are busts of Helios and Selene and around them are four concentric rings bearing, from the center outwards, the twelve zodiacal signs, the *termini* (five-part subdivisions of each sign), the figures of the decans, and their Egyptian names in Greek. On the decans in the Grand tables see Abry, in *Les tablettes* 77–112, esp. 90.

animals and during the later period Seth was frequently envisaged in the form of an ass or with the head of an ass.¹² Apparently, the figure under consideration is a representation of the Egyptian god Seth. However, in contrast to the *Sacred Book*, the decan in the *Liber Hermetis Trismegisti* carries a sword and in the A tablet from Grand a dagger or knife (in B only the head and upper torso are preserved). There is also fr.1 of the Kharga glass disk depicting a decan holding a dagger in the right hand.¹³ Hence, Joachim Quack has argued for identifying these as the Egyptian daemons named “arrows” (*šsrw*), several of which are related to Seth and depicted with a knife in hand.¹⁴

In order to make the astral amulet, the practitioner is instructed to carve the ass-headed figure upon adamant (*ᾠδόμας*). The mental mechanics lurking behind this link can be reconstructed on the basis of a synthetic argument. First, in Graeco-Roman times the ass and by extension Seth were related to Kronos and his planet Saturn.¹⁵ Second, as Alphonse Barb has stressed, adamant can be identified mineralogically

¹² See H. te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion. A Study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion* (Leiden 1967) 13–15.

¹³ The glass disk from the Kharga Oasis is dated to the third/fourth century. Although very fragmentary, it preserves the figures of several decans on its outer ring. See M.-D. Nenna, “De Douch (oasis de Kharga) à Grand (Vosges). Un disque en verre peint à représentations astrologiques,” *BIFAO* 103 (2003) 355–376, esp. 356, 370.

¹⁴ Quack, *Beiträge*, section 2.4.2. Cf. two gems engraved with the image of Seth in armor holding a sword/dagger: BM inv. G 556, EA 48954, J. G. Griffiths and A. A. Barb, “Seth or Anubis?” *JWarb* 22 (1959) 367–371, pl. 38a = S. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum* (London 2001) no. 381; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum inv. 1872.562, M. Henig and A. MacGregor, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Finger-Rings in the Ashmolean Museum II* (Oxford 2004) no. 13.8.

¹⁵ See A. Pérez Jiménez, “Fundamentos religiosos y mitológicos de la atribución de plantas, metales, piedras y animales a los cinco dioses planetarios,” in S. Montero and M. C. Cardete (eds.), *Naturaleza y religión en el mundo clásico. Usos y abusos del medio natural* (Madrid 2010) 213–232, at 217–219. See also Bouché-Leclercq, *L’astrologie* 318, 483–484 n.3.

with hematite (iron oxide), which is linked to Saturn via their common elemental qualities.¹⁶ Two astrological texts, though of later date, evince this intrinsic bond between Saturn and adamant.¹⁷ However, another possible hypothesis for this affinity could be the stone's particular semantics in referring to the mythological connotations of Kronos as a god in the Underworld.¹⁸ Pliny gives for adamant the synonym *anancitis*, "stone of necessity," while, citing from the 'Persian' Magi, he refers to *anancitis*' use in hydromancy for summoning divine apparitions.¹⁹ Hydromancy, more commonly known as bowl divination, was a ritual practice sometimes associated with necromancy and the invocation of the dead;²⁰ thus in an astrological text, *Scorial.gr.* Ω IV.22 (*CCAG* XI.2 119.25–26), the stone is cited as useful for necromancy. In the lapidary of Damigeron and Evax (3.5, 3.7 [238, 239 H.-S.]) it is remarked that adamant is identical to ἀναγκίτης and drives away every fear, the visions of obscure dreams, and the images of ghosts, phenomena intrinsically connected with the Underworld.²¹ What is more, the stone occurs once again in the tract under the name ἀναγκίτης and corresponds to the third section of

¹⁶ A. A. Barb, "Lapis adamas – Der Blutstein," in J. Bibauw (ed.), *Hommages à Marcel Renard I* (Brussels 1969) 66–82; R. Halleux and J. Schamp, *Les lapidaires grecs* (Paris 1985) 334 n.3. On hematite, Saturn, and Kronos see Barb 78 n.4, 80–81 n.3, 81; S. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen. Zu Bildern und Zauberformeln auf geschnittenen Steinen der Antike und Neuzeit* (Berlin 2004) 154 n.800, 175–177. ἀδάμας was a generic term used for several minerals characterized by their hardness.

¹⁷ Codex *Scorial.gr.* Ω IV.22, *CCAG* XI.2 119.12; *Liber de astronomiae disciplinae peritia*, *CCAG* XII 228.24. The latter is the Latin translation by Gerard of Cremona of the now-lost Arabic astronomical work of the eleventh-century Georg of Antioch.

¹⁸ Hom. *Il.* 8.478–481, 14.203–204, 274, 15.225.

¹⁹ *HN* 37.61, 192; see also Isid. *Etym.* 16.15.22.

²⁰ See D. Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton 2001) xxviii, 53–54, 70, 131, 191–194.

²¹ Cf. codex *Scorial.gr.* Ω IV.22, *CCAG* XI.2 119.26, 28–29, and the texts cited in Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 239 n.1.

Capricorn—a link that is based on the astrological doctrine that Capricorn is the “house” of Saturn.²² In conclusion, one may presume that the semantic contours of adamant as a stone rendering aspects of the asinine Kronos/Saturn led to its affinity with a decan depicting the ass-headed Seth.

Adamant is set in a ring along with the plant ὄρχις (of the family of orchids). In antiquity various plant species were called by this name, and so a specific identification is impossible. The plant was generally considered to have aphrodisiac or anaphrodisiac properties, owing to its double and round tubers that evoke the male reproductive organs, whence its name, meaning “testicle.”²³ Its erotic physiognomy is in concordance with the connotations of Seth as the god of unrestrained sexuality. This is implied, for example, in the mythic theme of the conflict of Horus and Seth and particularly in the episode of the injury of Horus’ eye and Seth’s testicles.²⁴ The god’s sexuality is compatible with the Egyptian belief that the ass is an animal characterized by lustfulness. We can see this at work in magical texts where the Ass, as a daemonic being, threatens his victims

²² Ancient astrology viewed each planet as exercising dominion over two zodiacal signs, one diurnal and one nocturnal, that were called “houses,” with the exception of the two luminaries that had only one house each. See Bouché-Leclercq, *L’astrologie* 182–192; Neugebauer and van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* 7; R. Beck, *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology* (Malden 2007) 85–86.

