

CHAPTER VI

MEDICAL MAGIC III

THE CURSE OF EVE

THERE is a large group of obviously magical amulets that present, amid many variations, one constant feature, a very curious one. It has the appearance of a large vessel occupying the center or, more frequently, the lower third of the field. It looks like a big-bellied pot, which in almost all the known specimens has the mouth downward. Sometimes it is represented as almost globular, sometimes it is a more or less flattened spheroid, and again its outline is sometimes a broad oval. A short neck is often, but not always, indicated; but it never has a base or foot — a point worth noting, since the only kind of vessel made with a broad bottom and without a foot would be a cooking pot or cauldron.¹

This vessel has several peculiarities. From the highest point of its up-turned bottom a horizontal or slightly curving line or streamer extends outward on each side to the limit of the field. In many specimens two shorter straight or slightly wavy lines extend horizontally or at a slight downward slant from each side of the neck. Below the mouth of the vessel, and of equal horizontal extent with it, is a parallelogram, usually rather narrow, crossed by several vertical bars so that it looks like a grating; and connecting with the bottom line of this parallelogram is something that closely resembles the crank of a winch. It has a fairly long arm and a horizontal grip or else a knoblike handle. In the upper part of the field, standing on the long horizontal streamers or even on the vessel itself, are two or more deities — usually three or four — among whom, on different specimens, one may recognize Isis, Harpocrates, Osiris, Anubis (the last two regularly in mummy form), Chnoubis, Nephthys, Bes, and occasionally other deities. In a great majority of the specimens the design is accompanied by the inscription *Ορωριουθ*, usually cut on the reverse of the stone, only rarely on the obverse.

This description, which must, of course, be supplemented by the illustrations, gives an adequate idea of the great majority of the amulets belonging to this group (D. 129-143). The design is simplified in the smaller and cheaper specimens, especially by omitting the deities in the upper field; sometimes nothing but the characteristic vessel remains. On the other hand, there are a few elaborate specimens which contain added elements; these give useful help to the understanding of the design.

¹ Besides the illustrations in this work, the reader may examine the numerous drawings published by Matter (ed. of 1828), Pl. II C, 3-9, and by H. Koehler, *Mém. Acad. St.-Petersbourg*, Ser. 6, 3 (1836), plate facing p. 34; also the phototypes in the *Southesk Collection*, I, Pl. 14; De Ridder 3463-3464, Pl. 29; Barry in *Ann. du serv.*, 7, Pls. 1-2; Delatte, *Musée Belge*, 18 (1914), Pl. 3.

There is no type among all these magical amulets which has so puzzled the archaeologists as this one has. Consequently the mere rehearsal of the suggested interpretations is a string of bizarre fancies. It is usually a waste of time to go over examples of mistaken ingenuity, but some of these false explanations have persisted down to our time, and still need to be corrected; and, furthermore, the history of the problem is so curious that it may warrant spending a little time on it.

Strangely enough, the first recorded approach to an understanding of this type was right, although, paradoxical as it may seem, the interpretation was set forth in connection with a stupid forgery, not a genuine specimen. It appears in some letters exchanged between Nicholas Claude Fabri de Peiresc and Peter Paul Rubens in the year 1623.² Both the scholar and the painter were keenly interested in antiquities, especially coins and gems, and, like other amateurs of their time, both men had a taste for items that some modern collectors call *curiosa* — a taste which led them to accept, with uncritical eagerness, some obvious counterfeits as genuine productions of later antiquity. In a letter of July 27 Peiresc tells Rubens that he is sending him four gems, which he begs him to accept as a present.³ More or less complete descriptions in this letter and the preceding one (July 20)⁴ make it clear that three of these intaglios bore phallic subjects. To another he refers as an "intaglio d'amethysta con la vulva deificata et revestita delle ale di farfalla."⁵ Other passages in their correspondence make it plain that Peiresc uses the word *vulva* in the ancient sense, i.e. as a synonym for uterus. Replying from Antwerp on August 3 Rubens acknowledges the gift of the gems, accepts Peiresc's interpretation of the amethyst, and, fortunately, draws on the margin of his letter a little sketch of the main design, which enables us to form an idea of it.⁶ The fact that the vessel rests upon an altar and has wings attached to it marks it as a forgery, because not one of the many genuine uterine amulets has these characteristics. But it is also clear that the forger had used a genuine specimen as a pattern, modifying it according to his ignorant fancy; for the principal object conforms fairly closely to the shape most commonly shown on ancient gems of this class.

In his next letter (August 10) Peiresc refers again to the design in question, saying that in his collection of "Gnostic" gems there are several that show the same object, but never with the wings. He further interprets the lines or bands projecting from it as the ligaments of the uterus.⁷ A more careful comparison of the stone that he presented to Rubens with those in his own collection might perhaps have shown him the spurious character of the former; but he seems to have been singularly unsuspecting, although certain incredible

² These letters were published in Volume III of *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie*, etc., edited by Rooses and Ruelens (Antwerp, 1887-1909). In the following notes references to this work will be limited to the page number of the Italian text (Peiresc and Rubens wrote to each other in that language), followed by the page number of the corresponding French version in parentheses.

