

Threatened Wombs: Aspects of Ancient Uterine Magic

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MY PURPOSE is to present and discuss the ancient evidence for magical practices and religious beliefs pertaining to the womb and its reproductive capacities, and the ways in which human and supernatural interventions were thought capable of interfering with the natural process of reproduction.¹ Scattered information about these practices is found in the literary sources, supplemented by epigraphical, papyrological, and archaeological evidence. This material sheds light on various aspects of uterine magic but fails to provide a total picture; internal contradictions and inconsistencies are numerous. And as the evidence considered here comes from various parts of the Graeco-Roman world and ranges from the eighth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D., one would expect to meet some difficulty in integrating it into a homogeneous description of this phenomenon.

The views of classical antiquity on how women were affected by natural and magical influences at the time of conception, pregnancy, and delivery belong to a very common and widespread set of popular beliefs, clothed in a pseudo-scientific form; they originated in Near Eastern and Egyptian cultures and were based on the observation and interpretation of natural phenomena. Although scarcely

¹ Works cited by author's name: A. A. BARB, "Diva Matrix," *JWarb* 16 (1953) 193-238; H. D. BETZ, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago/London 1986); C. BONNER, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor 1950); A. DELATTE, "La clef de la matrice," *MusB* 18 (1914) 75-88; A. DELATTE and Ph. DERCHAIN, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris 1964); J. G. GRIFFITHS, ed., *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Cambridge 1970); T. HOPFNER, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber* (= *Studien zur Paläographie und Papyruskunde* 21, 23: Leipzig 1921-24); H. PHILIPP, *Mira et Magica. Gemmen im Ägyptischen Museum der staatlichen Museen* (Mainz 1986); K. Preisendanz, ed., *Papyri Graecae Magicae I-III* (Leipzig/Berlin 1928, 1931, 1941; reprint in 2 vols. by A. Henrichs, 1973-74); R. K. RITNER, "A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection," *JNES* 43 (1984) 209-21; B. SIMON, *Mind and Madness: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry* (Ithaca 1978).

affected by developments in Greek science, they were adopted by educated magicians in the Graeco-Roman world for the prestige and authority inherent in their antiquity and exotic sources.

The practices they inspired were used to affect the woman's body in both an aggressive and defensive way, to bend or restore the laws of nature according to the practitioner's wishes. The main part of our evidence consists of spells preserved in the magical papyri and on inscribed and carved stone amulets; their properties are described in the Greek lapidaries and bear witness to the actual use of uterine magic in antiquity. The Graeco-Egyptian character of this material does not rule out that similar practices were current elsewhere in the Roman Empire, as we see in an anecdote reported by Apuleius (n.31 *infra*), who had the reputation of having a first-hand knowledge of magical practices. And the encyclopedic work of the elder Pliny contains numerous allusions to such practices, despite the author's disclaimer of their value (*HN* 25.25).

Magic frequently departs from the realm of the supernatural to share in the less spiritual but tangibly more effective power of pharmacology. It is therefore natural to look beyond recipes for drugs, pessaries, clysters, ointments, and fumigations in the writings of such scientific or pseudo-scientific authors as Dioscorides and Pliny the Elder to focus not so much on the specific virtue of individual substances as on how they were supposed to work. There is no doubt that sympathetic magic (*i.e.*, "persuasive analogy") was often thought to be at work in a more or less disguised way; and while it is now possible in some cases to distinguish the medicinal properties of these substances from the hocus-pocus, ancient magicians were probably deceived, in varying degrees, by the then unexplainable aspects of their own profession. But what mattered to them was not so much scientific accuracy and economy as retaining credibility by achieving some, at least, of the predicted results. This minimum rate of efficiency was accompanied by a certain level of sophistication in order to discourage competitors: internal consistency, for instance, based on popular and pseudo-scientific knowledge would prevent opportunistic imitation.

We begin with the magicians' notion of the womb; we then indicate how they tried to effect its timely aperture and closure; and we end with a discussion, based on the deities invoked in uterine spells and represented on uterine amulets, of whether uterine magic was connected with a solar (Delatte) or with a lunar (Bonner) theology, and whether these two positions can be reconciled.

I. The Womb as Ancient Magicians Might Have Thought of It

In the ancient world some viewed the womb as an independent entity living within the female body, and exhibiting behavior beyond the control of the woman herself. Plato describes the womb as an animate creature, desirous of childbearing, that strays through the body and causes all manner of diseases if it remains barren too long.² This view was not explicitly rejected by the Hippocratics and Aristotle,³ but it suffered a temporary eclipse from the third century B.C. onwards, when Herophilus of Chalcedon performed the first dissections of human bodies and therefore radically changed the state of anatomical knowledge. This theory was nevertheless revived in the second century A.D. by Aretaeus of Capadocia and appears to have been still alive in the sixteenth century, as we see in the writings of Rabelais and Montaigne.⁴

² *Ti.* 91c: ζῶον (ἔμψυχον) ἐπιθυμητικὸν ἐνὸν τῆς παιδοποιίας, ὅταν ἄκαρπον παρὰ τὴν ὥραν χρόνον πολὺν γίγνηται, χαλεπῶς ἀγανακτοῦν φέρει, καὶ πλανώμενον πάντη κατὰ τὸ σῶμα, τὰς τοῦ πνεύματος διεξόδους ἀποφράττον, ἀναπνεῖν οὐκ ἔδῳν εἰς ἀπορίας τὰς ἐσχάτας ἐμβάλλει καὶ νόσους παντοδαπὰς ἄλλας παρέχει. Cf. Barb 210f, 214 n.23; Simon 259f; G. E. R. Lloyd, *Science, Folklore, and Ideology* (Cambridge 1983) 84 n.100. Beliefs about the 'wandering' of the womb are well attested in ancient medical and technical texts; cf. Aelius Promotus (second century) *Ἱατρικὰ καὶ ἀντιπαθητικὰ* 1365 (ed. M. Wellmann, p.774), πρὸς μήτρας ὄλισθον, κτλ.; *Kyranides* (ed. D. Kaimakis) 1.20.14, 17; 2.11.17; 4.44.9, 53.3 (I owe these references to Dr R. D. Kotansky); L. A. Dean-Jones, "Menstrual Bleeding According to the Hippocratics and Aristotle," *TAPA* 119 (1989) 177 n.3. On 'hysteria' as a disease affecting women, cf. Simon 238–68; G. Roccatagliata, *A History of Ancient Psychiatry* (=Contributions in Medical Studies 16 [New York/Westport 1986]) 43–45, 173–74, 218, 259, and esp. 263. For the view of the penis as a living creature, cf. the illustration in Simon 245 and his commentary (260) on *Pl. Ti.* 90E.

³ L. A. Dean-Jones, *Morbidity and Vitality: The Interpretation of Menstrual Blood in Greek Science* (diss.Stanford 1987) ch. 2, refers to the odor-therapies that the Hippocratics had taken over from folk medicine: cf. Hippoc. *Nat.mul.* 3, 4, 14. According to Dean-Jones, Aristotle is reminiscent of Plato *Ti.* 91c in *HA* 582b22–26 (prolapsed womb because of the lack of sexual intercourse) and *GA* 719a20f (καὶ κενὰ δ' οὔσαι αἱ ὑστέραι ἄνω προσιστάμεναι πνίγουσιν). Cf. also Roccatagliata (*supra* n.2) 267 n.40 with reference to I. H. Coriat, "An Ancient Egyptian Medical Prescription for Hysteria," *Annals of Medical History* 3 (1921) 12–16, who discusses a very old prescription (fumigation of precious stones, plants, raisins, and wine to cure hysteria) preserved on an hieratic ostrakon of ca 1500 B.C. (Metropolitan Museum, New York).

⁴ On human dissection performed by Herophilus, cf. Sieveking, *RE* 8.1 (1912) 1106f s.v. "Herophilus." See also H. von Staden, *Herophilus: The Art of Medicine*

It is quite clear that the traditional view of the womb as an independent animal was part of the magician's background and had been adapted to his or her specific need, in the more dramatic form of a demon or a primeval deity. A third- or fourth-century magical papyrus preserves a prayer to the uterus to prevent it from moving up within the belly:

I conjure you, O womb, [by the] one established over the Abyss, before heaven, earth, sea, light, or darkness came to be; [you?] who created the angels, being foremost, AMICHAMCHOU and CHOUCHAO CHEROEI OUEIACHO ODOU PROSEIONGES, and who sit over the cherubim, who bear your (?) own throne, that you return again to your seat, and that you do not turn [to one side] into the right part of the ribs, or into the left part of the ribs, and that you do not gnaw into the heart like a dog, but remain indeed in your own intended and proper place, not chewing [as long as] I conjure you by the one who, in the beginning, made the heaven and earth and all that is therein. Hallelujah! Amen!

Write this on a tin tablet and "clothe" it in seven colors.⁵

This is one example of the various forms through which magicians tried to control the activities of the uterus. Other invocations and

in *Early Alexandria* (Cambridge 1989). On how the traditional view was affected by these experiments, cf. Soranus *Gyn.* 1.8.2. On the return to the traditional view, cf. Aretaeus *SA* 2.11.1: ἡ μήτηρ σπλάγγχον γυναικῆιον ἀγχιστα ζῶδες ... καὶ εὐώδεσι ὁσμήσεσι τέρπεται.... καὶ τὸ ζύμπαν ἐν τῇ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐστὶ ἡ ὑστέρη, ὁκοῖόν τι ζῶον ἐν ζῶφ. Cf. Rabelais, *Tiers-Livre* 32 (quoted by Simon 260), and Montaigne, *Essais* 3.5 (Editions du Seuil [Paris 1967] 348).

⁵ *PGM* VII.260–71 (*P.Lond.* I 121): πρὸς μήτρας ἀναδρομὴν· ἐξορκίζω σε, μήτραν (κατὰ τοῦ) κατασταθέντος ἐπὶ τῆς ἀβύσσου πρὶν γενέσθαι οὐρανὸν ἢ γῆν ἢ θάλασσαν ἢ φῶς ἢ σκότος, τὸν κτίσαντα ἀγγέλους, ὧν πρῶτος Ἀμιχαμοῦ καὶ χουχαῶ χηρωεὶ ουειαχω οδοῦ προσειογγης, καὶ ἐπὶ χερουβὶν καθήμενον, βαστάζοντα τὸν θρόνον τὸν ἴδιον· ἀποκατασταθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἔδρᾳ μηδὲ κλιθῆναι εἰς τὸ δεξιὸν πλευρῶν μέρος μηδὲ εἰς τὸ ἀριστερὸν πλευρῶν μέρος μηδὲ ἀποδήξης εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ὡς κύων, ἀλλὰ στάθητι καὶ μένοις ἐν χώροις ἰδίοις, μηδὲν μεμαση[μ]ένη, ἔστε ἐξορκίζω σε τὸν ἀρχῆ ποιήσαντα τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ. ἀλληλουα, ἀμήν (tr. Scarborough in Betz). For the womb as a primeval deity, cf. *PGM* III.602ff (a spell to establish a relationship with Helios); cf. *Barb passim*. Dr Kotansky has kindly communicated to me his new reading, based on a fresh examination, of the text found on a gold *lamella* from Beirut, now in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris (Froehner no. 286; *CIG* IV 9064), that will appear shortly in his new corpus of amulets. The new reading shows that the spell concerns a 'prolapsus' of the uterus: "I adjure you, O Womb of Hypsa whom Hypsa bore, that you never abandon your place, upon the name of the living Lord, unconquerable: remain at (your) place, (that) of Hypsa whom Hypsa bore!"

threats directed at the womb are preserved on stone amulets, the purpose of which is to prevent painful wanderings of the bearer's womb: "Be quiet (or "contract"), womb, lest Typhon overcome you."⁶ The practitioner who tries to intimidate the restless uterus by threatening to call in a more powerful deity to subdue it might boast a special relationship with this deity or have some personal means to persuade or to compel him or her. When the practitioner is confident enough in his or her own power, the distinction between a prayer and a polite order is often blurred. A magical amulet provides an example of such a request addressed to the Egyptian moon god Khonsou or Sachmet: "Fasten the womb of so-and-so in the right place, O (you who raise) the disk of the sun!"⁷

With such spells as these, ancient magicians aimed at restricting the freedom of movement of the womb, which, as an animal, demon, or deity, was thought to have a natural inclination to move about inside the female body. The preventive and curative aspects of these magical practices do not seem to have been devised separately.