²³ ὄρχις/κυνὸς ὄρχις: Theophr. *Hist.pl.* 9.18.3; Diosc. *Mat.med.* 3.126 (II 136–137 Wellmann); Plin. *HN* 27.65, cf. 26.96; Gal. *Simpl.med.* 8.15.17 (XII 92 Kühn); Isid. *Etym.* 17.9.43; ὄρχις σεραπιᾶς: Diosc. 3.127 (II 137–138 W.); Plin. 26.95; Gal. 8.15.18 (XII 93 K.). Moreover, in the alphabetical recension of Dioscorides (3.128 RV [II 138 W.]) ὄρχις Σατύρου (“satyr’s testicle”; cf. Plin. 26.96 *satyrios orchis*) and τεστίκουλουμ λέπορις (*testiculus leporis*, “hare’s testicle”) are synonyms of σατύριον, given its erotic properties. These virtues are also indicated by the name σατύριον itself referring to the Satyrs, the ithyphallic deities of classical myth (Isid. 17.9.43). Cf. the plant *priapiscus* in Ps.-Apul. *Herb.* 15 (49–50 Howald and Sigerist). On the plant species see J. André, *Les noms de plantes dans la Rome antique* (Paris 1985) s.vv. *orchis*, *cynosorchis*, *orchis satyrios*; G. Ducourthial, *Flore magique et astrologique de l’Antiquité* (Paris 2003) 523 n.46, 524 n.49, 554 n.230.

²⁴ See te Velde, *Seth* 32–59.

with sexual abuse.²⁵ And the relation between ass and sexuality is not exclusively Egyptian but also a part of the Greek cultural field, found as early as the time of Archilochus (fr.43 West). Thus, the plant's value, charged with a particular meaning, directed the author to associate it with a decan in the form of Seth.

Three decans on we come to the first in Cancer. It is called Σωθείρ and is described as a dog-faced coiled serpent seated on a pedestal. The name is a variation of Σωθις (Sothis), the Greek rendition of the Egyptian name of Sirius, the decan Sopdet (*Spd.t*).²⁶ Its serpentine body visualizes the 70-day period of Sothis' invisibility in the Egyptian sky,²⁷ while its canine head draws on Greek tradition.²⁸ Such synthesis of Egyptian and Greek astronomy is also found in the form of the very same decan in the *Liber Hermetis Trismegisti* (1.13) and the tablets from Grand.²⁹ Our concern here is that Sothis had been connected

²⁵ E.g. J. F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts* (Leiden 1978) 16 (§18), cf. 38 (§59). See Griffiths and Barb, *JWarb* 22 (1959) 367–371; te Velde, *Seth* 56; Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen* 180–184.

²⁶ See Neugebauer and Parker, *EAT* 164, no. 68. Sothis was the most important decan in Egyptian astronomy because its heliacal rising ca. 19 July, in Cancer, marked the annual rising of the Nile and the beginning of the Egyptian year. The decan occupies the first section in Cancer in other Greek and Latin decanal name-lists as well; see the table in Gundel, *Dekane* 77–79.

²⁷ See Quack, *Beiträge*, section 2.4.2.

²⁸ In Homer (*Il.* 22.29) Sirius is seen as Orion's dog. Later, ancient writers placed Sirius upon the tip of the jaw, the head, or the tongue of the constellation of the Dog (αCMa): Aratus *Phaen.* 329–332; Eratosth. *Cat.* 33; Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2.35, 3.34.

²⁹ Abry, in *Les tablettes* 92. Von Lieven (*ARG* 2 [2000] 31) argues that two jackal-headed figures, the first with the tail of a snake instead of legs while the other is completely in snake-form, as found on two gems, are representations of the first decan in Cancer: Berlin, Staatliche Museen inv. 9925 and 9870, H. Philipp, *Mira et Magica. Gemmen im Ägyptischen Museum der Staatlichen Museen* (Mainz 1986) nos. 172–173.

with Isis already in the Pyramid Texts,³⁰ an association that becomes explicitly evident during the Roman period.³¹

After the preparation of the amulet, the interested party has to abstain from eating the stomach of white sow (χοῖρος λευκή).³² The decan's semantic patterns and most importantly its name impelled the author to select this particular animal, since in the Egyptian cultural field Isis was sometimes addressed as “white sow.”³³ This is first attested in line 86 of the Metternich Stela (360–343 BCE), in which Min-Horus is addressed as the son of the white sow (*t3 šꜣ.t ḥꜩ.t*) that is in Heliopolis.³⁴ Again, a Greek love spell of the fourth century invokes the mighty god who was borne by a white sow (λευκή χοιράς) (*PGM XXXVI.106–107*). Presumably, this god is to be identified with Min-Horus³⁵ and the white sow with his mother

³⁰ See R. Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten* (Wiesbaden 1997) 173–180.

³¹ See G. Clerc, “Isis-Sothis dans le monde romain,” in M. B. de Boer and T. A. Edridge (eds.), *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren I* (Leiden 1978) 247–281; C. Desroches-Noblecourt, “Isis Sothis – le chien, la vigne –, et la tradition millénaire,” in J. Vercoutter (ed.), *Livre du centenaire 1880–1980* (Cairo 1980) 15–24; V. Tran tam Tinh, “Isis,” *LIMC V* (1990) 761–796, at 787 (nos. 320–331), 795 (comm.); G. Tallet, “Isis, the Crocodiles and the Mysteries of the Nile Floods: Interpreting a Scene from Roman Egypt Exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo,” in A. Mastrocinque and C. Giuffrè Scibona (eds.), *Demeter, Isis, Vesta, and Cybele. Studies in Greek and Roman Religion in Honour of Giulia Sfameni Gasparro* (Stuttgart 2012) 139–163, at 151–155. See also the amulets inscribed with the name Sothis in Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen* 45 n.206.

³² Although the animal as dietary taboo is theoretically in *antipatheia* with the decan, here (and in the next case as well) it appears to be in *sympatheia* with the represented astral divinity.

³³ See J. Bergman, “Isis auf der Sau,” in S. Brunnsåker and H.-A. Nordström (eds.), *From the Gustavianum Collections in Uppsala, 1974. To Torgny Sève-Söderbergh on his 60th Birthday* (Uppsala 1974) 81–109, at 91–92.

³⁴ Borghouts, *Magical Texts* 71 (§95).

³⁵ A different view has been put forward by J. G. Griffiths, “P. Oslo. 1, 105–9 and Metternich Stela, 85–6,” *JEA* 25 (1939) 101, who holds that “the son of the white sow” is not Min-Horus but Seth.

Isis.