³ P. 210 (213).

⁴ P. 203 (205-206).

⁵ Pp. 209-210 (213).

⁶ P. 216 (218).

⁷ P. 233 (236-237).

designs on the plates of Chiflet and Capello show clearly enough that spurious gems were no rarity at that period. It is evident, however, that Peiresc interpreted the peculiarly shaped vessel as a representation of the uterus, and his actual words are worth recording: "... Parecchie volte si vede scolpita la vulva nella medesima forma che sta in questo taglio, cioè come una borza posta sotto sopra, ma però senza quelle ale di papilione o di mosca, le quali io non ho mai visto se non in questo intaglio solo che mi ricordi." A little farther on he adds that he has always conjectured "che que' raggietti dei lati siano i nervi, cotiledoni, o ligamenti della vulva." Another conjecture concerning a different detail, the bars or grating usually seen below the mysterious vessel, is erroneous and not worth repeating. It only remains to note that Peiresc seems to have called the organ "divine" merely because on the amethyst forgery it was shown resting on an altar.⁸

We shall see in due course that several amulets of this type bear inscriptions giving more than a hint of their purpose. One of these has been known so long that it may conceivably have come to the attention of Peiresc. Its present whereabouts are unknown, but it formerly belonged to the library of Sainte Geneviève in Paris; it seems, however, not to have found its way to the Cabinet de Médailles, as some other gems of that collection did.⁹ It was first published by Du Molinet with some slight and pardonable inaccuracies in his illustration.¹⁰ A figure of the Anubis mummy, so often shown on such stones, is given the beak of a bird, and the inscription surrounding the obverse is probably not well copied; but it is near the rim of the stone, where most amulets of this kind, particularly when cut from the usual haematite, are somewhat abraded. In other respects the obverse is a fairly normal specimen of the type and needs no further discussion. But the reverse is inscribed *τάσσον τήν μήτραν τῆς δείνα εἰς τὸν ἴδιον τόπον ὁ τὸν κύκλον τοῦ ἡλείου*, a sentence which requires comment.

The genuineness of this inscription has been quite unjustifiably impugned; the only excuse for the suspicion is that the skeptics could not have known those peculiarities of the later Greek language which are now familiar to all papyrologists, and particularly to those who have read magical papyri. It

⁸ Perhaps also because of an inscription on the stone, if the gem sent to Rubens was the same as that described by Peiresc in his letter of July 20 (p. 203 [206]). But there are difficulties. The stone described on July 20 is "di pietra sanguigna," that described on July 27 is called amethyst; yet both are spoken of as third in a group of four, the number presented to Rubens, and if Peiresc had at hand in Paris two stones with the uterus design, he would surely have mentioned both. The fact that Rubens sketched only the central feature of the design, which chanced to interest him, proves nothing. He had no time to draw both obverse and reverse with all details. I incline to think that the stones are the same, and that the inconsistency concerning the material is due to a slip on Peiresc's part. At any rate, there is no reason to think that in calling the object "divine" Peiresc was influenced by a memory of Irenaeus (1, 28, 9, ed. Harvey), who says that the Cainite heretics called Hystera the maker of heaven and earth.

⁹ To me it seems certain that the stone illustrated by Du Molinet (see the next note) is the same as one figured by Koehler (note 14 below) as No. 19 on his plate. Koehler says it was then in the possession of Prince Radziwill. The differences between the two cuts can be explained by some slight "improvements" made by Du Molinet's engraver, and by the indistinctness of the inscription, which, as I suspect, neither illustrator read correctly.

¹⁰ Claude Du Molinet, *Le Cabinet de la bibliothèque de Sainte Geneviève* (1692), I, Pl. 29, 1, and p. 126.

means "Set the womb of So-and-So in its proper place, thou who (liftest up) the disk of the sun." *τάσσον* is an irregular and vulgar substitute for *τάξον*. The use of the phrase *τῆς δέινα* shows that the amulet was placed in the maker's stock for sale to any woman, not ordered for an individual customer. The buyer would, of course, substitute her own name in repeating the prayer. I would supply the word *ἐξαίρων* after the article *ὁ*, because *ὁ ἐξαίρων τὸν κύκλον τοῦ ἡλίου* is a phrase attested no less than three times in magical invocations.¹¹ Thus the sentence, as even Du Molinet saw, is clearly a charm or prayer to rid the woman who wore the amulet of the suffering incident to uterine displacement. A much longer charm for the same purpose, to be written on a lamella of tin and tied on with threads of seven colors, may be read in a London magical papyrus.¹²

Du Molinet's matter-of-fact explanation of the inscription on his gem was rejected by Matter in his *Histoire critique du gnosticisme*.¹³ Obsessed as always by his belief that these amuletic designs concealed an exalted, mystical meaning, Matter held that the scenes represented a *psychostasia* or weighing of souls in the Egyptian Hades. This fanciful notion seems to have been suggested by the balanced position of some of the deities standing on the horizontal lines in the upper field. The vessel in the lower part of the design he dubbed the "Vase of Sins," an absurd name which has been brought down to our own times by the uncritical acquiescence of museum curators. Within the last ten years some of the most important collections of such amulets still bore labels written in accordance with Matter's hallucination.