II. Timely Aperture and Closure of the Womb

The unpredictable action of the womb was not the only concern of ancient practitioners. In a society in which survival was a day-to-day struggle, with a high infant mortality rate and a short life expectancy at birth serving as a constant reminder of the precariousness

⁶ Bonner no. 140: ορωριουθ σαβαωθ στάλητι μήτρα μή σε Τυφῶν καταλάβη, discussed p.84 and similar to another stone treated by Delatte esp. 76 and 80; cf. also Philipp 112 no. 184. Parallel instances in W. Drexler, "Alte Beschwörungsformeln," *Philologus* 58 (1899) 594–616, esp. 594–608, with the legend ὑστέρα μελάνη μελανωμένη, ὡς ὄφις εἰλύεσαι καὶ ὡς λέων βρυχᾶσαι καὶ ὡς ἀρνίον κοιμοῦ, or variants ("O womb, black and blackening, you crawl like a serpent, roar like a lion, and lie still like a lamb!"). On Seth/Typhon as a solar deity in the Roman period, cf. Plut. *Mor.* 367C-D (reporting the views of the Stoics) with Griffiths' commentary 455f; cf. also Griffiths and Barb, "Seth or Anubis?" *JWarb* 22 (1959) 367–71. In ancient Mesopotamia, the demon Lamashtu was thought to pose a threat to pregnant women: cf. B. L. Goff, "The Role of Amulets in Mesopotamian Ritual Texts," *JWarb* 19 (1956) 17f.

⁷ Delatte 81, referring to a gem published by H. Koehler, *MémStPetersbourg* SER. VI 3 (1834) 1–34, esp. no. 18: τάσσον τὴν μήτραν τῆς δεῖνα εἰς τὸν ἴδιον τόπον, ο (ὦ) τὸν κύκλον τοῦ ἡλίου (also quoted by Drexler [*supra* n.6] 599 with a variant: κύκλου, probably a misreading). Delatte interprets it as an invocation to the sun, but *PGM* VII.300, 366–69, and IV.1326 show that ἐξαίρων (rather than ἐξαίρων) must be supplied. The deity invoked is Khonsou or Sachmet; cf. Betz notes *ad locc.*

of life, the reproductive functions of women were highly valued; all sexual and physiological dysfunctions were considered threats to society. In this context, the womb was viewed as a potential target of undesirable influences from occult powers, against which it needed the protection of specific gods and demons.

Uterine magic consisted primarily, but not exclusively, in controlling the timely aperture and closure of the womb, and could be used in a good or in an evil way. The practitioner might want to help the natural course of conception, pregnancy, and delivery, by letting the semen reach the egg, by preventing an untimely return of the menses, a miscarriage, or a premature birth, and by providing an easy delivery. For women who did not wish to become pregnant—and this must have been quite frequent in the upper classes during the Roman Empire (Juv. 6.592–97)—uterine magic was expected to provide suitable contraceptive and abortifacient means, though often not without risk for the women who used it. The same magical powers could be applied in a harmful way to hinder conception, cause abortion, hasten, delay, or complicate delivery, or interfere with the health or shape of the offspring. That accidents at any stage of the reproductive process were thought to be the result of malevolent magical actions on the part of human or divine beings is evident in the abundance of prophylactic material, spells, and amulets that make up the bulk of our evidence for uterine magic.

The belief that the uterus was the target of recurrent supernatural actions is documented by three types of evidence. First, there are reports of the means by which one might try to control conception and pregnancy. For instance, a man concerned with rejection or sexual misbehavior on the part of his lover might attempt to secure her faithfulness by conjuring her womb, so that it would become accessible to his own semen only, with the result that she would be unable to have intercourse with, conceive, and bear a child for another man:

Take an egg of a crow and the juice of the plant crow's foot and gall of a river electric eel, and grind them with honey and say the spell whenever you grind and whenever you smear it on your genitals. This is the spell that is to be spoken: "I say to you, womb of NN, open and receive the seed of NN and the uncontrollable seed of the IARPHE ARPHE (write it). Let her, NN, love me for all her time as Isis loved Osiris and let her remain chaste for me as Penelope did of Odysseus. And do you, womb, remember me for all the time of my life,

because I am AKARNACHTHAS.” Say this while grinding and whenever you rub your genitals, and in this way have intercourse with the woman you wish, and she will love you alone and by no one else will she ever be laid, just by you alone.⁸

⁸ *PGM* xxxvi.283–94: φουσιλείδιον (...) ἔστι δὲ ὁ λόγος ὁ λεγόμενος· “σοὶ λέγω, μήτρα τῆς δῖνα, χάνε καὶ δέξαι τὸ σπέρμα τοῦ δεῖνα καὶ σπ[έ]ρ[μ]α τὸ ἀκρατὲς τοῦ ιαρφε αρφε (γράφε). φιλίτω με ἢ δεῖνα εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα αὐτῆς χρόνον, ὡς ἐφίλησεν ἢ Ἴσις τὸν Ὅσιριν καὶ μινάτω μοι ἀγνή ὡς ἢ Πηνελόπη τῷ Ὀδυσσῆϊ· σὺ δὲ, μήτρα, μνημόνευέ μου εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα τῆς ζωῆς μου χρόνον, ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶμι Ἀκαρναχθας” (tr. E. N. O’Neill in Betz). Cf. also *PGM* vii.910ff; P. Warren 21.138; *PGM* v.330ff in combination with a ritual to be performed when the moon is waning. Dr Kotansky has brought to my attention a gold *lamella* from Ballana (Nubia), published by S. Eitrem in W. B. Emery and L. P. Kirwan, *The Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul* (Cairo 1938) 382 (Cat. no. 874) 405–07, and pls. 107b, 116.1, which calls for Isis to open her womb to receive the waters “flowed from the breast of Ibis, the water of Anubis, the brother of...,” and brought to and sown in her by her brother Osiris (tr. Eitrem): ἀνυξὸν σου τὴν μήτραν, ἐν ταύ(τῃ) τῇ ὥρᾳ καὶ ἐν (ταύ)τῃ τῇ ῥοπή καὶ ἄρπαξον τὸ σπαραῖν ἐν σοὶ ὕδρῳ ἐν τῷ σοὶ ὀνόματι, Ἴσι, ἄνασσα, βασίλισσα τῶν στυζῶν (=πάντων ζώων), ἥδη, ταχύ ταχύ, διὰ δύναμιν ἡμῶν, ταχύ (11ff). (A new reading will be published by Kotansky in his forthcoming corpus of amulets.) It is unclear whether purification or fecundation is meant, but the latter is more likely: see Plut. *Mor.* 368c (quoted 446 *infra*). In Euripides’ *Andromache* the protagonist denies Hermione’s false charges that she is using secret drugs to secure her childlessness and her husband’s consequent hatred (32f, λέγει γὰρ ὡς νιν φαρμάκοις κεκρυμμένοις τίθημι ἅπαιδα καὶ πόσει μισουμένην, and 205, οὐκ ἐξ ἐμῶν σε φαρμάκων στυγεῖ πόσις). This might provide an instance of closure of the womb for contraceptive purpose, though the text contains no explicit reference to the use of “*witchcraft* and malignant drugs to seal her womb” (Simon 258; italics mine). Elsewhere Hermione connects Neoptolemus’ resentment towards her with Andromache’s use of φάρμακα: the secret drugs have destroyed her barren womb (157f, στυγοῦμαι δ’ ἀνδρὶ φαρμάκοις σοῖς, νηδὺς δ’ ἀκύμων διὰ σέ μοι διόλλυται). But the effect of Andromache’s alleged philtres consists in poisoning Hermione’s foetus and causing her to miscarry (355f: ἡμεῖς γὰρ εἰ σὴν παῖδα φαρμακεύομεν καὶ νηδὺν ἐξαμβλοῦμεν, ὡς αὐτὴ λέγει): we are dealing here with abortifacient drugs rather than with contraceptive charms. Deceitful poisoning may or may not be considered as magical practice. Pliny’s digression on *abortiva ... amatoria ... (et) alia magica portenta* in the midst of his treatment of plants (*HN* 25.25) demonstrates plainly that P. T. Stevens’ distinction between “the sphere of magic” and “Greek pharmacopeia” is unnecessary (*Euripides’ Andromache* [Oxford 1971] 95 with references to *Od.* 4.230, 10.394, and *Eur. Med.* 717f, where Medea proposes to provide Aegeus with drugs to promote male fertility: παύσω γέ σ’ ὄντ’ ἅπαιδα καὶ παίδων γονὰς σπεῖραι σε θήσω· τοιάδ’ οἶδα φάρμακα). In Cic. *Clu.* 31, a pregnant woman had been given a *venenum* shortly before delivery with the intent of killing the foetus, thus depriving her husband of progeny; the treacherous operation resulted in the mother’s own accidental death. The empress Eusebia, Constantius II’s wife, was more successful in securing recurrent miscarriages for her sister-in-law Helena, Julian’s wife, whom

If intercourse and conception have occurred, the pregnant woman—or someone else—might want to prevent the normal course of pregnancy. A magical papyrus of the third century contains a spell used to inflict an abortion by causing menstruation or menorrhagia, even though it might be more correct to consider the return of the menses as the sign (or side effect) and not the cause of the abortion:

“Let the genitals and the womb of her, NN, be open, and let her become bloody by night and day.” And [these things must be written] in sheep’s blood, and recite before nightfall, the offerings (?) ... first she harmed ... and bury it near a sumac, or near ... on a slip of papyrus.⁹

This spell contains numerous features quite specific to uterine magic. In the form in which the spell has been transmitted, the intelligible part is preceded by a long section containing magical words known as *Ephesia grammata*; in the third and fourth lines (not quoted above) one can read the names of the Egyptian deities Hathor, goddess of sexual love, and Isis, who is called μία (“the only one”) or perhaps μαῖα, mother goddess or midwife. As protectors of the womb, Hathor and Isis are represented together on at least one uterine amulet.¹⁰ The cult of Isis had been adopted widely in the East by the end of the Hellenistic period and its expansion continued during the Imperial period. Several Greek inscriptions, dating from the first century B.C. to the third A.D. (from Andros, Cyne, Ios, and Macedonia) present Isis as the goddess in

she induced to drink a *quaesitum venenum ... per fraudem* (Amm. Marc. 16.10.18). Whether such practices were labelled ‘magical’ or merely ‘criminal’ is a matter of who committed the act and in what circumstances. In none of the above instances is the use of magical spells or charms explicitly suggested. On a possible shift of the sense of *veneficium* from poisoning to magical practice in Republican Rome, cf. M. Le Glay, “Magie et sorcellerie à Rome au dernier siècle de la République,” in *L’Italie préromaine et la Rome républicaine. Mélanges Heurgon I* (Rome 1976) 525–50, esp. 536–38.

