CHAPTER NINE

LATER HELLENISTIC IDENTIFICATIONS

A. Helius

During the centuries following the reign of the first Ptolemy, Sarapis tended more and more to acquire the attributes of other gods of a transcendent nature, to the extent that his godhead became the major focal point of later Hellenistic syncretism. Sarapis' identification with the Sun is an example of the way he attracted the attributes and personalities of other, older gods. The phrase "Zeus Helius Great Sarapis" was an exceedingly common formula in the second and third centuries A.D.\(^1\) The same series of names occurs in two earlier inscriptions from Italy \(^2\) and in one highly restored dedication from the reign of Ptolemy XIII.\(^3\)

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\(^2\) IG, XIV, 916, from Ostia, dated after 100 B.C. (?); and IG, XIV, 1023, early (?) Roman, from Rome. Compare POxy, VIII, 1148, Κόριν ου Σαράπι τ’ Ἡλε εἰεργύτα, first century A.D.

\(^3\) SB, I, 4963: the dedication of a temple and peribolos Δ[ι] Ηλίῳ Σαράπιδι με[γάλῳ.}
The Egyptians had worshipped the Sun from high antiquity. In Egypt, the Sun was often identified with Osiris, and such an identification of a heavenly god with one from the underworld could be justified in the Sun’s visit to the underworld every night during his return from west to east.¹ Such a thought may have prompted Artemidorus (Onirocritica, II, 13) to list Helius, along with Zeus and several deities with chthonic associations, as a god to whom the snake was holy.

As for the Greeks, the feature of the Sun which most impressed them was the omniscience derived from his ability to see everything.² Pseudo-Callisthenes (I, 33, 3) referred to Sarapis as “the one who sees all things”,³ and evidence of a ceremonial nature shows that at least by the second century B.C. Sarapis was especially thought of as a god who sees. Among the dedications listed in the temple inventory from Serapeum C at Delos are a number of votive eyes.⁴ These are probably thank-offerings to the god for some favor or benevolent supervision rather than for the healing of diseases, since the only other parts of the body which appear in the inventories are ears, associated in Egyptian tradition with the god who listens and grants prayers.⁵ and an occasional pair of genitals, recalling

² E. Jessen, art. Helios, in R-E, VIII, cols. 58-59, cites the epithets παναίστης and παναδερφής. A common Hellenistic use appears in UPZ, 15 (157 B.C.), which closes with a prayer that Isis and Sarapis will grant the king and queen dominion of πάσης χώρας ἢς ὁ Ἅλιος ἑφορᾶ.
³ τὸν πάντα δεκτόμενον.
⁴ CE, pp. 223, 229-232, 236-237, between 150 and 145 B.C., where the lists include, from the Anubieion within the Serapeum, ὁ τοῦ ἄργυρον καὶ ὀρθαλμὸν χρυσοῦ ἐπὶ ταινίδιο, ὀρθαλμοὶ ἄργυροι καὶ τύπιον ἄργυροι καὶ ἐνυδία χρυσά ἐπὶ ταινίδιο, ὀρθαλμοὺς ἄργυρους ἐπὶ σανδίου.