In 1836 H. Koehler published in the *Memoirs of the St. Petersburg Academy* an essay on a letter of Rubens to Peiresc (the one of August 3, 1623), the purpose of which was to elucidate the class of amulets that we are here examining.¹⁴ Rightly rejecting Matter's notions about them, he wrongly attacked the interpretation of Peiresc, which he might have treated more tolerantly had he seen all the pertinent letters of Peiresc and Rubens instead of the single one that was then accessible. Lacking the context, he misinterpreted some allusions in Rubens' letter, and made wild and mistaken guesses about certain personal matters which Peiresc's previous letters set in clear light. The antiquary Chaduc had incurred Peiresc's displeasure by some churlish behavior — he had refused to give Peiresc an impression of one of his gems, though Peiresc would have returned the courtesy — and Peiresc had reported the incident to Rubens. Koehler rightly perceived that the amethyst presented to Rubens must have been a forgery, and he jumped to the conclusion that it had been made at Chaduc's orders and put in Peiresc's way, with the hint that the design represented the deified matrix. He also suggested, without a particle of evidence, that the uterine amulet published

¹¹ PGM IV, 1324-1326; VII, 300, 367-368. *ἐξαίρων* is to be preferred to *ἐξαίρων*. Preisendanz vacillates between the two.

¹² PGM VII, 260-271. The organ is adjured: *στάθητι καὶ μένοις ἐν χώροις ἰδίοις*.

¹³ Ed. of 1828, III, 51-53; Pl. II C, 3-9.

¹⁴ "Erläuterung eines von Peter Paul Rubens an Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc gerichteten Dankschreibens," *Mém. Acad. St.-Petersbourg*, Ser. 6, 3, 1-34, especially 11-13 and 18-24.

by Du Molinet had formerly been in Chaduc's possession, and that the important inscription on its reverse was forged by Chaduc to support his interpretation of the design on its obverse face. The whole combination of conjectures is without foundation and may now be ignored.

Unacceptable also is Koehler's own theory about the meaning of our design. Emphasizing the divinity of the Nile, he holds that the vessel is really a waterpot, a symbol of the sacred stream. According to Koehler, it is a vessel such as those that were fastened to the water wheel, that contrivance for irrigating Egyptian soil which has been used from ancient times even down to the present day. A single simple objection suffices to dispose of this theory. The earthen pots used on the water wheel must have a distinct foot, for they are fastened to the frame of the wheel by cords tied tight round both the neck and the foot of each vessel; but, as has been noted already, the vessels shown on the "pot amulets," though they vary not a little in form, are all alike in never having a foot. It is unfortunate that Drexler, whose knowledge of the works dealing with magical amulets was, and still is, unrivaled, should have lent his authority, and that of Roscher's *Lexicon*, to Koehler's mistaken notion,¹⁵ for the title "Nilotic Vessel" vies with Matter's "Vase of Sins" on the labels in our museums.

Before passing to the evidence that definitely establishes the meaning of these stones, we may note a few other curious attempts to explain, or at least to describe, the design.

Zoega, who found several stones of this type in the collection of Cardinal Borgia, says, after describing the vessel minutely, that it is placed "over a sort of stove or furnace (*fornello*) made of vertical bars," which are perhaps to be turned or lifted with the aid of the crank handle at one side.¹⁶ A. Vincent took the object to be a pneumatic organ, in which the capacious vessel served as the wind chest and the crank handle helped to force in the air.¹⁷ C. W. King seems to have vacillated between two interpretations.¹⁸ In one place he recognizes in the mysterious pot the breast-shaped vessel which Apuleius describes as carried by a priest in the procession of Isis;¹⁹ yet he seems to approve Koehler's idea that the vessel shown on the amulets is a waterpot of the kind fixed upon irrigation wheels. Later, however, he accepts the natural interpretation of that inscription on the reverse of the Sainte Geneviève amulet, but without perceiving that what he calls "the udder-shaped vase" is actually meant for the uterus itself. Lord Southesk deserves credit for rejecting Koehler's interpretation, and holding firmly to the view that the "mystic vase" represents the human matrix.²⁰

We owe it to the learning and keen perception of A. Delatte that the common-sense view of these once mysterious amulets has been definitely

¹⁵ W. Drexler, article "Isis" in Roscher, II, 1, 465.

¹⁶ *Museo Borgiano*, p. 462, 17.

¹⁷ A. Vincent, *Mém. Soc. Ant. de France* (1850), p. 4.

¹⁸ King, *Gnostics*, pp. 110-111, 300.

¹⁹ *Apul. Met.* 11, 10 *ad fin.*: "aureum vasculum in modum papillae rutundatum, de quo lacte libabat."