The white sow is encountered once more in the list of the prohibited substances; for its liver is a dietary taboo for the efficacious amuletic use of the first decan in Virgo. The decan is described as a coiled snake surmounted by a *basileion* and standing on a pedestal, in the form of Thermouthis.³⁶ Thermouthis or Hermouthis is the Greek rendering of the Demotic name of Renenutet (*T-Rmwete*), the cobra-goddess of fertility of the harvest and of divine motherhood. Renenutet displayed many similarities to Isis and accordingly the two goddesses were associated with each other and finally, from the late Ptolemaic period on, were merged.³⁷ This is indicated in the first century BCE hymns of Isidorus from the temple of Renenutet at Narmouthis³⁸ and by numerous archaeological objects representing Isis-uraeus.³⁹

³⁶ Most of the manuscripts of the *Sacred Book* describe the decan as dog-faced and with a hot and fiery body. However, this description is a corruption of the original text due to misinterpretations and mistakes made by the Byzantine copyists. For the correction see Quack, *Beiträge*, section 2.4.2.

³⁷ See J. Broekhuis, *De godin Renenwetet* (Assen 1971), esp. 105–109.

³⁸ Bernand, *L.métr.Egypte* 175; Broekhuis, *De godin Renenwetet* 110–137; V. F. Vanderlip, *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidorus and the Cult of Isis* (Toronto 1972). On the hymns see now I. S. Moyer, “Isidorus at the Gates of the Temple,” in I. Rutherford (ed.), *Greco-Egyptian Interactions. Literature, Translation, and Culture, 500 BCE–300 CE* (Oxford 2016) 209–244.

³⁹ F. Dunand, “Les représentations de l’Agathodémon à propos de quelques bas-reliefs du Musée d’Alexandrie,” *BIFAO* 67 (1969) 9–48; G. Deschênes, “Isis Thermouthis: à propos d’une statuette dans la collection du professeur M. J. Vermaseren,” in *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren* I 305–315; F. Dunand, *Catalogue des terres cuites gréco-romaines d’Égypte* (Paris 1990) nos. 385–395; Tran tam Tinh, *LIMC* V (1990) 771 (no. 135), 777 (no. 212), 778 (no. 229), 779 (nos. 242–243), 788–789 (nos. 332–364), 791 and 794 (comm.). On Isis-Thermouthis in the form of a cobra with atef crown see Kelsey Museum inv. 1963.04.0005, C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets* (Ann Arbor 1950) D.23. As a human-headed serpent surmounted by a crown and standing on an hourglass-shaped base, the goddess appears in Berlin Staatliche Museen inv. 9828, Philipp, *Mira et Magica* no. 74.

Isis-Thermouthis was assimilated to Demeter,⁴⁰ and so the goddess rules over a segment of the constellation of Virgo. Ancient astronomers represented Virgo as a winged woman holding an ear of grain, which refers to the constellation's brightest star, Spica (α Vir).⁴¹ As ears of grain were the symbol of Demeter and later of her Egyptian equivalent Isis, Virgo was equated with either Demeter or Isis.⁴² By way of analogy, the first decan of the sign soon was drawn into this equation. The first century BCE astrologer Teucer of Babylon (in Rhetorius, *CCAG* VII 202.21–23) remarks that with the first decan of Virgo rises the *paranatellon*,⁴³ “a goddess seated on a throne and feeding a young child,” which is construed by Teucer as Isis feeding Horus in the entrance to a temple.⁴⁴ In sum, the decan's stylization as Isis-Thermouthis, the goddess of fertility and motherhood, is in agreement with the ancient astronomical ‘encyclopedia’ and in analogy with the white sow, an animal that occasionally stood for Isis in Egyptian tradition.

In order to find another god as popular as Isis, one has to come to the second decan in Pisces. The decan is pictured as a naked man crowned with a *basileion* and wearing a wrap

⁴⁰ Isidorus hymns 1.3, 3.2, 4.4. The assimilation of Isis with Demeter had already occurred by the time of Herodotus, 2.59, 156.

⁴¹ Aratus *Phaen.* 97; Eratosth. *Cat.* 9; Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 3.24.

⁴² Eratosth. *Cat.* 9; Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2.25; Manil. 2.442.

⁴³ In astrology this signified a constellation that was co-rising within certain degrees of a zodiacal sign or with a decan. On the Egyptian background of *paranatellonta* see J. F. Quack, “Frühe ägyptische Vorläufer der Paranatellonta?” *Sudhoffs Archiv* 83 (1999) 212–223.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kamateros *Eisag.* 789–791 (28 Weigl). In two manuscripts preserving the second version of Teucer's text this constellation is addressed as “the seated Eileithyia embracing a child” and as “the feeder with children.” The astrologer Antiochus (1st/2nd cent.) calls it “a woman carrying a young child”: F. Boll, *Sphaera. Neue griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder* (Leipzig 1903) 47.25–27, 47.19–20, 58.9–10. This tradition with adaptations is found in the work of Abū Ma'šhar (*Great Introduction* 6.1: Greek version *CCAG* V.1 162.28–163.3 ~ Arabic with German transl. Dyroff in Boll 512–513). On this constellation see Boll 210–216.

thrown over his shoulders, while he holds a small water-vessel in his right hand and brings his left index finger to his mouth. In the tablets from Grand and fr.4 of the Kharga disk a figure bringing his hand to his mouth corresponds to the third decan in Pisces.⁴⁵ The Grand tablets, like the *Sacred Book*, show the figure naked, except for a mantle. All represent the god Harpocrates, usually depicted as a naked child rather than as an adult. His Egyptian name, *Hr-p3-hrd*, means Horus-the-Child; for he is the juvenile form of Horus and the incarnation of the young (morning) sun.⁴⁶

Horus-Harpocrates takes over the plant λιβανωτίς (rosemary frankincense?), a phytonym given to various aromatic plant species with the scent of λίβανος.⁴⁷ λίβανος designated the frankincense-tree (*Boswellia carteri*), as well as its resin, frankincense, a highly valued substance initially imported to the Mediterranean world through the eastern trade routes. Frankincense was used not only for the making of medicines, ointments, and perfumes but especially as a sacrificial offering to the gods.⁴⁸ In addition, λιβανωτίς has the meaning of the

⁴⁵ Abry, in *Les tablettes* 83–84, 108–109; Nenna, *BIFAO* 103 (2003) 358, 370–371.

