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J. Cale Johnson, Alessandro Stavru (Eds.)
VISUALIZING THE INVISIBLE WITH THE HUMAN BODY

DE GRUYTER

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VISUALIZING THE INVISIBLE WITH THE HUMAN BODY

PHYSIOGNOMY AND EKPHRASIS IN THE ANCIENT
WORLD

Physiognomy and ekphrasis are two of the most important modes of description in antiquity and represent necessary precursors of scientific description. The primary way of divining the characteristics and fate of an individual, whether inborn or acquired, was to observe his external characteristics and behaviour. This volume focuses initially on two types of descriptive literature in Mesopotamia: physiognomic omens and what we might call ekphrastic description. These modalities are traced through ancient India, Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible, before arriving at the physiognomic treatises of the Greek world, where physiognomic discussions become intertwined with ekphrastic descriptions of otherwise non-visible human characteristics or personality traits. In the Graeco-Roman world, literary and visual iconic media often interact, as the representations of famous historical figures such as Pericles, Socrates or Augustus clearly show. The Arabic compendial culture absorbed and remade these different physiognomic and ekphrastic traditions, incorporating both Mesopotamian links between physiognomy and medicine and the interest in the ekphrasis of characterological 'types' that had emerged in the Hellenistic period. This volume offers the first wide-ranging picture of these modalities of description in antiquity.

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Visualizing the invisible with the human body

Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Cultures



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Markus Asper
Philip van der Eijk
Mark Geller
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Volume 10

Visualizing the invisible with the human body



Physiognomy and ekphrasis in the ancient world

Edited by
J. Cale Johnson and Alessandro Stavru

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