²⁰ *Cat. Southesk Collection*, I, 160 (N 33).

established; and the most cogent proofs of it that are used here have been drawn from his article, though it has been possible to supplement them materially and to correct one or two minor details of his work.²¹ Delatte recognized the importance of the unjustly suspected amulet published by Du Molinet, and corroborated its evidence by other significant inscriptions. One of the Athenian amulets published by him (No. 33) has on its reverse side, in addition to the usual *Ορωριουθ, Ιαω, Σαβαωθ*, one or two other magical words, and a palindrome. Then follow the words *στάλητι* (for *στάληθι*) *μήτρα*.²² Another example of the type has *στάλητι* without *μήτρα* (No. 34). The passive of *στέλλω* must mean here "be contracted," that is, return to the normal condition after the dilatation caused by pregnancy or the ordinary periodic function.²³

A curious development of this command is inscribed on a stone in the Cairo Museum.²⁴ Barry, who published it, read ΑΤΑΛΑΕΗCOPWΠΙΟVΘΕΙΜΗΤΙΜΗΓΑΜΓΙCΕΤVΦΩΝ. This is arranged in two circles, and Barry unfortunately began with the inner, although spiral inscriptions read from the outside to the center as often as or oftener than the reverse. The right reading is almost certainly *στάλητι μήτρα* (correctly read by Delatte) *μή σε Τυφών καταλάβη Ορωριουθ*, "Contract, womb, lest Typhon seize upon you."²⁵ The last word is added merely as a name of power to enforce the charm. The kappa of *καταλάβη*, which was missed by both Barry and Delatte, is to be seen on the plate; it is in the outer circle between the sigma of *στάλητι* and the nu of *Τυφών*; all that follows the kappa is in the inner circle. It should be observed that the figure on the obverse, standing on the vessel, is not Anubis, as Barry thought, but the ass-headed Set, as we might expect from the reference to Typhon in the inscription.

An amulet in the collection of Mr. Joseph Brummer (D. 140) confirms the reading of the inscription on the Cairo stone. Its obverse calls for little remark; the uterine symbol is flattish, and the "key" lacks the usual upward stroke for the handle, being a mere horizontal projection. On the reverse an easily legible spiral inscription reads *Ορωριουθ Σαβαωθ στάλητι μήτρα μή σε Τυφών καταλάβη*. It encloses a scarab with extended wings, but with the head of a crowned hawk; below it is a uterine symbol of another kind, which will be discussed later. It roughly resembles an octopus, with

²¹ A. Delatte, *Musée Belge*, 18 (1914), 75-88. This chapter, "La Clef de la matrice," is one of the subdivisions of the author's series of studies on Greek magic. For the complete list see *Musée Belge*, 26, 252, n. 1. The amulets published by Delatte for the first time belong to the National Museum in Athens; a few others, which had been briefly described by Svoronos, belong to the Numismatic Museum.

²² Delatte, *op. cit.*, p. 76. It is unnecessary to assume, as he does (p. 82), that *στάλητι* is a corruption of *στάθητι*.

²³ In medical language *στέλλω* evidently meant to exercise an astringent, contracting, or reducing influence upon swollen or inflamed tissues; cf. Diosc. 5, 135, *στέλλει δὲ καὶ οὖλα*.

²⁴ Barry, *Ann. du serv.*, 7 (1906), 246, No. 3; Delatte, *op. cit.*, p. 80, where Barry's stone is mentioned by an oversight as No. 4.

²⁵ In an effort to check the text I made an inquiry some years ago of the officials of the Cairo Museum, hoping to obtain a new photograph or at least a new reading of the inscription; but the stone had been temporarily misplaced and could not be found. I hope that it has since reappeared and that some archaeologist may examine it again.

tentacles extending downwards. The Fouquet stone to be mentioned in the next paragraph has a similar reverse design, except that in this instance the scarab seems to have the head of a cynocephalus.

Another inscription adduced by Delatte is even more important because it enables us to understand the mysterious yet almost always present word *Ορωριουθ*. A gem belonging to the Fouquet collection bears a long invocation to the demon or spirit that guards the womb — whether one demon called by various names or several distinct beings is not certain.²⁶ There is no need to repeat the whole text here; the words *μήτρας γυναικῶν κύριος Ορωριουθ Αυβαχ* not only identify Ororiouth as a special demonic power concerned with the generative functions of women, but also show that this whole class of amulets, one of the most numerous of all, was intended for the relief of ailments peculiar to the female sex. There is also some evidence that the name Ororiouth might be applied to the organ itself; this extension of its use seems to be attested by the Syrian stone published by Jalabert and Mouterde, and cited below for another purpose.