⁹ PGM LXII.76–106 (P. Warren 21), tr. Scarborough in Betz; cf. n.14 *infra*: ἀνοιγήτω ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ μήτρα τῆς δεῖνα καὶ αἰμασσέσθω νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας καὶ τα[ῦτα γρ(άφων)] ἀρ[νείφ] χρῶ αἵματι καὶ προδί[ω]κε τὰ [πα]ράθε[τα] νυκτὸς γε[ca 9 letters]ιομ[.] πρώτη ἠδίκησε καὶ χῶσον παρὰ ροῦν ἢ παρὰ ..δα χα...ον ἐν πιττακ[ιδί]ω.

¹⁰ Delatte and Derchain no. 345, where Isis is identified with Hathor. Cf. F. Daumas, *LdÄ* 2 (1977) 1029 s.v. “Hathor.”

charge of governing sexual relations, length of pregnancy, and birth.¹¹ A second-century papyrus (*P.Oxy.* XI 1380) contains the text of an invocation of Isis that indicates that the goddess was worshiped as *μία* at Letopolis Magna (6), and as *μαῖα* at Athribis (39), among the Bucoli (42), among the Indians (103), and at Berytus (116). Isis, in her function as midwife, probably occupied an important place in uterine magic, for midwives bridged the rôles of doctor and magician; Plato has Socrates, whose mother was a midwife, say that they combined some acquired technical skill with the knowledge of a bulk of incantations and portentous recipes.¹²

The spell preserved in *P.Warren* 21, quoted above (n.9), includes a drawing of a crescent-shaped figure (PLATE 1), described in the papyrus as imitating the shape of a *καρδία* (line 82, οὕτως καρδιοῖδῶς). This word usually designates the heart, but occasionally refers to the genitalia. The drawing itself is more reminiscent of a lunar crescent than of anything else, but we do not know how the copyist or his or her model visualized the heart and female genitalia respectively: with some imagination both anatomical parts could be so represented. In my view, there are more reasons to understand

¹¹ *IG* XII.5 739.36–39 (Andros, I B.C.), ἄδε γενέθλας ἀρχάν, ἀνδρὶ γυναῖκα συνάγαγον, εὖ τε σελάνας ἐς δεκάταν ἀψείδα τεθαλότος ἄρτιον ἔργου φέγγος, ἐπ' ἀρτίγονον βρέφος ἄγαγον; H. Engelmann, *I.v.Kyme* 41. 18–20 (I B.C./A.D.); *IG* XII.5 14.17–21 (Ios, II/III); *SEG* XII 316, XXXIV 622, 626f (Macedonia, Imperial period: dedications to Εἰσιδὶ Λοχίᾳ). Isis was honored as *μία* in Cyrene (*SEG* IX 192, A.D. 103). Cf. S. K. Heyob, *The Cult of Isis among Women in the Graeco-Roman World* (= *EPRO* 51 [Leiden 1975]) 44–52, 70–74. According to Plutarch (*Mor.* 372D) Isis was a lunar deity; cf. Griffiths' commentary, 497, 500f. See also *supra* n.8.

¹² *Tht.* 149C–D: midwives can provoke or soften birth-pangs, deliver women in labor, and perform an abortion when necessary, διδοῦσαί γε αἱ μαῖαι φαρμάκια καὶ ἐπάδουσαι. Pliny *HN* 28.70 blames midwives and prostitutes for carrying on the tradition of *portentorum miracula* involving abortion and menstruation. At 28.81 he cites the fifth-century B.C. midwife Lais, in conjunction with the first-century B.C. cosmetician and sexologue Elephantis, as the author or compiler of gynecologic *monstrifica*; cf. Lloyd (*supra* n.2) 63 n.11 and 168f, with a discussion of Soranus *Gyn.* 1.4.4, where the author stresses the necessity for midwives to be free from superstition (ἀδεισιδαίμονες), a barely concealed hint at a different reality. On midwives in antiquity cf. V. French, "Midwives and Maternity Care in the Graeco-Roman World," *Helios* 13 (1986) 69–84. In the later Middle Ages midwives and other female medical practitioners were often persecuted as witches as a result of restrictions imposed on the medical profession: cf. M. Green, "Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe," in J. M. Bennett *et al.*, edd., *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* (Chicago 1989) 39–78, esp. 56f nn. 51–53; T. R. Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch* (New Haven 1966).

the drawing as a representation of female genitalia (perhaps an open cervix) rather than as a representation of the heart. Be that as it may, the drawing is covered and encompassed by the seven vowels and magical words sprinkled with smaller lunar crescents.¹³

The magician who invented or transmitted the spell recommends that it be written with blood on a slip of papyrus or tablet (πιττακίδιον). It is uncertain what kind of blood was meant to be used. The plate in *P. Warren* shows that the text is hardly legible and that the correct reading of line 104 might be καὶ (followed by traces of about 10–12 letters) αἰσχροῦ αἵματι, meaning “with menstrual blood.”¹⁴ Several ancient writers interested in agriculture and

¹³ Preisendanz refers in his *apparatus criticus* to H. de Villefosse’s collection of similar drawings on lead tablets, *BAntFr* (13 Sept. 1905) 291, to which one may add F. Maltomini, “I papiri greci,” *StClOr* 29 (1979) 55–124, esp. no. 6, plate x, fr. A. On καρδία with the meaning of genitalia, cf. Barb 202 and n.156, with reference to *PGM* v.156–58: ἐγὼ εἶμι ἢ Χάρις τοῦ Αἰῶνος, ὄνομά μοι καρδία περιεζωσμένη ὄφιν. On the rôle of the seven Greek vowels in a uterine context, cf. Ritner 218 and P. Cox Miller, “In Praise of Nonsense,” in A. H. Armstrong, ed., *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality (Egyptian, Greek, Roman)* (= *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* XV [New York 1986]) 481–505.

¹⁴ Probably the equivalent of Columella’s *obscaenus cruor* (*Rust.* 10.360). My proposed reading, kindly revised by Prof. D. D. Obbink on the basis of the plate provided in *P. Lugd. Bat.* I, is closer to the reading adopted by the editors of *P. Warren* 21 (*P. Lugd. Bat.* I, M. David, B. A. van Groningen, and J. C. van Oven, edd. 1941, with an excellent commentary [p.64] to which this paper owes much) than to the reading adopted by Preisendanz/Henrichs (reprinting the text included in the unpublished third volume of *PGM* in proof in 1941). The *editio princeps* by A. S. Hunt (in *Studies presented to F. Ll. Griffith* [Oxford 1932] 233–40) does not provide a more convincing text (line 125: καὶ ἡμέρα(ι)ς καὶ τὰ μην..αρ...χροῦ αἵματι καὶ προδί[ω]κε. At my request Dr F. A. J. Hoogendijk has checked the original in the Papyrologisch Instituut in Leiden and has supplied a new photograph. Her convincing reading of 124–27 is close to the text printed in *P. Lugd. Bat.* I: ἀνυγήτω ἢ φύσις καὶ ἡ μήτρα τῆς δι(νος) καὶ αἰμασέσθω νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρα(ι)ς καὶ τὰ κ.γ. ..() αἰσχροῦ αἵματι καὶ προδί[ω]κε τὰ [.]..θε..νυκτὸς ἀδ..[.]αὐτὴ με πρώτη ἠδίκησε καὶ χῶσον παρὰ ροῦν ἢ παρὰ [.]ηχα.ον ἐν πιττακιδί[ω]φ. I would only suggest that the reading ἠδίκησε is justified by the new photograph. At 126 Dr Hoogendijk suggests the tentative reading τὰ [π]ρόθετα νυκτὸς ἀδήλ[ου]? and rightly speculates that [.]ηχα.ον in 127 “must be a kind of water, stream, well.” I suggest restoring either [μ]ηχανήν or [μ]ήχανον. The latter is not attested, but would be the equivalent of μηχανικὸν ὄργανον; μηχανή would be a ‘water-wheel’, commonly used in Roman and Byzantine Egypt to pump water from the ground (cf. for instance *P. Oxy.* XXXIV 2730, 3th or 4th c.). I can find no parallel for the use of sheep’s blood for magical or medical purposes in Greek or Latin literature, but goat’s blood (αἰγὸς αἶμα) is attested in the magical papyri: *PGM* iv.2575f (in a δεινόν τι θυμίασμα to secure the cooperation of the moon),

natural history record instances of magical practices in which menstrual blood plays an essential part. Contact with menstrual blood was universally considered bad for vegetables and animals, and was seen as being adverse to fertility or even threatening their survival: Pliny (*HN* 28.78) refers to Cappadocian practices reported by Metrodorus of Scepsis (first century B.C.), and points out that all plants are contaminated by the proximity of a menstruating woman (19.176); even minerals were thought to be susceptible to corrosion by contact with women during their periods (7.63f, 28.79f). These alleged negative properties made menstrual blood all the more attractive to magicians. Columella, whose source was the treatise *On Antipathies* by Democritus of Abdera, mentions that the use of menstrual blood in recipes belonged to the domain of magic, or "Dardanian art" (10.357–62). Such recipes were part of Mediterranean folklore—it seems difficult to be more precise about the geographical origin of this material—and illustrate the attitude of rural populations toward menstrual blood. Considering that these charms were used to keep off vermin and hail, it is quite clear that they reflect a genuine fear of menstrual blood. Similar beliefs are occasionally found in various cultures, for instance in nineteenth-century Paris and Finland, and in contemporary Jamaica.¹⁵

In the context of ancient uterine magic, the use of menstrual blood in writing a spell can be explained in various ways. Pliny lists,

2644. Note that in the same passages, the (non-menstrual?) discharge of a dead virgin is called *ιχώρ παρθένου νεκρῶς* (for the meaning of *ιχώρ* see J. Jouanna and P. Bemont, *REA* 83 [1981] 197–209). The recipe for a (non-uterine) amulet is preserved in the same magical papyrus (iv.78–82): the spell was to be written on a pure leaf (of papyrus or any other material) with blood taken from the hand or foot of a pregnant woman: *φυλακτήριον τοῦ προκειμένου· γράψων εἰς χάρτην καθαρὸν αἵματι ἀπὸ χειρὸς ἢ ποδὸς γυναικὸς ἐγκύου τὸ προῦποκείμενον ὄνομα καὶ φέρει περὶ τὸν ἀριστερὸν βραχίονα λίνφ δήσας.*

