Classics 329: Ancient Medicine
TuTh at 11:30–12:45 pm

Instructor: David Camden, Department of Classics (david.camden@emory.edu)
office hours: Tu 2:30–4:30pm and by appointment (221E Candler Library)

Description:
The goal of this course is to familiarize students with the healing traditions of the ancient Mediterranean from the second millennium BCE to the dawn of the Middle Ages. Toward this end, we will read medical literature from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, asking not only what these texts can tell us about ancient medical practices, but also what they indicate, more generally, about the cultures in which they were produced. Specific topics to be explored will include ancient theories about anatomy and physiology, the relationship between medicine and religion, the methodology of clinical decision-making, and the social status of ancient doctors. We will also devote significant attention to ancient beliefs about women’s bodies—one of the many areas in which a familiarity with ancient medicine is indispensable for the social historian.

Prerequisites:
None. All readings will be in English, and no knowledge of ancient history is required.

Required text:

Other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Assessment:
Class meetings will be conducted in a lecture-with-discussion format. Students will be expected to have completed the day’s reading before each session, and to be prepared to ask and answer questions about the material. Quizzes and exams will focus on key terms and passages, while a written assignment will reinforce the concepts developed in lecture.

- Attendance and contributions to class discussion 15%
- Weekly quizzes (see syllabus for dates; lowest grade dropped) 15%
- Short written assignment (due Mon., Feb. 24) 10%
- Midterm (in class, Wed., Mar. 5) 25%
- Final (Tues., May 6, 8:00–10:30am) 35%

The goal of the written assignment is to help you think like an ancient doctor. After reading the Greek treatise *On Affections*, you will be asked to interpret various syndromes according to the principles of Greek pathology.

Extension policy: To ensure fairness for all students, I cannot grant extensions except in extraordinary circumstances, in which case the request must be made at least two days before the due date. Late assignments will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade (i.e., A becomes A-) for each day they are late.
Schedule of assignments:
(All readings should be completed by the date for which they are assigned)

**Tues., Jan. 14: Why is there a history of medicine?**
Readings: Diseases of Young Girls (to be distributed and read in class)

**UNIT 1: Egyptian medicine**

**Thurs., Jan. 16: Overview of Egyptian medicine**
Readings: Nunn, Ancient Egyptian Medicine, chapter 2 (“The Medical Papyri”); Metternich stele

**Tues., Jan. 21: Incantation and purgation**
Readings: Ebers papyrus

**Thurs., Jan. 23: Clinical decision-making**
Readings: Edwin Smith papyrus, Kahun gynecological papyrus

**UNIT 2: Mesopotamian medicine**

**Tues., Jan. 28: Overview of Mesopotamian medicine**
Readings: Letters from the library of Aššurbanipal; selected incantations

**Thurs., Jan. 30: Divination and diagnosis**
Readings: Selections from the Diagnostic Handbook

**UNIT 3: The Hippocratic Corpus, part 1: A series of tubes**

**Tues., Feb. 4: Overview of “Hippocratic” medicine**
Readings: *The Science of Medicine* (a.k.a., On the Art)

**Thurs., Feb. 6: Winds, waters, and bodily channels**
Readings: Places in Man

**Tues., Feb. 11: The four humors**
Readings: *The Nature of Man* and *A Regimen for Health* (these actually form a continuous treatise)

**UNIT 4: The Hippocratic Corpus, part 2: Classification and commonality**

**Thurs., Feb. 13: Diagnostic handbooks and the individualization of treatment**
Readings: Diseases II (selections), *Regimen in Acute Diseases*

**Tues., Feb. 18: The search for stable generalizations**
Readings: *Epidemics* I & III, *Aphorisms*  
**Written assignment due**

**Thurs., Feb. 20: Phusis and dunamis**
Readings: *Airs Waters Places*

**Tues., Feb. 25: The doctor-cosmologists**
Readings: On Breaths, On Flesh, On Regimen

**Thurs., Feb. 28: MIDTERM**
UNIT 5: The Hippocratic Corpus, part 3: Medicine and religion

Tues., Mar. 4: The cult of Asclepius
Readings: Epidaurus inscriptions, Posidippus’ Iamatika

Thurs., Mar. 6: Divine vs. natural causes
Readings: *The Sacred Disease

Tues., Mar. 11 & Thurs., Mar. 13: NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

UNIT 6: The Hippocratic Corpus, part 4: Women’s bodies

Tues., Mar. 18: Embryological theories Quiz #5
Readings: *The Seed-The Nature of the Child

Thurs., Mar. 20: Female diseases
Readings: Diseases of Women I (selections)

UNIT 7: Greek medicine after Hippocrates

Tues., Mar. 25: Dissection Quiz #6
Readings: *The Heart; selections from Praxagoras

Thurs., Mar. 27: Aristotle
Readings: Selections from Aristotle

Tues., Apr. 1: Herophilus Quiz #7
Readings: Selections from Herophilus

Thurs., Apr. 3: Erasistratus
Readings: Selections from Erasistratus

Tues., Apr. 8: Hellenistic medical sects Quiz #8
Readings: Galen, The Sects for Beginners

UNIT 8: Greek medicine in Rome and beyond

Thurs., Apr. 10: Greek doctors, Roman patients
Readings: Selections from Roman authors

Tues., Apr. 15: Introduction to Galen Quiz #9
Readings: Galen, My Own Books, The Best Doctor Is Also a Philosopher

Thurs., Apr. 17: Galen’s Hippocrates
Readings: Galen, The Elements According to Hippocrates

Tues., Apr. 22: Greek medicine in the East Quiz #10
Readings: Selections from Arabic authors

Thurs., Apr. 24: Greek medicine in the West
Readings: “Chlorosis” (1833), from A Dictionary of Practical Medicine (vol. 1, pp. 315–318)