⁴⁶ On his iconography see S. Sandri, *Har-pa-chered (Harpocrates). Die Genese eines ägyptischen Götterkindes* (Dudley 2006) 97–128; V. Tran tam Tinh, B. Jaeger, and S. Poulin, “Harpocrates,” *LIMC* IV (1988) 415–445; Dunand, *Catalogue* nos. 107–324. On gems engraved with the naked Harpocrates surmounted by a crown, wearing or holding his mantle, see Paris, *Collection Blanchet* 68, A. Delatte and P. Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris 1964) no. 162 = A. Mastrocinque, *Les intailles magiques du Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques* (Paris 2014) no. 39; Berlin, *Staatliche Museen inv.* 9818, 9766, 4929, 9769, Philipp, *Mira et Magica* nos. 76–77, 89–90. Add Pliny *HN* 33.41, who states that there was in his day a fashion of wearing the image of Harpocrates on fingers.

⁴⁷ See the taxonomies in Theophr. *Hist.pl.* 9.11.10–11; Diosc. *Mat.med.* 3.74–75 (II 85–88 W.); Plin. *HN* 24.99–101; Gal. *Simpl.med.* 7.11.14 (XII 60–61 K.). See André, *Les noms s.v. libanōtis*.

⁴⁸ On the use of incenses, including frankincense, see M. Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis. Spices in Greek Mythology* (Princeton 1994), esp. 5–36; C. Zaccagnino, *Il thymiaterion nel mondo greco. Analisi delle fonti, tipologia, impieghi* (Rome

brazier in which frankincense seeds were placed and burnt during ritual practices.⁴⁹ Hence, behind the selection of a plant whose name signifies both frankincense and ritual paraphernalia lies the representation of the decan as Harpocrates, one of the most popular gods of Graeco-Roman Egypt. His terracotta figurines that stood in numerous households of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt suggest the relocation of civic rituals to domestic contexts, often reflected in frankincense offering on miniature altars.⁵⁰ However, for the choice of this plant another supplementary rationale can be proposed: frankincense was widely viewed as a solar substance,⁵¹ and so it was selected to be assigned to a decan portraying a solar deity.

The same plant occurs once more in the *Sacred Book*, at the third decan in Gemini: it is to be placed under the solar stone heliotrope (ἡλιοτρόπιον).⁵² Both these links are explained by the astrological truism that the decan has the “face” of the sun. What is relevant here is that the solar aspect of the decan, the

1998) 33–39; L. R. LiDonnici, “Single-Stemmed Wormwood, Pinecones and Myrrh: Expense and Availability of Recipe Ingredients in the *Greek Magical Papyri*,” *Kernos* 14 (2001) 61–91, at 65–79.

⁴⁹ See Zaccagnino, *Il thymiaterion* 46. On λιβανωτής meaning incense burner in inscriptions of Isiac cults see L. Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques* II (Paris 2005) index [4] s.v. λιβανωτής.

⁵⁰ On the process of domestication of the Egyptian cults in Graeco-Roman Egypt see D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt* (Princeton 1998) 131–142; I. S. Moyer and J. Dieleman, “Miniaturization and the Opening of the Mouth in a Greek Magical Text (*PGM* XII.270–350),” *JANER* 3 (2003) 47–72.

⁵¹ See Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis* 7–14; R. L. Gordon, “Reality, Evocation and Boundary in the Mysteries of Mithras,” *JMithSt* 3 (1980) 19–99, at 36–37; LiDonnici, *Kernos* 14 (2001) 76–77.

⁵² The name means “turning with the sun.” On its solar identity see the cited sources in Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 237 n.1, and especially the second astrological section of the lapidary ascribed to Damigeron and Evax, in which heliotrope is set under the patronage of the sun and is engraved with Helios or with solar symbols (233). Cf. *PGM* XII.273–276. Heliotrope can be identified with a type of green quartz or chalcedony (236 n.3).

plant, and the stone is indicated by the ‘fiery’ thunderbolt (κεραυνός) which the decan wields in the right hand.⁵³ A gem in the Getty Museum, engraved with the three forms of the Egyptian sun-god, thus likewise endowed with a solar significance, portrays a nude bearded figure pouring water from a vessel onto a lightning bolt held in the other hand.⁵⁴ Similarly, in the *Sacred Book* the decan holds, in addition to the thunderbolt, a small water-vessel with the left hand. Those similarities notwithstanding, the two figures are different in form, since the decan in Hermes’ book is described as a woman crowned with a *basileion* and bearing wings from the waist down to the feet.

Decanal iconography and natural substances are joined in a solar context also in the case of the third section of Pisces. The decan is described as invisible (ἀφανής) and having the shape of a coiled serpent⁵⁵ with a beard and a *basileion* on its head, quite probably meant to represent the god Agathodaimon.⁵⁶ This was the “Good Spirit” of the city of Alexandria, the personification of good fortune, abundance, and protection. Although his Greek equivalent can be found in the form and function of Zeus Ktesios, the god had stronger relations with the Egyptian snake-god Shai.⁵⁷ During the Roman period Agathodaimon was considered a supreme deity and, as such, was assimilated

⁵³ On the connection of thunderbolt with fire see e.g. Plut. *Quaest.conv.* 4.2 (665E), *De Alex. fort.* 2.13 (343E); *PGM* LXII.19.

⁵⁴ Getty Museum inv. 83.AN.437.45, Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen* 172. Cf. the similar gem in Paris, Collection De Luynes 168, Delatte and Derchain, *Les intailles* no. 45 = Mastrocinque, *Les intailles* no. 469.

⁵⁵ Similarly, in the astrological calendar preserved in *P.Oxy.* III 465.201–202 (2nd cent. CE) the astral deity ruling the 11°–15° of the Egyptian month Pachon (= Pisces) has the form of an erect snake. See O. Neugebauer and H. B. van Hoesen, “Astrological Papyri and Ostraca: Bibliographical Notes,” *PAPhS* 108 (1964) 57–72, at 62.

⁵⁶ See Dunand, *BIFAO* 67 (1969) 9–48, and “Agathodaimon,” *LIMC* I (1981) 277–282.

⁵⁷ See J. Quaegebeur, *Le dieu égyptien Shai dans la religion et l’onomastique* (Louvain 1975) 170–176, 263–264.

to the highest divinity of the religious and philosophical thought of the times, the sun-god Helios, as indicated by the ritual practices of the Greek magical papyri.⁵⁸

This decan is to be carved upon jacinth (ὑάκινθος),⁵⁹ a stone in *sympatheia* with the sun according to three astrological texts of later times.⁶⁰ An earlier text amply demonstrates the stone's solar physiognomy: in the lapidary of Damigeron and Evax 60.2 (286 H.-S.) *alcinio*, a type of jacinth, shines when lifted towards the sun.⁶¹ Jacinth's affinity with the sun is shaped by the name itself, derived from the hero Hyacinthus, the lover of Apollo who accidentally killed him with a discus throw. In Greek myth and cult Hyacinthus was merged with the sun-god Apollo,⁶² and given the mythological connotations of jacinth's name, it is easy to understand why it entails a solar identity.