¹⁵ *Geoponica* 12.8.5f 20.5, 25.2; 16.10.2; Colum. *Rust.* 10.357–62; 11.3.38, 50, 64; Plin. *HN* 7.63–67, 11.44, 17.266, 19.176, 28.77; Ael. *NA* 6.36; Palladius *Rust.* 1.35.3; and possibly Mart. *Epigr.* 4.64.16; Hopfner 90 (§373), 128 (§507), 236 (§848); H. J. Rose, "The Folklore of the *Geoponica*," *Folklore* 44 (1933) 57–90, esp. 72 n.25 (I owe this reference to to an anonymous referee); Victor Hugo, *Choses vues 1830–1846* (Paris 1972) 441, quoted by R. Schilling in the Budé edition of Pliny Book 7 (Paris 1977) 155; Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Paris 1970) 282ff, quoted by R. Martin in the Budé edition of Palladius Book 1 (Paris 1976) 159f For Jamaica, see H. Surovell, "Posse Power," *Penthouse* (August 1989) 42; and for a reverse usage in antiquity, H. I. Bell *et al.*, *ProcBritAcad* 17 (1931) 246.

among many magical properties attached to the menses, their alleged abortifacient and contraceptive virtues:

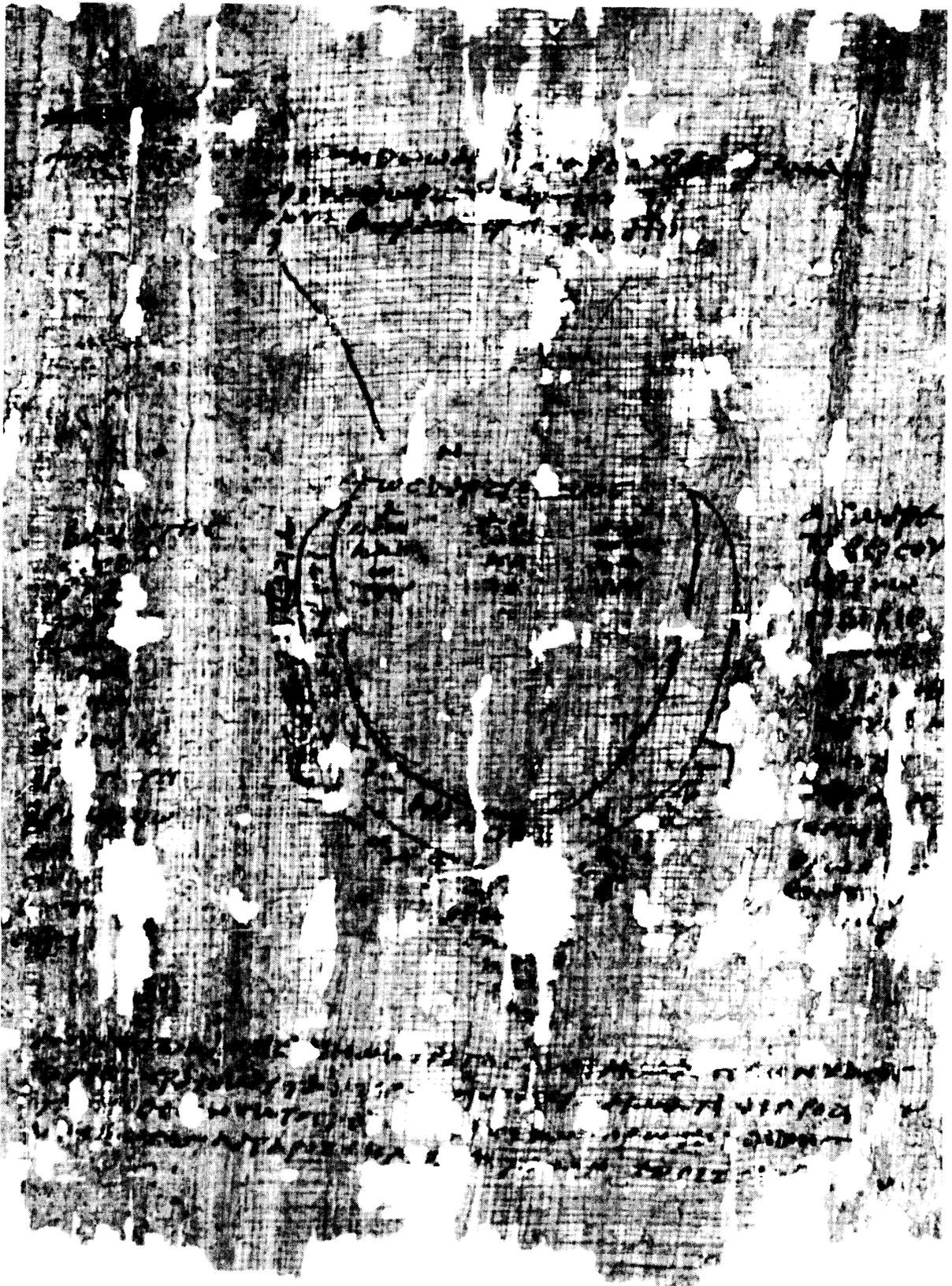
Not even women themselves are immune to the evil effects (of menstrual blood). A pregnant woman who smears it on her or merely steps over it will miscarry. Lais and Elephantis reported conflicting stories about abortifacients, such as charcoal of root of cabbage, myrtle, or tamarisk, extinguished by menstrual blood. They also told of female donkeys that remained barren as long as they were fed with grains of barley stained with menstrual blood. They were also the source of monstrous or contradictory pronouncements; the latter claimed that fertility was promoted by the very means that the former recommended for barrenness.¹⁶

Of related interest is a contraceptive recipe that called for bitter-vetch seeds to be soaked inside the genitalia of a menstruating woman and to be given to a frog before releasing it alive at the very spot where it had been captured. This ritual was supposed to be fully effective when combined with the wearing of a special amulet. Let us note that the frog, who shared its shape with the goddess Heqet, was associated with fertility in Egypt and was viewed as a symbol of the uterus.¹⁷

The efficacy of a spell for abortion or menorrhagia would be enhanced if it were written with a substance known for its abortifacient qualities, according to a basic principle of sympathetic magic. In addition, menstrual blood was thought to be indestructible, and

¹⁶ HN 28.80f: *ne ipsis quidem feminis malo suo (= eius sanguinis) inter se immunibus: abortus facit inlitu aut si omnino praegnans supergradiatur. quae Lais et Elephantis inter se contraria prodidere de abortivo carbone e radice brassicae vel myrti vel tamaricis in eo sanguine extincto, itemque asinas tot annis non concipere quot grana hordei contacta ederint, quaeque alia nuncupavere monstrifica aut inter ipsas pugnantia, cum haec fecunditatem fieri isdem modis quibus sterilitatem illa praenuntiaret, melius est non credere.* His source is possibly Dioscorides *De mater. med.* 2.79.2, who attributes to the menses contraceptive power: γυναικὸς δὲ τὸ ἐπιμήνιον περιαιλιφόμενον καὶ ὑπερβαινόμενον ἀσυλλήμπτους δοκεῖ ποιεῖν γυναῖκας.

¹⁷ PGM xxxvi.321–32 (4th c.): ἀσύνλημπτον, τὸ μόνον ἐν κόσμῳ· λαβὼν ὀρόβους, ὄσους ἐὰν θέλῃς πρὸς τὰ βούλει ἔτη, ἵνα μίνης ἀσύνλημπτος, βρέξον αὐτὰ εἰς τὰ καταμήνια τῆς γυναικὸς οὐσῆς ἐν ἀφέδρῳ, βρεξάτω αὐτὰ εἰς τὴν φύσιν ἑαυτῆς. καὶ λαβὼν βάτραχον ζῶντα βάλε εἰς τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ τοὺς ὀρόβους, ἵνα καταπίῃ αὐτούς, καὶ ἀπόλυσον τὸν βάτραχον ζῶντα, ὅθεν αὐτὸν ἔλαβ(ε)ς; =P. Oslo I 1 with an abundant commentary by S. Eitrem, and Betz 277 n.40. For the frog as a symbol of the uterus, cf. Barb 214 n.23. A frog is also used as medium in a curative spell against toothache (Marc. Emp. *De medicam.* 12.24): cf. J. Knobloch, "Ein lateinischer Zauberspruch in Marcellus Empiricus," *RhM* 132 (1989) 408f.



in particular fire-proof,¹⁸ which meant that even in the case of the destruction of the tablet, the spell would be saved in spite of the disappearance of its material support. Finally, Pliny says that menstrual blood applied on door posts would protect the inhabitants of a house from any magical interference. By extension, the use of menstrual blood on the tablet would have a counter-magical purpose to preserve the full effect of the spell.¹⁹

The spell preserved in *PGM* LXII.103–06 was to be recited at dusk and then buried in the vicinity of a stream (ῥοῦς) or of a sumac (ῥοῦς), the fruit of which was recognized to have some pharmacological applications in a set of cures for various gynecological ailments. Hippocrates recommends the use of sumac in fumigation, pessaries, or clysters in order to regulate the excess of bile in pregnant women, to strengthen and clean the womb, to treat white and red discharges, to fix semen, and to act as an emollient, astringent, and emmenagogue. Soranus of Ephesus and Aetius use it on contraceptive pessaries.²⁰ Theophrastus (*HP* 3.18.5) lists two varieties of sumac: the male is not productive, while the female is fruit-bearing. Pliny (*HN* 13.55) wrongly inverts these properties, but the point is that, in sympathetic magic, sumac could be used for antithetical purposes. The seed of the *Rhus erythrus* was thought to have astringent and cooling properties, and was used, according to Pliny (24.93), to check excessive menstruations. The association between menstruation and the sumac may be explained in several ways. Ancient folk medicine commonly attributed opposite properties to many substances, and the author of the spell obviously plays with the double meaning of the Greek word ῥοῦς ('flow, stream' and 'sumac'); further, since menstrual blood contains an anti-

¹⁸ Plin. *HN* 28.80, *ne igni quidem vincitur*.

¹⁹ 28.85: *id quoque convenit ... tactis omnino menstruo postibus inritas fieri Magorum artes, generis vanissimi*.

²⁰ Hippoc. *Mul.* 31.3 (treatment for excess of bile in pregnant women); 78.217f, 80.15f (as a component for a strengthening clyster to clean the womb); 117.6 (treatment for white discharge); 181.10f (to fix the semen); 195.2, 4 (fumigation for discharge); 196.16 (pessary for red discharge); *Nat.mul.* 32.82, 89 (purgative for the womb); 32.187, 189 (astringent); 33.6 (emollient clyster); 34.53 (fumigation); 103.4, 6 (fumigation); 109.60 (emmenagogue); cf. Theophr. *HP* 3.18.5; Dioscorides *De mater. med.* 1.108; Soranus *Gyn.* 1.62.1 (contraceptive pessary); Aetius 16.17 (pessary to make a woman barren); cf. M.-Th. Fontanille, *Avortement et contraception dans la médecine gréco-romaine* (Paris 1977) 145 and nos. 71, 78, 206, 344 of her pharmacopeia.

coagulant, the proximity of a hemostatic substance, such as sumac, was perhaps required to fix the blood with which the spell was written. One wonders to what extent ancient magical and medical practitioners were aware of this property of menstrual blood.