Delatte's most significant contribution to the understanding of this type is not concerned with the inscriptions, nor with the vessel, for there others had at least pointed the way. But seeing that the curious crank handle, in combination with the bars of the gratinglike object at the mouth of the vessel, is nothing but a schematic representation of a large key, he was the first to bring this point into a significant relation with the rest of the design.²⁷ The symbolism of the key in connection with either the promotion or the prevention of conception can be easily understood, and certain idiomatic expressions in various languages make it clear enough. Delatte cites a medieval Greek text which prescribes the use of a key in a charm intended to prevent conception, or, perhaps more probably, to insure that no rival shall have access to the woman on whom the spell is laid; and since his work came out Eitrem has published a much older text wherein the name *φυσικλείδιον* is given to a formula which lays claim to the power of making a woman accessible to the user of the charm, but to no other.²⁸

We may therefore treat it as definitely proved that the vessel shown on these amulets is a conventionalized representation of the uterus, and that the lines proceeding from its top represent the Fallopian tubes, the others the ligaments that hold the organ in place. The various deities shown in connection with the design are to be regarded just as in other amulets; they exercise control over the department of human life to which the amulet ministers. In some cases the appropriateness of the individual deities is obvious. Isis as a guardian of women and Harpocrates as a divine infant are naturally associated with the functions of reproduction, and the comical dwarf Bes is known to have been regarded, even from dynastic times, as a

²⁶ Barry, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-242, Pl. IIA; Delatte, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁷ Lenormant (as quoted by Vincent, *Mém. Soc. Ant. de France* [1850], p. 5, n. 1) had recognized the key many years before, but seems to have written nothing on the subject.

²⁸ P. Oslo, I, No. 1, 283-294.

protector of children. The goddess Thueris, who sometimes appears among the deities in the upper field, was apparently a guardian of pregnant and nursing women.²⁹ Other gods are present only because of their general powers of protection and help.

We may now add a few pieces of evidence that corroborate Delatte's interpretation. Jalabert and Mouterde have published an inscription carved on the reverse of an amulet marked by its design as belonging to this class: *κατάσχεσ τήν μήτραν Μαξείμας ἧς ἔτεκεν*.³⁰ The text is slightly emended, but this is certainly what the engraver intended. *κατάσχεσ*, "check," "restrain," suggests that Maxima's complaint was the same as that of the woman who was healed by the touch of Jesus' garment.³¹

The significance of the key in this type is emphasized by several gems in which a deity is touching it or manipulating it. The most striking example of this is a stone in my possession, a fine red carnelian clouded with white, one of the most perfectly preserved of its kind (D. 141). The uterine symbol is here shown without the serpentine appendages that usually extend from its top, probably because the young Harpocrates is sitting on the vessel. He has one leg extended, the other bent and drawn up under him, just as he is often shown sitting on a lotus flower. His left hand rests upon the knobbed handle of the great key, as if he were about to turn it. The inscriptions are unusually elaborate; on the obverse is *Ακτιωφι Ερεσχιγαλ Νεβουτοσουαληθ*, followed by the seven vowels. The three names are often found, singly or combined, in the magical papyri. Ereschigal is properly the name of the Babylonian goddess of the underworld, to whom Persephone approximately corresponds,³² but in the magical papyri, where syncretism has gone so far as to fuse most of the goddesses together, it is given to others as well. Aktiophis appears as a moon-goddess in the great Paris magical papyrus, and a little later in the same text the same deity is addressed by all three of these names, Aktiophi Ereschigal Neboutosoualeth.³³ The invocation that follows brings together as one entity Artemis, Persephone, Selene, Aphrodite, and Hekate. The same names are applied to Hekate-Persephone in another place, to Aphrodite in still another.³⁴ On the reverse of the gem, after Oriouth we find the palindrome *αεμειναεβαρωθερρεθωραβεανιεμια*, followed by some characters and a group of vowels. Delatte noted that the palindrome is used in invoking Typhon, and we have already seen that that god plays a part in the mythology of this type.³⁵ In some noteworthy specimens of the

²⁹ See Erman, p. 147.

³⁰ *Inscr. gr. et lat. de la Syrie*, I, 121, No. 222.

³¹ It is strange that the name of Maxima's mother does not appear. If the stone was not broken at that point, one wonders whether, since there was not room on the face, the name could have been scratched on the edge of the stone and overlooked by the editors. I found a name so placed on an amulet in the British Museum, to which we shall return later (p. 105).

³² *PGM IV*, 337, identifies Ereschigal with Koure Persephone.

³³ *PGM IV*, 2474, 2484 f. It is not easy to see why these three names should be included in an invocation to Set-Typhon (*PGM XIV*, 23) as part of his *ἀθέτηκόν ὄνομα*.

³⁴ *PGM IV*, 2749 f., 2913.

³⁵ Delatte, *op. cit.*, pp. 80, 87. He cites *PGM IV*, 197; add *XIV*, 24, where the formula is abbreviated.

class an ass-headed deity stands on the symbol, and is evidently meant for Set-Typhon.³⁶

There are other examples also which represent a deity as touching the key of the uterus. A good specimen in the University collection shows four deities above — an unidentified goddess, the Anubis mummy, and two winged goddesses in the usual attitude of Isis and Nephthys in attendance upon Osiris. Below, at the right, is seated a ram-headed figure, resting his right hand on the large knobbed handle of the key.³⁷ A similar position is occupied, on one of the Southesk stones, by a deity who apparently has the head of an ass, that is, Set; but this being touches the base of the vessel or one of the bars or wards of the key. Something that looks like the handle of the key is to be seen on the opposite side of the design, but the illustration does not make all details clear.³⁸ On one of the Athenian amulets published by Delatte, a ram-headed (or hawk-headed) figure, human, I think, not simian, as Delatte says, kneels at the lower right, on the same side with the handle of the key, but seems to be touching, not the handle, but the stem of the key from which the wards project.³⁹ Mr. Seyrig has in his collection an unusual design which represents an enthroned deity, ram-headed and crowned with a sun disk, holding out on his right hand the uterine symbol with the key distinctly shown.⁴⁰ Over it sits a tiny figure of Harpocrates. Fronting the enthroned god stands a female figure, hands raised with palms outward in a gesture of adoration or benediction.