Jacinth engraved with the bearded snake is fixed in a ring along with the plant ἀνθεμία (*Anthemis*).⁶³ In ancient rhizotomic taxonomies this phytonym was used for various species of

⁵⁸ PGM IV.1596–1715, XXXVI.211–230. Cf. the yellow jasper BM inv. G 446, EA 56446, Michel, *Gemmen im Britischen Museum* no. 332, with the image of a bearded snake with solar rays on its head. When combined with the gem's inscription (εἰς Ζεὺς Σάραπις), the figure can be interpreted as Agathodaimon/Sarapis.

⁵⁹ Almost all the Byzantine manuscripts preserving the *Sacred Book* give for jacinth the name ὑάκινθίνη; in its common form, ὑάκινθος, the stone is attested only in *Mosquen.gr.* 415. Jacinth is mineralogically identified with sapphire or with varieties of amethyst. See Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 328 n.7.

⁶⁰ Theophilus of Edessa, in *Laurent.gr.plut.* 28.34, ed. A. Ludwich, *Maximi et Ammonis carminum de actionum auspiciis reliquiae* (Leipzig 1877) 121.12 (for the attribution to Theophilus see F. Cumont, *CCAG* IV 122); *De planetarum gemmis*, *CCAG* IX.2 152–153; *Liber de astronomiae disciplinae peritia*, *CCAG* XII 227.7.

⁶¹ Cf. the testimony of Solinus (30.33 [136 Mommsen] ~ Isid. *Etym.* 16.9.3), according to which jacinth's glow varies with a cloudy or clear day.

⁶² See T. Bilić, "Apollo, Helios, and the Solstices in the Athenian, Delphian, and Delian Calendars," *Numen* 59 (2012) 509–532, at 524–525.

⁶³ The name ἀνθεμία of the Byzantine manuscripts (except *Paris.gr.* 2502 ἀνθεμίσα) is a variant of the common form ἀνθεμῖς.

chamomile.⁶⁴ It was a hot and dry plant,⁶⁵ thus endowed with the same two elemental qualities attributed to the sun.⁶⁶ Indeed, Galen (*Simpl.med.* 3.10 [XI 562 K.]) says that the wisest of the Egyptians had consecrated chamomile to the sun. His testimony is supplemented by a name found in the list of plant synonyms provided by the *Herbarius* of Pseudo-Apuleius (23 [62 H.-S.]), where chamomile is called *trociscos eliacos*, “solar lozenge,” a Greek phytonym possibly included in the herbal prescriptions ascribed to the legendary astrologer Nechepsos.⁶⁷ Thus, it is safe to assume that the solar physiognomy of jacinth and chamomile is in concordance with the solar physiognomy of Agathodaimon, or, to phrase it differently, Agathodaimon generates the selection of both stone and plant.

For the cases that remain to be discussed, decanal iconography continues to generate signs for material selection, but without articulating a pattern of popular Egyptian divinities. The first decan in Leo, named Χνοῦμος,⁶⁸ is described as a lion-faced coiled snake, turned upwards, with solar rays emanating from its head, in a very similar way as it is portrayed in the *Liber Hermetis Trismegisti* (1.16). Again, in the B tablet from Grand the astral deity shows up as a lion-headed serpent with a looped tail, standing erect (in A only the looped tail of a serpent is distinguishable).⁶⁹ This serpent with the radiate lion head is a common motif in gems of the Roman period, where it is often

⁶⁴ Diosc. *Mat.med.* 3.137 (II 145–147 W.); Plin. *HN* 22.53–54. See André, *Les noms* s.v. *anthesis*.

⁶⁵ Gal. *Simpl.med.* 6.1.47 (XI 833 K.), 3.10 (XI 562 K.); Diosc. *Mat.med.* 3.137.2 (II 146 W.).

⁶⁶ Ptol. *Tetr.* 1.4.1 (22 Hübner) ~ Heph. 1.2.2 (I 31 Pingree).

⁶⁷ Most likely to be identified with the species *Matricaria chamomilla* (cf. Ducourthial, *Flore* 504 n.34). See S. Piperakis, “From Textual Reception to Textual Codification: Thessalos and the Quest for Authenticity,” *Open Library of Humanities* 2 (2016: <http://doi.org/10.16995/olh.37>) 1–28, at 6–7.

⁶⁸ Cf. the name as it appears in another codex preserving the *Sacred Book*, *Vindob.med.gr.* 23: Χνομήτης (in marg. Χνομήπις).

⁶⁹ Abry, in *Les tablettes* 94.

designated by the name Χνοῦβις. The form Χνοῦμος in the text follows closely this tradition and can be understood as a Greek rendition of the name of the decan Kenmet (*Knm.t*). Its serpentine shape can also be traced back to Egyptian representations of Kenmet.⁷⁰ Even though in the decanal name-lists Kenmet is placed in the third section of Cancer and not the first of Leo,⁷¹ the lion-headed serpent is intimately connected to Leo; its head reflects the animal representing Leo,⁷² while its rays represent the sun, which is ‘at home’ in this zodiacal sign.⁷³

The lion-headed serpent is to be engraved on agate (ἀχάτης).⁷⁴ An amuletic use of this stone is set out in the second

⁷⁰ See Neugebauer and Parker, *EAT* 157–160, no. 2; von Lieven, *ARG* 2 (2000) 22–24, 27–31. On Chnoubis’ amulets see Bonner, *Studies* 54–60; Delatte and Derchain, *Les intailles* 54–57; Michel, *Gemmen im Britischen Museum* 194–195, and *Die magischen Gemmen* 165–170; V. Dasen and A. M. Nagy, “Le serpent léontocéphale Chnoubis et la magie de l’époque romaine impériale,” *Anthropozoologica* 47 (2012) 291–314; Mastrocinque, *Les intailles* 93–95. Many amulets depict Chnoubis the way he is described in the tract. The most complete catalogue of items is in Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen* 255–263 (§11). An exhaustive catalogue is now being prepared by Quack for *Beiträge*.

⁷¹ See Gundel, *Dekane* 77–79; Abry, in *Les tablettes* 93.