The only explicit aim of the spell is to open the womb and genitalia of a woman in order to let the menstrual flux out of her body. In appearance, the spell belongs to the category of curative magic, and would be used as a cure for amenorrhea. A detail in the last part of the text, though damaged, suggests that there is more to it. Line 126 (=105; quoted *supra* n.14) alludes to the woman as first offender (πρώτη ἠδίκησε), so that one suspects that the spell was used in a malevolent way. To cause menorrhagia could be harmful enough, but the true purpose of the spell is suggested by what we know of some ancient medical ideas about human reproduction. The Greek medical writers thought that a return of the menses or a menorrhagia would terminate a pregnancy. Thus their pharmacopeia includes many emmenagogic drugs and pessaries that were used on occasion to cause abortions.²¹ It seems plausible that this idea was shared by ancient magicians because most uterine amulets were made of hematite, a stone known for its styptic qualities, and these

²¹ Dean-Jones (*supra* n.3) ch. 4; Hippoc. *Aph.* 5.60f; Fontanille (*supra* n.20: 146) lists twenty different emmenagogues used in 163 of 413 recorded recipes. Interestingly enough, modern books promoting so-called self-help abortion contain lists of abortifacient plants, several of which are used indifferently to induce the periods and to decrease the menstrual flow: cf. S. Gage, *When Birth Control Fails. How to Abort Ourselves Safely* (Hollywood 1979); R. Chalker, *The Complete Cervical Cap Guide* (New York 1987). Whether or not abortifacients provoke an early return of the menses is still debated today. It seems that the effect of the morning-after pill, such as the Tetragynon, is to prevent the implantation of the fecundated ovum in the uterine tissue and may also delay or accelerate the menstrual cycle: cf. *Compendium suisse des médicaments* (Basel 1989) 1694. In the same way the RU 486 (mifepristone), an abortifacient pill devised a few years ago by E. Leroy-Beaulieu (CNRS) and Roussel-Uclaf, is a contra-gestive drug which combines the effects of an anti-hormone and of a prostaglandine (or quasi-hormone). The former stops the activity of progesterone which allows the implantation of the ovum in the uterus. The latter provokes the expulsion of the foetus by stimulating the contractions of the uterus: cf. *Science et vie* 845 (1988) 74. In neither case is it suggested that the fecundated ovum—or foetus—is expelled through a return of the menses. Recent experiment with mifepristone, performed on 2,115 women, has shown that the treatment provokes uterine bleeding of a mean duration of 8.9 days in 99.7% of the group, "whatever the outcome." Cf. L. Silvestre, et al., *New England Journal of Medicine* 322 no.10 (March 8, 1990) 645–48, esp. 646. In antiquity uterine bleeding might have been provoked by most abortifacient drugs and then confused with a returned of the menses. (I owe these references to Mr F. Jeanneret.)

amulets were supposed, among other things, to protect pregnant women against miscarriages.²²

The *πιττάκιον* on which the spell recorded in *PGM* LXII.103–06 was to be written could be a slip of papyrus or a tablet made of wood or various metals, lead in particular. On the basis of its aggressive purpose and of its form, one can place this spell in the category of the *defixiones* or curse tablets—though, surprisingly, none of this type has been discovered.²³ Such a curse would be used to deprive an enemy of progeny. As we assume that abortifacients were regularly used by women on themselves as a method of birth control, it does not seem unlikely that a woman would resort to such a spell for herself.

Besides causing the loss of a prospective child, abortifacient spells could be used for a different purpose. It was common practice among magicians to utilize some parts of the human body as components of powerful recipes (e.g. the liver of a corpse for a love potion, Hor. *Epod.* 5). The purity or monstrosity of the raw material were qualities considered instrumental in enhancing the efficacy of any recipe. Because of the stigma of pollution traditionally attached to the performance of sexual acts, the bodily parts and fluids of most adults were probably considered of inferior quality compared to those of chaste individuals who had met an untimely death (ἄωροι). In this context youngsters, both new-born and stillborn babies, and embryos played an important rôle in magic.²⁴ Whereas

²² Barb 215 n.37; Plin. *HN* 30.130, 36.151; Damigeron *De lapidibus* 1 (*Lapis Aetites*), 8 (*Lapis Exnebenus*), 31 (*Lapis Lyngurium*); *Orphei Lithica Kerygmata* 36 (Λίθος Ὀνοχίτης); Evax *De lapidibus* 1 (*Lapis Aetites*), 50 (*Lapis Sardo*), 55 (*Lapis Polyzonus*); cf. also the notes in R. Halleux and J. Schamp, edd., *Les lapidaires grecs* (Paris 1985); *Kyranides* 3.1.91–93 (Λίθος Ἀετίτης); cf. W. A. Krenkel, “*Erotica I: Der Abortus in der Antike*,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock* 20 (1971) 443–52, esp. 445 with additional references, and 450 with comment on “*Abortus durch Zauberei*”; and E. Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco-romano* (Milan 1971).

²³ Confirmed by personal communications from Professors D. R. Jordan, R. D. Kotansky, and M. Smith. Jordan cites an unpublished new reading of a first-century lead tablet from the Athenian Agora, a curse against thieves to cause sterility or barrenness: cf. “*A Survey of Greek Defixiones not Included in the Special Corpora*,” *GRBS* 26 (1985) 159 no. 21 (*SEG* XXX 326.23ff): κὲ μήτε αὐτοῖς γῆ βατή, μὴ θάλασσα [π]λωτή, μὴ βίου ὄνησις, μὴ τέκνων [ἐ]πίκτησις, ἀλλὰ ὦλη κὲ πανῶλη αὐτοὺς ἢ αὐτόν.

²⁴ See H. C. Youtie and O. M. Pearl *ad P. Mich.* VI 423–24.12f, pp.124f (cf. *infra*). On the use of human remains in ancient magic, cf. A.-M. Tupet, *La magie dans la poésie latine* I (Paris 1976) 82–91, 207f.

the extensive practice of infanticide and child-exposure must have facilitated the procurement of young children—dead or alive—for magical purposes, the supply of freshly aborted embryos must have remained scarce at all times and everywhere in the ancient world. The performance of the following ritual, described in a ‘slander spell’ to win the cooperation of the moon (Selene) in subjecting a woman to the power of the practitioner, was undoubtedly rare:

She, NN, is burning for you, Goddess, some dreadful incense and dappled goat’s fat, blood, and filth, the [non-]menstrual flow of virgin, dead, heart of one untimely dead, the magical material of dead dog, woman’s embryo ... and this is sacrilege. She placed them on your altar....²⁵

In addition, the art of divination took various forms, and some practitioners did not hesitate to seek information about the future by using foetuses in magical acts. The Etruscan seer Arruns relied on the monstrous fruits of barren wombs—not necessarily human—that he consumed in an unholy fire (Luc. 1.589–91). This ceremony resembles the one described above. The offering of a foetus was meant to propitiate gods or demons, who would then agree to answer specific questions or requests. Further, it was an accepted fact that embryos conveyed up-to-date information attached to their shape. Piso’s conspiracy in 65 was preceded by the ominous appearance of two-headed human and animal embryos in public places. For contemporaries this was the unmistakable sign of a forthcoming aborted coup (Tac. *Ann.* 15.47).

Most commonly, ancient magicians would resort to spiritualistic mediums in order to communicate with supernatural powers. A good medium was expected to participate in both life and death, a

²⁵ *PGM* iv.2574–91 (abridged): ἡ δεινά σοι θύει, θεά, δεινόν τι θυμίασμα· αἰγός τε ποικίλης στέαρ καὶ αἷμα καὶ μύσαγμα, ἰχῶρα παρθένου νεκρᾶς καὶ καρδίαν ἄωρου καὶ οὐσίαν νεκροῦ κυνός καὶ ἔμβρυον γυναικός ... —ἃ μὴ θέμις—τοῖς σοῖς ἔθηκε βωμοῖς (tr. O’Neil in Betz 85f). *PMG* iv.2643–74 presents roughly the same spell, but as a result of a confusion on the part of the scribe who compiled this papyrus (or its source), the human embryo is replaced by a dog’s (κύνειον ἔμβρυον); Lucan 6.558f describes the Thessalian witch Erichtho cutting open women’s wombs to deliver in an unnatural way babies that she then offers on a burning altar; Hopfner 104 (§423), 163 (§638), 170f (§§665f). The representation of such a ceremony is found in a Campanian wall painting: cf. H. Hubert, in *DarSag* 3 (1904) 1515 fig. 4784. The sacrifice of pregnant victims to Tellus, as a fertility rite, took place once a year in Rome during the festival called *Fordicidia* (April 15): cf. H. J. Rose, *OCD*² (1970) 444, with reference to *Ov. Fast.* 4.630ff and *Paus.* 2.11.4.

condition that bestowed on him or her a superior knowledge or power. Those who had recently died of unnatural (*i.e.*, violent) causes (βιαιοθάνατοι) and who had not been properly buried (ἄταφοι)—such as criminals executed on the cross or the gallows—had the right profile for the job, for they were expected to resent their fate and threaten both human and supernatural beings.²⁶ In 371/2 a certain Numerius, a military tribune, confessed to ripping open a live pregnant woman and using her offspring to stir up malevolent spirits of the underworld in order to learn about a possible change at the head of the Empire (Amm. Marc. 29.2.17). Foetuses and new-born children were thought to enjoy a special relationship with the underworld that enabled them to control, or to act as, powerful demons through the performance of magical rituals. An actual judicial case from Roman Egypt is recorded in a petition submitted to the *strategos* of the Arsinoite nome on 22 May 197. The writer Gemellus *alias* Horion, son of Gaius Apollinarius, from Antinoe, who owned some land in the village of Karanis, reported being harassed by two brothers who wanted to get possession of his property. After causing some damage to the crops in the fields, one of them, named Julius, accompanied by his wife and a third person, brought a βρέφος (embryo or new-born child) “intending to hem in [Gemellus’] cultivator with malice so that he should abandon his labor.” In response to this action, Gemellus brought along several village officials to witness the crime done to him. Then the trespassers again “threw the same βρέφος towards (him), intending to hem (him) in also with malice.” Once the crops had been carried away from Gemellus’ land, Julius “took the βρέφος away to his house.”²⁷ Although the whole story contains many obscurities, it seems that the use of a βρέφος had enabled Julius to prevent landowner, cultivator, and village officials from interfering with his illicit activities. The magical power attached to born or unborn offspring compares with that of menstrual blood in that both stem from the female body, a point that illustrates the fear

²⁶ Luc. 6.413–830; G. Luck, *Arcana Mundi* (Baltimore 1985) 165, 254f.