The last five specimens all seem to be directed towards control of the organ, but the purpose for which that control is to be exercised is not made clear. It might be to check any morbid condition, to prevent conception, or to favor it and facilitate parturition. Evidence that all those ends might be sought by magical means can be gathered from the papyri.

At this point attention may be called to a very curious stone which, in my opinion, belongs here, although a different view has been expressed by the scholar who first made it known. It is illustrated by satisfactory line drawings in Mr. Seyrig's "Invidiae Medici."⁴¹ The reverse, which it is convenient to examine first, presents a combination of elements that is apparently unique. The lower half of the field is occupied by what seems to be an altar of very unusual form. Its main part is a truncated pyramid, and upon that rests a crescent-shaped structure which may, perhaps, represent schematically the upper surface of the altar with high horns at the corners. If, as is likely, the stone is of Syrian manufacture, that may account for this feature of the design. Nothing like it is to be found on the numerous specimens, kindred in purpose, that follow the Egyptian pattern heretofore discussed. Over this altar, if such it is, but not resting upon it, is a vessel of oval outline, slightly

³⁶ Barry, *Ann. du serv.*, 7, Pl. 1, 3 (following p. 288); *Southesk* N 43, Pl. 14, formerly in the Montigny collection, and surely identical with No. 9 on Koehler's plate.

³⁷ D. 142. ³⁸ N 44, Pl. 14.

³⁹ Delatte, *op. cit.*, p. 75, No. 33 (Pl. 3, 9 — lowest row, second from the left).

⁴⁰ D. 143. The head might also be taken for that of a hawk; it is hard to be sure of details in such minute work. ⁴¹ *Berytus*, 1, 3-4; D. 144 (from a photograph).

gathered in at the neck, and closely corresponding in shape to some of the uterine symbols previously treated; but this has its mouth upward, which is unusual.⁴² On each side of the vessel is a snake, its head approaching the lip of the vessel. Still higher on the stone is a disk with eight radii — whether a wheel or a conventionalized sun disk is uncertain. On the base of the altar Ιαω is inscribed, and below it in the exergue are the seven vowels. There is also an inscription encircling all but the lower third of the field, but apart from Σαβαωθ at the right it is unintelligible.

The greater part of the obverse side is covered with an inscription in what magicians called a pterygoma, that is in the form of a wing, made by repeating the first line, dropping the initial letter at each repetition, until only the final letter remains at the lowest point of the pattern. The words of the first line, which because of its length the engraver had to finish in the space above, are διψάς Τάνταλε αίμα πιε. The word διψάς, not found in earlier literature, is a feminine adjective; but doubtless by association with ἐχιδνα it came to be used as a substantive, a name for a kind of viper. This reptile's bite was believed to cause intolerable thirst, and, according to popular belief, it was the reptile's own thirst, imparted through its fangs, which tortured its victim. There was a folk tale that explained how the dipsas came to suffer from eternal thirst.⁴³ The inscription, as its editor observed, is a puerile charm; but, dissenting from his interpretation, I take it to be an injunction addressed to the thirst-snake, "Drink up the blood"; and the uterine symbol on the reverse with a snake on each side shows that the whole amulet is intended for the cure of menorrhagia. The use of the vocative Τάνταλε addressed to the snake is very strange, but it must imply "thirsty as Tantalus"; "thirst-snake, a Tantalus for thirst," or the like.⁴⁴ It is only a curious coincidence that Lucian (*De dipsadibus* 6) says he had heard of a tomb stele for a man killed by the bite of a dipsas, and on it the sufferer was represented as artists represent Tantalus, standing in a pool and dipping up water, while some women hurry towards him and pour jars of water over him.

At the lower left of the obverse, in the space left by the diminishing pterygoma, there is a warrior standing to front, with his head turned to left. He wears a helmet and kilt, his right hand holds his spear upright, the left rests on the rim of his shield, which is just behind him. Over his head is a stylized thunderbolt. It does not seem possible to connect this warlike figure with the Tantalus of the myth, and I should call it Ares. We have already seen how such divine or heroic figures as Ares, Perseus, and Herakles were used in magic because they were formidable enough to drive away pain and disease;

⁴² But not unique; compare the interesting stone in the Fouquet collection (Barry, *Ann. du serv.*, 7, Pl. 1 (opposite p. 288), A). A specimen in my own collection, not otherwise remarkable, has the object in the same position (D. 135).