⁷² Parallels on the leonine form of this decan are found in the writings of the ‘Persian’ astrologer Achmes (Greek version *CCAG* II 154.33) (10th cent.) and in the Sanskrit poem *Yavanajātaka*, 3.14 (cf. 2.18), in Pingree, *JWarb* 26 (1963) 245, 242. The latter was composed in third-century CE India, yet the iconography of the “hours” (halves of a sign) and decans of its second and third chapters reflects the Graeco-Egyptian decanal tradition; see Pingree 223–254.

⁷³ In ancient Egypt the lion was a symbol of the sun, while in Graeco-Roman culture lions were also considered fiery animals: C. de Wit, *Le rôle et le sens du lion dans l’Égypte ancienne* (Leiden 1951) 138–147; Gordon, *JMithSt* 3 (1980) 33–34, 36–37. Regarding the *Yavanajātaka*, Pingree (*JWarb* 26 [1963] 250) argues that the disheveled hair of the second “hour” and decan of Leo is a misinterpretation of Chnoubis’ solar rays.

⁷⁴ The name designates a variety of stones, here probably the veined quartz; see Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 317 n.1.

astrological section of the Damigeron and Evax lapidary, where agate corresponds to Saturn (a planet that also rules the first decan in Leo) and, when inscribed with the image of a reclining lion, is used as an amulet by slaves.⁷⁵ In order to find the rationale behind this agate-lion relationship, one must turn to the lapidarian ‘encyclopedia’. Pliny (*HN* 37.142), citing Magian tradition, says that agates resemble lions’ skins and are endowed with marvelous powers,⁷⁶ adding that they had to be tied up with lions’ manes in order to be effective. Thus, the relationship between agate and lions depends on the stone’s resemblance to their skin. This is repeated in the Orphic lapidaries (*Lith.* 617–621 [115 H.-S.]; *Kerygm.* 21.3–4 [163 H.-S.]), in which agate is called *λεοντοδέρης*, “lion’s-skin,” and the reason given for this is its characteristic color. References to the leonine color of the stone are found in other texts as well.⁷⁷ What the practitioner is further instructed to do is to place under agate the plant *λεοντόποδον*, “lion’s-foot,” whose name designates a plant with foliage resembling the feet of a lion.⁷⁸ Thus, for the ancients both stone and plant were generating signs which were in analogy to the iconography of the decan and its zodiacal sign.

The same pattern can be seen in the second decan of Scorpio. Represented as a man in full dress standing with feet joined above the scorpion, the decanal figure draws elements from the zodiacal constellation of Scorpio. This iconography is

⁷⁵ Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 233.

⁷⁶ See also Isid. *Etym.* 16.11.1.

⁷⁷ Socrates and Dionysius 39.3 (172 H.-S.); Damigeron and Evax 17.2 (255 H.-S.); Epiph. *De gemmis* 8 (197 Ruelle); Aët. *Med.* 15.15 (79.8–9 Zervos). In the Byzantine *Hippiatrika* (2.148.5) a reference is made to the stone *λεονταχάτης*, “lion’s-agate”; but this is probably a scribal error and the emended text reads instead *λεοντάγγης*, “lion-strangling”: see R. Kotansky, “*Λεονταχάτης* or *λεοντάγγης* (*Hippiatr.* 2.148.5)?” *Glotta* 60 (1982) 110–112.

⁷⁸ The plant was also rendered by *λεοντοπέταλον* (*Leontice leontopetalum*): Diosc. *Mat.med.* 3.96 and 3.96 RV (II 108–109 W.); Aët. *Med.* 1.248 (I 102 Olivieri). See André, *Les noms* s.vv. *leontopetalon*, *leontopodium*.

better preserved in the *Liber Hermetis Trismegisti* (1.26). There the decan is described as a man who stands with feet joined above the middle part of a scorpion and holds with both hands a large snake that protrudes from each side of his chest, depicting the constellation of Ophiuchus, located between Scorpio and Sagittarius.⁷⁹

After the engraving, the appropriate stone is set in a ring along with the plant σκορπίουρον or σκορπίουρος, “scorpion-tailed.” A parallel, with no astral semantics whatever, is attested in a recipe in the *Kyranides* (1.24.100–103 [110 Kai-makis]): the root of σκορπίουρον, along with other ingredients, is set under a stone engraved with a swallow and a scorpion at its feet standing on a sprat. For Dioscorides (*Mat.med.* 4.190.1 [II 338 W.]) this phytonym denotes the “large heliotrope” (*Heliotropium europaeum*) on account of the shape of its flower, which resembles a scorpion’s tail.⁸⁰ On the contrary, for Pliny (*HN* 22.60) it designates the other species of heliotrope that has a scorpion-tailed seed, called *triccum* (*Chrozophora tinctoria*).⁸¹ In either case, the Hermetic author has chosen this plant because of its value as a metaphor for the corresponding astral iconography (decanal and zodiacal). Since σκορπίουρον/σκορπίουρος is a synonym of heliotrope, the plant of the sun *par excellence*, its selection to be assigned to the second section of Scorpio and not the first or third is explained by a logic based on the system of “faces”; for the second decan in Scorpio has

⁷⁹ Ophiuchus is carved on a hematite in the Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 58.2184, in the form of a naked figure standing on a scorpion and holding a snake with both hands: Bonner, *Studies* D.352 = Delatte and Derchain, *Les intailles* no. 383 = Mastrocinque, *Les intailles* no. 483.

⁸⁰ Cf. Diosc. *Mat.med.* 4.190 RV (II 338 W.) σκορπίου οὐρά ~ Ps.-Apul. *Herb.* 49 (100 H.-S.) *ura scorpionu*. Schol. Nicander *Ther.* 676d (250–251 Crugnola) mentions that this name was given to the plant because of the shape of its root.

⁸¹ In the alphabetical Dioscorides (*Mat.med.* 4.191 RV [II 339 W.]) σκορπίουρον and σκορπίουρος refer to the second species of heliotrope as well, the “small heliotrope.” On the species see André, *Les noms s.vv. scorpiūron, hēliotropium* (1, 2); Ducourthial, *Flore* 288, 529 n.122, 574 n.153.

the “face” of the sun.