²⁷ *P. Mich.* VI 423/4.12–21: ἔχοντες βρέφος βουλόμενοι τὸν γεωργὸν μου φθῶνῳ περικλῖσαι ὥστε καταλείψει τὴν ἰδ[ί]αν γεωργίαν ... τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ προσ(σ)[έ]ριψάν μοι [τὸ] αὐτὸ βρέφος βουλόμενοι καὶ με φθῶνῳ περικλῖσαι ... τὸ βρέφος ὁ Ἰούλιος συνκομισάμενος; tr. Youtie and Pearl (*supra* n.24), who point out that φθῶνος commonly refers to black magic.

and loathing that women occasionally and more or less unconsciously inspired in men.²⁸

A second type of evidence for magical actions regarding the womb is concerned with birth. Just as people were worried about miscarriages (which implies the necessary loss of offspring), there was also concern about the length of pregnancy. Premature or delayed birth meant the risk of malformations and precarious health, if not death, for the child and considerable discomfort or worse for the mother. So far as I know, no spell aimed at ensuring a sufficiently long pregnancy has been preserved; but the *Geoponica* contains a spell to prevent a tree from casting its fruit prematurely: it consists of writing the text of Psalms 1.3 (in the Septuagint version) on some material and attaching the charm to the tree: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season."²⁹ A variant charm prescribes writing a Homeric verse (*Il.* 5.387): "in a bronze vessel he [Ares] had been bound for thirteen months."³⁰ Thus the aim of this spell is to make the tree retain its fruit until it is ripe. Insofar as a pregnant woman is in a similar position, it is possible to imagine a spell by which her womb would be closed until her foetus matured.

Such a spell could also be used in a harmful way. Apuleius (*Met.* 1.9f) tells the story of the Thessalian witch Meroe, who by uttering only one word (*unico verbo*) caused her lover's outraged and outspoken wife to remain pregnant for eight consecutive years by closing up her womb while allowing the foetus to continue to develop. Seeing this mischief, the people of the neighboring city sentenced the witch to be stoned to death, but she managed to escape her fate by locking up all the inhabitants in their houses for two days, so that they were forced to compromise and grant her immunity. Apuleius specifies that she obtained this magical result by securing the secret cooperation of malevolent gods through curses spoken on a grave. In both cases, she prevented exit from the womb and from houses, which had been unnaturally closed up

²⁸ Plin. *HN* 28.70: *quae ex mulierum corporibus traduntur, ad portentorum miracula accedunt, ut sileamus divisos membratim in scelera abortus, mensium piacula quaeque alia non obstetrices modo verum etiam ipsae meretrices prodidere.* This passage introduces a long section on the remedies whose components belong to the female body.

²⁹ Tr. Authorized Version; καὶ ἔσται ὡς τὸ ξύλον τὸ πεφυτευμένον παρὰ τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὑδάτων ὃ τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ δώσει ἐν καιρῷ αὐτοῦ.

³⁰ χαλκῆφ δ' ἐν κεράμφ δέδετο τρισκαίδεκα μῆνας. Cf. Rose (*supra* n.15) 67.

by a magical spell. Only the second spell involved supernatural beings explicitly, but one can surmise that the first worked in a similar way.³¹

Apuleius transmits neither the wording of these spells nor the names of the gods and demons. In comparative material, one notes that while the magical papyri preserve no examples of a locking spell, they do provide some reverse spells—for instance a fourth-century charm to open a door:

Take from a firstborn ram an umbilical cord that has not fallen to the ground, and after mixing in myrrh, apply it to the door bolts when you want to open a door, and say this spell, and you will open it immediately. Now this is the spell: Open up for me, open up for me, door bolt; be opened, be opened, door bolt, because I am Horus the Great, ARCHEPHRENEPSOU PHIRINX, son of Osiris and Isis. I want the godless Typhon to flee, immediately, immediately, quickly, quickly.³²

Another spell of a relatively late date (fifth century) and showing explicit Christian features was intended for childbearing: “Come out of your tomb, Christ is calling you. [Place] a potsherd on the right thigh.”³³ The introductory lines of the collection to which this

³¹ *unico verbo mutavit (etc.)... eadem amatoris sui uxorem, quod in eam dicacule probrum dixerat, iam in sarcina praegnationis obsepto utero et repigrato fetu perpetua praegnatione damnavit et, ut cuncti numerant, iam octo annorum onere misella illa velut elephantum paritura distenditur. quae cum subinde ac multi nocerentur, publicitus indignatio percrebuit statutumque, ut in eam die altera severissime saxorum iaculationis vindicaretur: quod consilium virtutibus cantionum antevortit et ... devotionibus sepulchralibus in scrobem procuratis ... cunctos in suis sibi domibus tacita numinum violentia clausit.* It is not certain that *unico verbo* applies to all the magical operations performed by Meroe in the passage.

³² *PGM* xxxvi.312–20: ἀνοιξίς θύρας· λαβὼν πρωτοτόκου κριοῦ ὀμφάλιον μὴ πεσὼν χαμαί, ζμυρνίσας ἔχε καί, ὅτι βούλη ἀνοιξίαι, πρόσφερε τοῖς κλίστροις λέγων τὸν λόγον τοῦτον, καὶ ἀνοίγεις εὐθέως. ἔστι δὲ ὁ λόγος· ΑΥΩΝ ΝΗΙ ΑΥΩΝ ΝΗΙ ΤΚΕΛΛΙ ἀνοίγηθι ἀνοίγηθι, κλειστρον, ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι Ὁρος ὁ μέγας ἀρχεφρενεψ φιριγγ υἱὸς τοῦ Ὁσίρεως καὶ τῆς Ἰσιδος. βούλωμαι δὲ φυγεῖν τὸν ἄθεον Τυφῶνα, ἦδη ἦδη ταχύ ταχύ; tr. R. F. Hock in Betz 277. The door is opened by Horus acting against Seth/Typhon who is presumably keeping it closed. The reverse situation is described in *Harris Magical Papyrus*, discussed by Ritner 216f, where Seth opens (=impregnates) and Horus closes the womb (=prevents the delivery) of the great goddesses Anat and Astarte.

³³ Maltomini (*supra* n.13) 65 no. 1.48ff: πρὸς γενοῦσαν· ἤξερθε ἡκ τοῦ μνεμίου σου Χριστός σε καλῖ. ὠστρακον δεξιῶ μερῶ (with commentary pp.81–84)= *PGM* cxxiii.a.50; tr. R. Kotansky in Betz 319. The name of Brimo appears in a circle drawn in the middle of the spell and is related to Hecate-Selene-Persephone.

last spell belongs contain several references to the moon and to the underworld. In the spell, the womb is compared to a tomb, perhaps in connection with the belief that resurrection, being a kind of rebirth, requires a womb.³⁴

Again, a Coptic magical text of the fifth century or later contains a birth spell summoning several archangels to the assistance of a parturient woman, to "split her right side, bring forth her child ... and bring out from under her some polluted blood and some baneful fluid."³⁵ The fear that pregnancies would not necessarily result in deliveries after a period of nine to ten months was common in classical antiquity. An inscription from Epidaurus, dedicated *ca* 320 B.C., commemorates the providential intervention of the god Asclepius in numerous cases involving various ailments: significantly the first two cases refer to long-awaited deliveries.³⁶

The third type of evidence pertaining to uterine magic is found in certain oaths and funerary imprecations. These documents contain curses requesting that any transgression of their provisions should cause, among other plagues, women to remain barren or to have difficult pregnancies resulting in the procreation of monstrous offspring. These maledictions are attested in various places and in different periods. One may cite, in chronological order, the Amphictyonic oath (early sixth century: Aeschin. 3.111); the oath allegedly sworn by the Greeks before the battle of Plataea in 479 and preserved on a stele from Acharnae (Tod II 204); the oath of Taurian Chersonesus (300–280: *Syll.*³ 360); the oaths of Dreros, Itanos, Axos, and Hierapytna on Crete (III/II B.C.);³⁷ and funerary inscriptions of Imperial date from Neocaesarea, Salamis on Cyprus,

³⁴ Barb 206, 230f nn.203–13. Uterine symbolism in grave-chambers and cinerary urns would repay special study; Cicero (*Leg.* 2.22.56) refers to the fetal position of corpses buried according to an old custom.

³⁵ W. H. Worrell, "Coptic Magical and Medical Texts," *Orientalia* n.s. 4 (1935) 5–13 (P.Mich. inv. 1190.12–24). I owe this reference to R. D. Kotansky. The text is unfortunately damaged in some places. A similar prayer ("incantation pour un accouchement") has been recognized in *PGM* v.459–89 by M. Philonenko, "Une prière magique au dieu créateur," *CRAI* (1985) 433–50, esp. 445f, with parallels in I.239f, II.123, XIII.807. Such prayers can be traced back to the time of the New Kingdom (XIXth Dynasty): cf. J. F. Borghouts, *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I* (Leiden 1971) 12f and 28f, with seven spells (nos. 28–34) to accelerate or facilitate deliveries; Ritner 214f. I have not seen A. Ermon, *Zaubersprüche für Mutter und Kind* (Berlin 1901).

³⁶ *IG* IV² 121.1–22, after five and three years respectively.

³⁷ *I.Cret.* I IX 1.85–89; II v 23; III III 5, IV 8.

and Halicarnassus.³⁸ Several Near Eastern parallels are preserved in some eighth-century B.C. Aramaic and Akkadian treaties,³⁹ and in the Old Testament the prophet Hosea calls for the doom of Israel in punishment for its idolatry:⁴⁰

Give them, O Lord: What wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.... Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb.

There is no sign of a direct connection between the Near Eastern curses and the Greek ones, because the two earliest Greek occurrences—a sixth-century Amphictionic oath and the oath allegedly sworn at Plataea, both preserved in fourth-century sources—stem from continental Greece, the later ones spreading eastward through Asia Minor and the southern Aegean area. We are probably seeing here a manifestation of common human experience that shows that ancient societies were sensitive to the fact that the barrenness of the soil, flocks, and women—all of which are usually found together in curses—would bring death and extinction of the race and thus represents the ultimate punishment.

III. Wombs and the Moon

Spells to cause barrenness, miscarriages, delayed deliveries, and monstrous births were thus part of the usual arsenal of ancient practitioners. The same magicians who built this arsenal probably devised defensive means to protect their clients or themselves against competitors' actions. Anticipated magical aggression was deflected with the help of apotropaic stone amulets. These are de-

³⁸ *SEG* XVIII 561.6–9, τούτωι μὴ πατρὶς οἰκοῖτο, μὴ γῆ καρπὸν ἐκφέρου, μὴ πλείοιτο θάλασσα, μὴ γυναῖκες τίκτοιεν κατὰ φύσιν, κακὸς δὲ κακῶς ἀπόλοιτο πᾶς τε αὐτὸς πρόριζος καὶ παῖδες παίδων καὶ γένος καὶ ὄνομα καὶ οἴκου ἐστία καὶ τάφοι πατέρων (cf. P. Moraux, *Une imprécation funéraire à Néocésarée* [=Biblio. archéol. et hist. de l'Inst. fr. d'Istanbul 4 (Istanbul 1959)] 20–41); *SEG* VI 802; *IGBM* IV 918.

³⁹ *ANET*³ 533 v.8, 534–41, 414ff, 435–39, 659–62. I owe these references to an anonymous referee for *GRBS*.