⁴³ The principal source is Nicander *Ther.* 334-358, with the scholia. Aelian *N. A.* 6, 51, and Lucian *De dipsadibus* 4 ff., doubtless draw from Nicander.

⁴⁴ I cannot accept Seyrig's rendering, "Tantale assoiffé bois le sang," because I do not see how διψάς, as a feminine adjective, can be taken with Tantalus. Others, however, may find a difficulty in my assumption that Τάνταλος can stand in descriptive apposition with διψάς as the dominant substantive.

Ares drives away pains in the liver, Perseus chases gout, Herakles cures colic. In the myths the war god does not wield the thunderbolt, it is true; but that is probably thrown in as a mere token of divine power. It is easier to accept the armed figure as a known symbol of divine help against disease, and to acknowledge that the inscription takes no cognizance of him, than to interpret this warrior as Tantalus against all probability.⁴⁵

There is another amulet that was certainly intended to check the flow of blood and may have been designed to relieve menorrhagia. It belonged to Carl Schmidt and was described by Preisendanz, whose article unfortunately provides no illustration.⁴⁶ The stone is a triangular haematite with an anchor on the obverse face; below it the inscription *στῆσον τὸ αἷμα*, and disposed around it, several magical names—Iao eulamo eulamo eulamo mormorotokoumbai. The reverse shows three deities, each standing on a sphinx. The god in the middle has a lion's head, the one on the right a jackal's (Anubis), the third a serpent's.

A stone in the British Museum gives a striking proof that the symbol on these amulets is actually intended to suggest and even to represent the appearance of the human uterus.⁴⁷ This is a pendant, apparently of steatite, a broad oval which was worn in a horizontal position, as there is a projection pierced for a cord at the top of the long side. Above are four divine figures: from left to right, the mummy of Anubis, the lion-headed Chnoubis snake, another uncertain mummified figure, probably meant for Osiris, and last Isis, her right hand raised, the left lowered and apparently holding a wand or torch (?) downward. They stand on the curving appendages of the organ, which in this example bears no resemblance to a pottery vessel, but is a broad oval, compressed vertically, and corrugated, evidently to show that it is of fleshy tissue. Within the main organ there is a smaller approximately oval outline, which indicates that it is hollow. It rests upon five vertical bars, but the handle of the key is not shown. Four lines slanting downward from the base of the organ are meant for ligaments. The representation is, of course, anatomically inaccurate; but there can be no doubt that the engraver was trying to represent something made of body tissue, not an object of pottery or metal. The letters *Iaw* are in the field, also a small serpentlike S-curve behind Isis. On the reverse are the seven vowels and the words *Ωρωριουθ Iaw*. The stone is unusually well cut by an engraver who shows a marked tendency to angular stylizing in the triangular bodies of the mummies and in the inscribed letters.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ As Seyrig does (p. 4).

⁴⁶ *Phil. Woch.*, 1932, pp. 101-108, in the special numbers (35-38) dedicated to Franz Poland. My remarks in *Byz.-neugriech. Jahrb.*, 9 (1932), 375-378, are in need of correction. I now believe the Michigan amulet mentioned on page 376 to be a forgery, though ultimately derived from a genuine piece, perhaps through Montfaucon's illustration of the type. The curious object on B. M. 56241 (p. 377 of my article) is still unexplained. I do not now think that it could represent an anchor.

⁴⁷ D. 136.

⁴⁸ No. N 42 of the Southesk collection may be a work of the same lapidary. There is the same stylizing, and the uterus was rendered in a similar manner, though the illustration, which is not very clear, leaves this point in doubt.

On a few uterine amulets the stylization of the organ has taken a turn that differs not a little from the predominating potlike type. In my collection there is a specimen, unique in my experience, which is made of metal, apparently iron with a slight admixture of zinc. The design on the obverse is not remarkable. Over the vessel stands a female figure without distinguishing attributes, probably Isis; at the left, and considerably below her, stands the deformed Bes; at the right, behind Isis, a quadruped apparently meant for a lion.⁴⁹ Several of the vowels are in the field, but the sequence is not complete. The design is surrounded as usual by the ouroboros. On the reverse, above, there is a scarabaeus beetle, below, an ovoid object from the bottom of which several wavy lines extend. The effect is rather like a conventionalized octopus. An inscription of some length encircles the field almost twice, but because of the wearing away of the metal and the confusion caused by adventitious scratches and stains, some parts are illegible. It contained the name Ororiouth followed by an aberrant form of the Sthombaule formula, which is usually associated with the solar divinities; see Chapter XIV. The same octopuslike treatment of the uterine symbol, again coupled with the scarabaeus, is to be seen on the reverse of a remarkable red jasper in the British Museum which I believe to be a birth amulet, and which must be discussed in detail a little later.⁵⁰ It is also well illustrated by the amulet belonging to the Fouquet collection, which Barry published with inadequate comment.⁵¹ He described the octopuslike symbol as a solar disk from which four serpents are emerging below.