The last decan organized under such a scheme of semantic contours is the second decan in Leo. It has the form of a naked man who wields a scepter in the right hand, a whip in the left, and is surmounted by the lunar crescent. His image is to be carved upon the “moon-stone,” selenite (σεληνίτης).⁸² Besides the name semantics that can explicitly justify why selenite is associated with a decan crowned with the moon, this reciprocal bond between figure and stone acquires another value if the emblem at top is evaluated as a motif of the goddess Selene.⁸³ Dioscorides (*Mat.med.* 5.141 [III 100 W.]) remarks that selenite has also been called by some people ἄφροσέληνος, “moon-foam,” because it is found during the night-time when the moon waxes. Under this name the stone is cited in the first astrological section of Damigeron and Evax’s work, where it is linked to Cancer, the “house” of the moon, and is engraved with a female figure wearing cow’s horns, a representation of Isis-Selene.⁸⁴ In the same vein, instructions for engraving the bust of Selene on selenite in order to make a marvelous amulet are given in the *Kyranides* (1.10.92–100 [66–67 K.]). In these works the law of similarity is centered on the belief that the “moon-stone” contains the image of the moon, which waxes and wanes depending on its course.⁸⁵

⁸² The name σεληνίτης designated a mineral form of foliated gypsum (sulphate of lime): Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 277 n.1. In an excerpt attributed to Theophilus of Edessa (in Ludwig, *Maximi et Ammonis carminum* 121.20) γῆ λευκή, “white earth,” a kind of gypsum, is a substance in affinity with the moon.

⁸³ See F. Gury, “Selene, Luna,” *LIMC* VII (1994) 706–715; Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen* 330 (§49).

⁸⁴ Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 232. See the discussion in J. F. Quack, “Zum ersten astrologischen Lapidar im Steinbuch des Damigeron und Evax,” *Philologus* 145 (2001) 337–344, at 339. On the amuletic use of ἄφροσέληνος see further Diosc. *Mat.med.* 5.141 (III 100 W.); Gal. *Simpl.med.* 9.2.21 (XII 208 K.).

⁸⁵ Damigeron and Evax 36.2 (277 H.-S.); *Kyr.* 1.10.93–94 (66–67 K.). The earliest datable reference is found in Pliny, *HN* 37.181; further refer-

More analogies between decanal iconography and inanimate or animate natural objects can be drawn, which however are less sound and therefore my analysis stops here.

Applying such a semantic principle in asserting correlations is but one of the various patterns employed by the Hermetic author for organizing his text. It provides him with taxonomic criteria for deciding what materials he will include but also exclude from the vast archives of Hellenistic wisdom. The natural substances selected are distinguished from others in that only they have the ‘legitimizing’ characteristics to be assigned to a particular block of data. However, any scholarly reconstruction of a number of criteria faces the risk of becoming simple conjecture, inasmuch as sometimes we can only speculate what the author had in mind. For instance, the first decan in Virgo with the form of Isis-Thermouthis is to be carved on coral limestone (κοραλλίτης).⁸⁶ Juba II of Mauritania, certainly drawing on a Graeco-Egyptian source, mentions that a bush that grows at the bottom of the Troglodytic Sea resembling coral is called *Isidis crinis*, “hair of Isis.”⁸⁷ Juba refers to coral because both *Isidis crinis* and coral were considered sea plants that were petrified when cut off.⁸⁸ One may still wonder whether the link between coral and the “hair of Isis” is echoed in the connection of coral limestone with a goddess whose locks of hair were a common feature of her artistic representations.⁸⁹ In other cases, rationales other than those proposed above can join the game. For example, the link

ences in Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 277 n.1.

⁸⁶ The name derives from κοράλλιον, “coral.” The most renowned coral was the red one, *Corallium nobile*.

⁸⁷ Plin. *HN* 13.142; see also Agatharch. 108 (*GGM* I 193); Plut. *De fac.* 25 (939D).

⁸⁸ See Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 313–314 n.3.

⁸⁹ See R. S. Bianchi, “Images of Isis and her Cultic Shrines Reconsidered. Towards an Egyptian Understanding of the *Interpretatio Graeca*,” in L. Bricault et al. (eds.), *Nile into Tiber. Egypt in the Roman World* (Leiden/Boston 2007) 470–505, at 482–487 (with further bibliography).

between the first decan in Gemini, in the form of Seth, and hematite, an iron oxide mineral, can also be elucidated by means of the Egyptian concept that iron is a mineral associated with Seth.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the affinity of this decan with ὄρχις is equally well explained by the doctrine of decanal “faces,” since it has the “face” of Jupiter, a planet which is allotted to semen and is indicator of engendering.⁹¹ Again, the connection of the third decan in Pisces with jacinth might be approached in another way: Pisces is a zodiacal sign ruled by Poseidon, who is associated with jacinth in ancient lapidaries.⁹² The lesson to be drawn from this is that there are some borderline cases for which one can reconstruct only *plausible*, not *standard*, authorial criteria.

Next to consider is the framing of such organized knowledge(s) within a religious/ritualistic discourse about the consecration rituals for rings.⁹³ The main ritual praxis consisted of carving the stones with decanal names and figures, followed by the application of plant material. One of the dominant ideas behind such amuletic consecration is that in Egyptian religiosity the names and images of gods were of immense importance for communicating with the divine. Divine names were an integral part of gods’ personality, while their images were not merely representations but also manifestations of their

⁹⁰ See S. H. Aufrère, “L’univers minéral dans la pensée égyptienne: essai de synthèse et perspectives (Autour de l’univers minéral X),” *Archéo-Nil* 7 (1997) 113–144, at 131.

⁹¹ Ptol. *Tetr.* 3.13.5 (234 H.) ~ Heph. 2.13.6 (I 141 P.); Vett. Val. 1.1.17, 18 (2 Pingree) ~ Rhet., *CCAG* VII 216.5, 6; *De planetarum patrociniiis*, *CCAG* VII 97.6.

⁹² Socrates and Dionysius 27 (166 H.-S.); Damigeron and Evax 60.4 (286 H.-S.). See Halleux and Schamp, *Les lapidaires* 328 n.8.

⁹³ These rituals include gem engravings with designs and/or inscriptions, invocations, purifications, and even sacrifices. The fundamental study on amulet consecration rituals is still S. Eitrem, “Die magischen Gemmen und ihre Weihe,” *SymbOslo* 19 (1939) 57–85.

essence.⁹⁴ By carving stones with decanal names and images and fixing them with their proper plants, natural substances are set under specific symbolic associations. In particular, they are imbued with decanal power and likewise participate in the divine status of their astral deities, according to the Egyptian doctrine that all objects of the physical world, both animate and inanimate, are inherent with divinity.⁹⁵ One might recall here the theurgic rites of Late Antiquity. Sacred names, graphic marks, stones, and plants that were in some sort of affiliation with divinity became vessels of powers that were used for the animation of statues.⁹⁶ The manual's main rite is complemented by the required dietary purification and the determination of the astrologically auspicious time when carving and ring-wearing are to be carried out.⁹⁷ Once again, there is a clear parallel to the statue animation rites, in which astrology seems to have played a certain role in determining the best moment for their performance.⁹⁸ Through these modes of ritual praxis, all the selected substances (the dietary taboos included) are shifted to the status of the symbolic and, with respect to the stones and plants, are transformed into the living images of the corresponding astral deities.

