This book teaches students and scholars of Greco-Roman medical history how to use and critically assess archaeological materials. Ancient medicine is a subject dominated by textual sources, yet there is a wealth of archaeological remains that can be used to broaden our understanding of medicine in the past. In order to use the information properly, this book explains how to ask questions of an archaeological nature, how to access different types of archaeological materials, and how to overcome problems the researcher might face. It also acts as an introduction to the archaeology of medicine for archaeologists interested in this aspect of their subject. Although the focus is on the Greco-Roman period, the methods and theories explained within the text can be applied to other periods in history. The areas covered include text as material culture, images, artefacts, spaces of medicine, and science and archaeology.

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For my parents
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MEDICINE IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

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The study of medical history in the Greco-Roman world has led to some fascinating insights into how philosophers and doctors conceived bodily functions, illnesses, and medical treatments. Yet, examinations of the scholarly medical texts alone do not provide a rounded approach to ancient medicine; it leaves us wondering what the patient and general public thought about medicine and doctors at this time. We can also ask if there were different practices and treatments from those described in the literature. Fortunately, there is a growing interest in broadening the scope of scholarship on medical history to include conceptions of medicine beyond the philosophical tradition. However, accessing these views is difficult because many people in the ancient world were illiterate, and if they could write, they did not always leave personal accounts that record their views on health care or their medical practices. Nonetheless, there is one way to access a broader voice and that is to consider the surviving archaeological remains.

An ample amount of material associated with ancient medicine exists in the archaeological record, consisting of archaeological sites, structures, medical tools, votive offerings, bodies, and botanical remains to name a few. Still, there are very few scholars working on the artefacts associated with medicine, particularly from a critically interpretative position. Yet, as someone who works with many of these materials, I have consistently encountered two problems. First, there is an underlying perception that little can be determined from the material remains by those who work with medical texts (Baker 2002a). This is an unfortunate position because a critical analysis of materials can tell us a great deal about social perceptions that have gone unrecorded in writing. Second, I have also found that there are attempts by some scholars who have no training in archaeology to incorporate material culture in their work. This is promising on one level because it indicates an interest and awareness that artefacts are a viable source of evidence. However, some
of the work demonstrates a poor understanding of critical methodological and theoretical approaches towards the remains.

Thus, two questions arise: why do such perceptions persist, and why are scholars unaware of the advances in the subject? I think a fundamental problem is that subjects are not made accessible to students and scholars in different disciplines. Therefore, this book is an attempt to do just that – to make archaeological methods and theories accessible to medical historians of the Greco-Roman period, from roughly the fifth century BC to the third century AD.

It was decided that a textbook that could be used along with general texts on medical history would be the best means of introducing archaeology to historians. This book will demonstrate the types of questions that can be addressed of material remains, and explains how the materials can be accessed and studied. It will also demonstrate that even texts – the main source of information used by historians – are a form of material culture. In so doing, it is hoped that students and scholars outside of the discipline of archaeology will be able to judge archaeological arguments critically and perhaps use artefacts in their own work, thereby enhancing our awareness of ancient medical practices and perceptions of the body and health in the past.

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