⁴⁰ LXX Ho. 9.14: δὸς αὐτοῖς, κύριε· τί δώσεις αὐτοῖς; δὸς αὐτοῖς μήτραν ἀτεκνοῦσαν καὶ μαστοὺς ξήρους. 9.16: ἐπόνεσεν Ἐφραϊμ τὰς ρίζας αὐτοῦ ἐξηράνθη, καρπὸν οὐκέτι μὴ ἐνέγκη· διότι καὶ ἐὰν γεννήσωσιν, ἀποκτενῶ τὰ ἐπιθυμήματα κοιλίας αὐτῶν.

scribed by the ancient lapidaries. Damigeron, Evax, the *Orphei Lithica Kerygmata*, and the *Kyranides* list many stones thought to be endowed with obstetrical virtues, such as aetite, exnebenus, orite, gagate, lyngurium, galactite, siderite, onuchite, sardonium, and polyzonus.⁴¹ According to the lapidaries, these stones were supposed to be effective by nature, with no additional design or legend, and without any form of consecration. They were worn on the right arm or either thigh, or tied to the belt, or rubbed against and introduced into the vagina, or used in fumigations and potions. Although it is rarely specified by the lapidaries,⁴² the archaeological evidence suggests that the stones were usually engraved with designs aimed at enhancing their magical efficacy.

The so-called Gnostic (Graeco-Egyptian) uterine amulets belong to various types.⁴³ The most common type shows on the obverse a

⁴¹ Damigeron *De lapidibus* 1, 8, 16, 20, 31, 34; *Orphei Lithica Kerygmata* 16, 36; Evax *De lapidibus* 1, 50, 55; *Kyranides* 1.24; 3.1.91–93; 6.9. W. Kroll, "Astrologisches," *Philologus* 57 (1898) 122–33, esp. 131, published three recipes for obstetrical (non-mineral) amulets, the first and the third to ensure easy and quick deliveries (with cautioning against risks of prolapsus of the womb), the second to protect pregnant women from miscarriages: (1) πρὸς δυστοκοῦσαν γυναῖκα· γράφε εἰς χάρτην καὶ περιᾶσον τὸν δεξιὸν μηρόν· ἅμα δὲ τέκει, ἔπαρον τὸ φύλλον, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὴν μήτραν καταφέρει. (2) πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐκτῶσαι· ρίζαν κισσοῦ λαβὼν εἰσσονο (= εἰς ὄνομα?) αὐτῆς περιᾶπτ(αι) τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς. (3) ὄκυτοκι (ca 7 letters) ρίζαν τ(?) ὠδίνου πτρίβε τοὺς πόδας (καὶ) παραχρῆμα ἐκβάλλει εἴτε ζῶν εἴτε τεθνηκός.

⁴² Galen *De simpl. med. temp. ac fac.* 9.19 (Kühn XII 207) and Damigeron-Evax (preface). A notable exception is found in *Orphei Lithica Kerygmata* 36.1–3: λίθος ὄνουχίτης ἕτερος μέλας τῇ ὄψει διόλου. οὗτος ὠφέλιμος ταῖς ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσαις καὶ ταῖς θηλαζούσαις. γλύφεται δὲ ἐν αὐτῷ Χνουβίος ἔχων κεφαλὰς τρεῖς. Halleux and Schamp in the Budé edition (1985) state (171 n.1) that Chnoubis, as a three-formed deity, is not attested on ancient gems. It is suggested, however, that the imagery was perhaps influenced by three-formed Hecate or Cerberus, cf. K. W. Wirbelauer, *Antike Lapidarien* (Würzburg 1937) 40. Chnoubis is usually represented as a lion-headed serpent and was a "syncretistic combination of the Egyptian creator god Chnoum, the serpent Kneph, and the star knm," cf. Betz glossary s.v. "Chnough/Chnoubis." The ram-headed Chnoum is the dominant figure on uterine amulets because of his rôle in shaping the body of children: cf. L. Otto, *LdÄ* 1 (1974) 952f; Ritner 215 n.43, 217 n.60. On the Chnoubis gems see H. M. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition* (Atlanta 1985) esp. 74–108. I owe this reference to R. D. Kotansky.

⁴³ Described by Delatte; Bonner 79–94 nos. 126, 129–47; Delatte and Derchain 245–58 nos. 336–63, cf. 84f, 142ff; D. Wortmann, "Neue magische Gemmen," *Bonn*

vessel-shaped symbol of the uterus placed mouth downwards above a key, surmounted by one or several figures, and surrounded by a snake swallowing its own tail (*ouroboros*). It also comprises various symbols, vowels, and formulas, the most common of these being the “Iao” and the “Soroor” formulas.⁴⁴ The reverse usually contains the legend “Ororiouth” which is thought to be the chief name of a demon, protector of the womb.⁴⁵

The stones were sometimes engraved with symbols, e.g. an octopus-shaped womb or a scarab.⁴⁶ The figures have been identified as Egyptian deities, such as Isis, Osiris, Harpocrates, Douamoutef (?), Nephthys, Anubis, Thoeris, Seth/Typhon, Chnoubis/Chnum, Bes, and Thoth. All of them were endowed with special protective functions related to women and children (Bonner 85f). One also finds a heterogenous list of names inscribed on uterine amulets. These names refer to supernatural beings. Some are Egyptian (Chuch, Hathor, Chnoubis, Thoth). Others are Jewish (Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Michael, Gabriel, Ouriel, Souriel, Raphael, Isigael, Adamel, Abrasax, Semisilam), Babylonian (Ereschigal or Ereshkigal, Neboutosoualeth?), or of otherwise unknown origin (Aktiophis, Aroriphrasi=Aphrodite?).

The study of the various elements found on uterine amulets has led modern scholars to look for astrological connections, and two schools have emerged. Delatte thought that most of these elements were related to the sun. In contrast, Bonner saw a reference to the moon, on the basis of the identification of the group Aktiophi(s)-

Jbb 175 (1975) 71f nos. 10–11; Ritner; Philipp 111–13 nos.181–86, who dates them to the second and third century on internal and stylistic grounds (*cf.* 15–20).

⁴⁴ Σοροορ-μερφεργαρβαρ-μαφριουριγγ: *cf.* Ritner 218 with n.69.

⁴⁵ Delatte 80f. Bonner (85) identifies it as “a special demonic power concerned with the generative functions of women.” Philipp (111 no. 181) suggests translating this formula “Licht der Lichter, uranfängliches Licht,” and sees a connection between this formula and the octopus as a solar symbol (112 no. 184). L. Barry (“Notice sur quelques pierres gnostiques,” *ASAE* 7 [1906] 241–49, esp. 241–45) provides the text of an interesting uterine amulet (haematite) with the names of several protectors of the womb (god, guard, saviour, or demon): (rev.) μή[τ]ρας θηλυκῆς θεὸς αβανβαω μήτρας γυναικῶν θεὸς ιαη αυη αιυ αιη ιεο νοε ιηα υια ηυα ηαια μήτρας γυναικῶν κύριος Ορωριουθ ανβαχ μήτρας γυναικῶν φύλα[ξ], ιαη ιεο νοε ιαω αιο ιηι οηι αωα ιηω νοε ιηαι μήτρας γυναικῶν σωτήρ, ἀμουν νο ... ιμαχ ακμη; (obv.) [μήτ]ρας γυναικῶν δαίμων, ὁμοροφ ... ὁμοροφώτης. R. D. Kotansky brought this text to my attention.

⁴⁶ Bonner nos.139 and 140 (reverse); Philipp 112, no.184.

Ereschigal-Neboutosoualeth with Hecate-Selene-Artemis and Persephone, for instance in love-spells of attraction.⁴⁷ In my opinion, Bonner's interpretation makes more sense than Delatte's in a Graeco-Roman context, where the moon is traditionally connected with childbearing. The Greek moon-goddess, often assimilated to Demeter, Persephone, Aphrodite, Eileithuia, and Prothuraia in Greek literature and inscriptions, is called λοχίας ("aiding birth"), λυσίζωνος ("loosening the belt"), μογοστόκος ("of birth-pangs"), σωδία ("saving in travail"), ὠδίων ἐπαρωγός ("helping in childbirth"), and ὠκυλόχεια ("giving a quick birth").⁴⁸ On the other hand, Pliny (*HN* 7.42) reports that pregnant women and infants after birth are most at risk at the time of the full moon, because it is inimical to them.

Assuming that the figures engraved on the amulets have been properly identified, we find that there is a conspicuous absence of other Egyptian deities traditionally associated with the protection of pregnancy and childbirth, such as Heqet, Nechet, Renenutet, Mafdet, Menhet, and Meschenet.⁴⁹ This is perhaps a sign of the twilight into which these deities faded during the Graeco-Roman period, their functions having been taken over by other deities who thereafter underwent changes in their astrological attributes. Some gods, like Osiris, Harpocrates/Horus, Chnoubis/Chnum, and Bes, were thus considered in an earlier period as sun gods, and this view

⁴⁷ Delatte 86; Bonner no. 141; *PGM* iv.2441–2621 and *passim*. Cf. also Bonner 197, 199. On the lunar aspect of the triad Hecate-Selene-Artemis, cf. Σ Eur. *Med.* 397: 'Εκάτην· ὅταν μὲν ἢ τριῶν ἡμερῶν, Σελήνη ὀνομάζεται, ὅταν δὲ ἕξ, "Αρτεμις, ὅταν δὲ δεκαπέντε, 'Εκάτη. Cf. H. G. Gundel, *Weltbild und Astrologie in den griechischen Zauberpapyri* (=Münch Beitr 53 [1968]) 25ff; for the moon as a fourfold deity, Gundel 28; T. Hopfner, "Hekate-Selene-Artemis und Verwandte in den griechischen Zauberpapyri und auf den Fluchtafeln," in *Pisciculi: Studien ... Fr.-J. Dölger*, edd. T. Klauser and A. Ruecker (=Antike und Christentum Erg.bd. 1 [Münster 1939]) 125–45. Cf. D. R. Jordan, "A Love Charm with Verses," *ZPE* 72 (1988) 245–59.

⁴⁸ Λοχίας: *PGM* iv.2285 (Selene-Mene); *supra* n.11 (Macedonia, Isis); λοχεία: Pl. *Th.* 149b (Artemis); *IG* IX.2 141–42 (Thebae Phthiotidis, Artemis); *Hymn. Orph.* 9.6 (Selene), 36.3 (Artemis); Plut. *Mor.* 659A (Artemis/Eileithuia/Selene); λυσίζωνος: *Hymn. Orph.* 2.7 (Prothuraia), 36.5 (Artemis); Theoc. 17.60 (Eileithuia); Cornutus *De natura deorum* 73.8ff (Eileithuia); Lib. *Ep.* 371.4.2 (Artemis); μογοστόκος: *Il.* 11.270, 16.187, 19.103 (Eileithuia); Theoc. 27.30 (Artemis); σωδία: *IG* VII 3407 (Chaeronea, Artemis); ὠδίων ἐπαρωγός: *Hymn. Orph.* 2.2 (Prothuraia), 36.4 (Artemis); ὠκυλόχεια: *Hymn. Orph.* 2.4 (Prothuraia), 36.8 (Artemis).