Such a downward chain of astral *sympatheia* comes more

⁹⁴ See F. Dunand and C. Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt* (Ithaca/London 2004) 24–26, 13–16.

⁹⁵ See S. H. Aufrère, “Le cosmos, le minéral, le végétal, et le divin,” *Bulletin du Cercle Lyonnais d’Égyptologie Victor Loret* 7 (1993) 7–24, and *Archéo-Nil* 7 (1997) 113–144; A. von Lieven, “Das Göttliche in der Natur erkennen. Tiere, Pflanzen und Phänomene der unbelebten Natur als Manifestationen des Göttlichen,” *ŽAS* 131 (2004) 156–172; cf. Quack, *Philologus* 145 (2001) 337–344.

⁹⁶ Procl. *In Ti.* III 6.12–15 Diehl; *Iambl. Myst.* 5.23; *Asclepius* 38; cf. August. *De civ. D.* 10.11.

⁹⁷ According to the introduction of the tract, carving and ring-wearing are to be happen when the relevant decan crosses the middle part of the Ascendant, the Agathodaimon, and the “place” of Possession or Health (ἔξις). On the “place” of ἔξις see Festugière, *La révélation* I 140 n.4.

⁹⁸ Heph. 3.7.13–18 (I 258–259 P.); Jul. Laod., *CCAG* VIII.4 252–253.

clearly into view only when the vividly described figures of decans are manifested in stones and plants (and in some exceptional cases animals). Only then is the power of images, so much advertised in the introduction of the *Sacred Book*, concretized in actual materials that can be applied in order for the practitioner to put the astral deities under the bonds of necessity. Trismegistus puts this eloquently: “when you have honored each one [decan] by means of its proper stone and its proper plant and further its shape, you will possess a great amulet.” When considered together with the manual’s practical intent, such a resonant link between a stone, a plant, and a figure conveys the importance of the semantic principle discussed here in asserting correlations. The tract aims to go beyond the restricted communication channels of author and readers. After its practical application, the manual as a whole will be set aside and what will remain at hand, at least to those with the proper expertise, is not the full range of the criteria for choosing the materials but instead only those that are articulated through material culture, namely the semantics of images, stones, and plants.

In contrast to the chosen materials, which are mostly adopted from the Greek taxonomies of the natural world, the rest of the *Sacred Book* has strong Egyptian connections. Egyptian influences are traceable in the decanal names and figures, which replicate mainly the Seti IB-Family of decans,⁹⁹ and in the system of *melothesia*, which has antecedents in the ritual of the deification of the limbs.¹⁰⁰ To these can be added Egyptian amuletic objects decorated with decanal figures,¹⁰¹ as well as two decanal lists from the temple of Hathor at Dendera (dated before 30 BCE and ca. 20 CE respectively), in which the decans are associated with minerals, metals, and woods.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ This work has been thoroughly undertaken by Quack in *Beiträge*.

¹⁰⁰ See Quack, *JbAC* 38 (1995) 97–122, esp. 104–113.

¹⁰¹ See Kákosy, *Oikumene* 3 (1982) 163–191.

¹⁰² Neugebauer and Parker, *EAT* 133–140. Note however that the link of

Nonetheless, as the product of the international milieu of Graeco-Roman Egypt, the *Sacred Book* adopts Egyptian elements in a Hellenistic disguise. The decans are those of Graeco-Roman times that have been assimilated to the Babylonian-Greek zodiac and the Greek order of the planets. And even though the ring consecration rituals reflect the traditional temple-based practices for the consecration of statues or other amuletic objects (after all, both gems and statues were viewed as images of divinity, only different in scale), these are intended to take place in domestic space and not in any temple context.¹⁰³

By introducing the *Sacred book* as the revealed wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus, the author contextualizes the adopted and adapted knowledge(s) through the prism of divine legitimation. In doing so, he responds to the demands of his social milieu for participation in the ‘ancient’ and ‘exotic’ wisdom of Egypt. At the same time, he embeds his text in an already legitimized tradition of similar Hermetic tracts, whose knowledge is intensely technical, since their aim is to manipulate nature by the tools of astrology, magic, or alchemy. Their content is in contrast to other Hermetic discourses that deal with religious/philosophical issues. However, Garth Fowden has convincingly shown that both these textual corpora are the products of Graeco-Roman Egypt and, equally important, that any rigid distinction between the technical and philosophical writings is an unhistorical dichotomy.¹⁰⁴

The *Sacred Book*, like other works of the technical Hermetica,

stars with stones, trees, and plants also has Hellenistic Babylonian antecedents: E. Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia 1995) 130–132.

¹⁰³ Cf. Moyer and Dieleman, *JANER* 3 (2003) 47–72.

¹⁰⁴ G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes. A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*² (Princeton 1993), esp. 1–11, 75–115. See also B. P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica. The Greek “Corpus Hermeticum” and the Latin “Asclepius” in a New English Translation* (Cambridge 1992) xiii–lix; R. van den Broek, “Hermetic Literature I: Antiquity,” in W. J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden/Boston 2006) 487–499.

promises deliverance from sufferings through the application of decanal medicine.¹⁰⁵ And like both the technical and the philosophical texts, it is advertised as the revealed Egyptian wisdom introduced in the form of a didactic discourse. What these Hermetic teachings impart is that the whole cosmos is divine and constrained by the chains of *sympatheia*, or, as Hermes says to Asclepius in the introduction of his book, “for without this decanal arrangement, nothing may come into being, since the universe (τὸ πᾶν) is contained in it.” God teaches man the secrets to reverse the evil vicissitudes of Fate by manipulating the cosmic chains in his own favor, chains that are tangibly rendered if the *Sacred Book* is ‘decoded’ in the way analyzed here.

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¹⁰⁵ Besides the *Sacred Book* and the *Liber Hermetis Trismegisti*, no other Hermetic tract on decans has come down to us from antiquity. Nevertheless, two ancient reports suggest that similar works attributed to Hermes were in circulation in Egypt. Galen (*Simpl.med.* 6 proem. [XI 798 K.]) mentions a Hermetic book on the 36 sacred plants of the Horoscopes (decans) that was used by the first century CE rhizotomist Pamphilus of Alexandria. Although quite similar in structure and content, this book was not identical to the *Sacred Book*; for it included the plant ἀετός which is not in the latter. And the so-called “astrologer of the year 379” (*CCAG* V.1 209.8–12) knew an iatromathematical tract of Hermes, under the title *Iatromathematika*, which treated the planets of the decans as causes of diseases.