⁴⁹ W. Westendorf, *LdÄ* 2 (1977) 461 s.v. "Geburt."

is occasionally still echoed in the magical papyri, where for instance, Osiris is identified with Helios (*PGM* IV.2342). Plutarch, however, records in the *De Iside et Osiride* that the Egyptians

locate the power of Osiris in the moon and say that Isis, as the creative principle, has intercourse with him. For this reason they also call the moon the mother of the world and they believe her nature to be both male and female since she is filled and made pregnant by the sun, while she herself in turn projects and disseminates procreative elements in the air. For Typhonic destructiveness does not always prevail.⁵⁰

This passage shows the contamination of two traditions, the one retaining the old association of Osiris with the sun, and the other adopting his subsequent rôle as a lunar god subject to the destructive attacks of Typhon, who in turn had become a solar god “warming and withering things that grow and bloom” (367D). Typhon is said to be responsible for all diseases and confusion, such as “bad seasons, imperfect coalescence of air, eclipses of the sun, and disappearances of the moon, which are in the manner of sallies and rebellions” (*Mor.* 371B).

In his argument for the importance of the sun in the protection of the womb, Delatte rested his case on the solar attributes of Bes, Horus, Osiris, Chnoubis, the tail-devouring snake οὐροβόρος, and the texts of two amulets. One has been quoted above (n.7): “Fasten the womb of so-and-so in the right place, O (you who raise) the disk of the sun.” As we have seen, its lunar character is not to be doubted. The other text admittedly has a solar connotation: “I invoke you, who illuminate the whole world and who rekindle those (beings, animals, or foetuses) who are in the course of pregnancy (or close to becoming pregnant).” While the use of the masculine points to Helios rather than Selene, nothing indicates that the amulet bearing this text is in fact a uterine amulet, as we have no information about its design and fabric.⁵¹ Still, the growing importance of the cult of the sun throughout the Roman Empire in the first three centuries of the Christian era might explain the presence of solar references in a domain traditionally reserved for lunar influences. And the snake ἀκρουροβόρος does appear in a

⁵⁰ *Mor.* 368c (tr. Griffiths). Cf. *supra* n.8.

⁵¹ Delatte 86, referring to an amulet of Berlin (“Cabinet de Berlin 9.77”): ἐπικαλοῦμαί σε, τὸν περιλάμποντα πάντα [*sic*] τὴν οἰκουμένην καὶ ἀναζωπυροῦντα τὰ ὑπὸ τὴν κήσιν Ἀβλαθαναλβ Ἀβρανειαω Ἀβρῖαιω, etc.

lunar spell (*PGM* VII.896f) in conjunction with Ereschigal. Finally, Delatte wrongly saw an invocation to the sun in the formula MORMOR/OTOKON/BAI, which appears in *PGM* IX.14 in connection with the god BAINCHOOCH, whom he considered a solar god. BAINCHOOCH, however, is the spirit (soul) of darkness (Betz 333); furthermore, the formula MORMORONTOKOUMBAL appears in a spell to Selene-Artemis-Hecate in *PGM* IV.2755f and is thought to represent the divine womb (Barb 201).

The lunar connotation of uterine amulets is reinforced by the symbols shown on them, in particular that of the key. In a gynecological context, the key serves to open the womb to allow conception and delivery, and to lock it to avoid efflux of semen, menorrhagia, menstruation, miscarriage, and wandering of the womb. In a magical context, the key is a symbol of the moon (*PGM* IV.2293) and an attribute of the ruler of the underworld (LXX.9–11). It serves to lock the moon in place to prevent other magicians from making her descend (an operation that would increase her malevolent influence) or undergo eclipse (thereby impairing her protective qualities).⁵² Uterine amulets contain other minor lunar symbols, such as a torch, by which the goddess can be controlled (VII.780ff).

Thus uterine amulets, interpreted with the help of the magical papyri, to some extent corroborate the evidence that both scientific writers and laymen in the Graeco-Roman world believed that the menstrual cycle and the reproductive functions of women were governed by the moon. They attributed this influence to what they called the principle of sympathy.⁵³ The belief that the moon influences human fertility is of course widely attested in various

⁵² See Ritner 221; the key as a lunar symbol is also attested in *PGM* IV.2335, VII.785. On the descent of the moon as a result of a magical trick, cf. I.123f and the treatment of the question by S. Lunais, *Recherches sur la lune I* (=EPRO 72 [Leiden 1979]) 222–33, and Tupet (*supra* n.24) 92–103.

⁵³ Arist. *HA* 582a35–b3; *Gen.An.* 738a18–22, 767a1–13, 777b16ff; Chrysippus, *SVF* II no. 748; Plut. *Mor.* 282b–d, 658f–659a, 939f–940a; Soranus *Gyn.* 1.21, quoting Empedocles and Diocles of Carystus; Gal. *De diebus decret.* 3.2 (Kühn IX 903); Eus. *Praep.Evang.* 3.11; Procl. *In Remp.* 2, 34, 57; *Anth.Gr.* 6.201, 202, 271–74; cf. Cl. Préaux, *La lune dans la pensée grecque* (=MemAcBelg 61.4 [Brussels 1973]) 88–91; Cic. *Nat.D.* 2.68, 119; Varro *Ling.* 5.69; Ov. *Fast.* 2.451f; Hor. *Carm.* 3.22.3; Sen. *Ben.* 4.23.1; Cornutus *De natura deorum* 73.15ff; Plin. *HN* 7.38, 20.1; cf. Lunais (*supra* n.52) 76f and *passim*. On the influence of the moon and the concept of sympathy-antipathy, cf. Lloyd (*supra* n.2) 83 nn.91f, 171, 178–81; Dean-Jones (*supra* n.2) 185 n.28, 187.

cultures, in ancient times as well as in modern pre-industrial societies.⁵⁴ It is worth noting that the moon is considered either as a male deity—in which case he is responsible for impregnating women—or as a female deity who facilitates conception and child-bearing by moistening the womb and the vagina.

Whether the interrelationship between the moon and the reproductive functions of women is real or not is still disputed. The lack of statistics makes it difficult to determine whether concentrations of miscarriages and births occur at regular times during the lunar month. Some modern medical authors, however, acknowledge the association of the lunar phases with the menstrual cycle, the time of ovulation, the intensity of sexual desire, and childbirth. As to the last, Katzeff cites several experiments conducted in the United States during the 1950's and 1960's, which suggested that the frequency of childbirth *does* vary from one lunar quarter to another. Peaks seemed to occur at full moons, but the authors of these experiments seem to have been unable to reach agreement on the relative frequency of childbirth at other lunar phases. More births occurred during the waning than during the waxing of the moon,⁵⁵ but these conclusions should be critically reviewed. On the basis of modern experiments,

a firm claim cannot be made for the reality of the lunar effect, for the effect is not large compared to the probable error. It is near the boundary of statistical significance. If this lunar effect is accepted as real, it

⁵⁴ See P. Katzeff, *Full Moons* (Secaucus 1981) 39–46 (“Fertility”), 151–63 (“Reproduction”).

⁵⁵ Cf. Katzeff (*supra* n.54) 153–56; A. and W. Menaker, “Lunar Periodicity in Human Reproduction: A Likely Unit of Biological Time,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 77 (1959) 905–14, esp. 910: “The evidence presented here shows a small but statistically significant synodic lunar (or sun-moon) influence on the human birth rate and, perhaps, on the ovulation rate”; E. Andrews, “Moon Talk: The Cyclic Periodicity of Postoperative Hemorrhage,” *Journal of the Florida Medical Association* 46 (1960) 1362–66; W. Menaker, “Lunar Periodicity with Reference to Live Births,” *AJOG* 98 (1967) 1002–04; M. Osley, D. Summer-ville, and L. B. Borst, “Natality and the Moon,” *AJOG* 117 (1973) 413–15; W. B. Cutler, “Lunar and Menstrual Phase Locking,” *AJOG* 137 (1980) 834–39, esp. 838: the test “demonstrated an association between an exogenous influence (the lunar phase) and menses onset. This suggests that a real phenomenon exists.... Menstrual cycles similar in length to the lunar cycle occurred predominantly in the light half-cycle of the lunar period.... Therefore, it might be considered that a natural rhythm of electromagnetic radiation has its origin in the lunar cycle, and may be reflected in phase-locking of the human menstrual cycle.”

should represent a cultural minimum. Greater lunar effects may then be expected in cultures without electricity, where the moon provides the principal nighttime illumination.⁵⁶

The influence of the full moon upon the reproductive functions of women has been attributed to an overproduction of serotonin (a neurohormone thought to cause abortion) due to an increase in positive ionization.⁵⁷ The lack of firm evidence means that such 'scientific' explanations are likely to meet with widespread skepticism.

IV. Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have discussed some aspects of uterine magic in order to demonstrate its importance in classical antiquity. The abundance and diversity of the material, and the perennial character of the practices and mentalities it illuminates, demonstrate the centrality of the problem of human reproduction in ancient societies. Often women seem to have been mere bystanders or objects, the real focus of interest being the potential offspring and, ultimately, the survival of the group.

Ancient practitioners received and developed a homogeneous conceptual framework in which the various components of uterine magic found their place. They considered the uterus as an independent entity, which had to be stabilized in a specific place, and which could be opened and closed at will, in order to assist or to prevent the performance of its natural functions.

Uterine magic is above all sympathetic magic. It was expected to work through the principle that similar things affect each other because of their vicinity in space and time: a spell buried near a stream would bring forth the menstrual flux (*supra* n.9); the smell of a lamp just put out would cause an abortion (Plin. *HN* 7.43); sitting with crossed legs in the presence of a pregnant woman would prevent her from giving birth;⁵⁸ and the loosening of a girdle would provide

⁵⁶ Osley *et al.* (*supra* n.55) 415, who uncritically assume that the moon's effect is from illumination.

⁵⁷ F. Soyka, *The Ion Effect* (New York 1977) esp. 70f, 137f, with references to the researches of F. G. Sulman, "The Role of Serotonin in Gynecology and Obstetrics," *The Hebrew Pharmacist* 14 (n.d.): *non vidi*.

⁵⁸ Cf. the legend of Alcmene giving birth to Hercules, after Hera delayed her delivery with the cooperation of Eileithuia (her sister) and the Pharmaciae: Ov.

an easy delivery.⁵⁹ Uterine magic borrows from folk medicine, demonology, theology, and astrology. It follows a few guidelines dictated by the observation of natural phenomena, such as the lunar periodicity of menstruation and the relationship between menstrual cycle and fertility.

What is perhaps most remarkable is that, concerning (a) menstrual regulation as an abortifacient method and (b) the influence of the moon on the reproductive system, we do not seem to have reached a much higher level of knowledge; the reason for this may be ascribed to a shift of interest connected with the fact that we no longer—or perhaps not yet—need menstrual regulation to perform a relatively safe abortion, and that little is left to the moon in controlling the time of conception and delivery. What seems to have been a central concern in the life of women in antiquity has become obsolete as a result of scientific progress.⁶⁰

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Met. 9.295ff; Plin. *HN* 28.59; Ant. Lib. *Met.* 29, following Nicander; Paus. 9.11.3 with J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias' Description of Greece V* (London 1898) 45f, including comparative material.

⁵⁹ *Supra* n.47 s.v. λυσίζωμος, to which can be added Hyperides fr.67 (ed. Jensen); Callim. *Del.* 209; Oppian *Cyneg.* 3.56; Pind. *Ol.* 6.39; Σ Ap. Rhod. 1.288.

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