This way of representing the uterine symbol is of special importance because it helps to explain the strange Byzantine development of the same object into a center representing a human face, from which serpents radiate in every direction, their heads at the circumference of the wheel-like design. The effect is that of a crudely executed Medusa; but it is almost certainly derived from the "octopus" version of the uterine symbol. Several examples of this Medusa design are known; since they have been treated by various scholars it suffices to refer to their writings.⁵² All the known specimens seem to be of medieval Byzantine workmanship, and most if not all of them are inscribed with a charm, complete or abbreviated, which is addressed to the *ὄστέρα* and has for its purpose the assuaging of pains or diseases affecting it. A curious feature of the incantation is that it represents the organ as an angry, restless beast whose rage must be quieted by the magical spell.

This notion of the womb as a thing having a life of its own, and moving

⁴⁹ Compare the somewhat similar gem in Athens, published by Delatte, *Musée Belge*, 18, 75, No. 33, Pl. 3, No. 10.

⁵⁰ B. M. 56389 (D. 145). Compare also B. M. 48024, which has above the uterine symbol Harpocrates seated on the head of Bes, also Isis, and a lion; on the reverse, an eagle-headed scarab beetle and below it an "octopus."

⁵¹ *Ann. du serv.*, 7, Pl. 2 A.

⁵² The best treatment of these amulets is that by W. Drexler, *Philol.*, 58 (1899), 594-608; see also W. Froehner, *Philol., Suppl. Bd.*, 5, 42-44; Schlumberger, *REG* 5 (1892), 89-92. Illustrations will be found in Chiffet, Pl. 17, 70; Montfaucon, II, 2, Pl. 169; Kopp, *Pal. Crit.*, IV, 330-331; King, *Gnostics*, p. 20, fig. 1; p. 57, fig. 3.

freely within the body, is not only deeply rooted in the beliefs of certain peoples, but is also very old.⁵³ It evidently underlies the language used by Plato in the *Timaeus* (91 b-d), a passage to which the commentators, who treat the words as figurative or merely fanciful, have not done justice. Hippocrates explains hysterical disorders as due to violent movements of the organ.⁵⁴ Soranus expressly denies the doctrine that the uterus has an independent life (*ζῶον μὲν οὐκ οὔσα, καθὼς ἐνίοις ἔδοξε*), but Aretaeus, writing in the same century, evidently held it. After commenting upon the movements of the uterus, he says, *καὶ τὸ σύμπαν ἐν τῇ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐστὶ ἢ ὑστέρῃ ὀκκοῖον τι ζῶον ἐν ζῶῳ*.⁵⁵ Given the belief that the organ had an independent life, it was natural that popular fancy should liken it to some animal. In the Byzantine uterine charms, which are inscribed on the Medusalike amulets, the womb is said to "coil like a snake, roar like a lion, hiss like a dragon," and it is adjured to "sleep like a lamb."⁵⁶ We have seen that on a certain number of much earlier stone amulets the uterus is given a form like that of an octopus, and that design may actually represent an ignorant idea of the organ.

It is possible that this octopus form and the Medusa type, which is probably its descendant, are the sources from which an extremely bizarre modern idea of the uterus is derived. Investigators of the customs and superstitions of the southern Tyrol have found in churches, especially those dedicated to St. Vitus and St. Leonard, certain votive offerings deposited in gratitude for deliverance from uterine maladies.⁵⁷ These offerings, which are called *Gebärmutter* or *Bärmutter*, can best be compared to the form of a gigantic cocklebur or clotbur (the bur of various species of *Xanthium*), that is, an ovoid or ellipsoid body covered with prickles. The Tyrolean specimens may be made of wood, iron, or wax; the central nucleus, which is spheroidal or ellipsoidal, is set with numerous spikes. Nobody has explained whence the people of Tyrol derived this idea of the female organ; but it seems possible that it came by way of the upper Balkan countries from Byzantine Greece. As to the choice of so strange a form, one can only suggest that the rounded organ was felt by suffering women to be a center from which stabbing pains radiated in various directions, and that this gave rise to the amulet types of the octopus and the snake-encircled Medusa, and also to the prickly, burlike *Gebärmutter* of the southern Tyrol.

There remain a few noteworthy stones which further confirm the interpretation of these uterine amulets by using the figure of a woman in the design. Here we may begin with a well-preserved example in the Royal Ontario

⁵³ See R. Andree, *Votive und Weihegaben des katholischen Volkes in Süddeutschland* (1904), p. 128.

⁵⁴ See, for examples, the opening words of *Gynaec.* 2, 123, and several sections following (Littré, VIII, 266 ff.).

⁵⁵ Soranus *Gynaec.* 1, 8 (ed. Ilberg); Aretaeus *S. A.* 2, 11, 1 (ed. Hude). With the words of Aretaeus compare *PGM VII*, 267 f., where the womb is adjured *μηδὲ ἀποδήξῃς εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ὡς κίων*.

⁵⁶ Drexler, *Philol.*, 58, 594-597.

⁵⁷ W. Hein, "Die Opferbärmutter als Stachelkugel," *Zeitschr. des Vereins für Volkskunde*, 10 (1900), 420-426; Andree, *Votive und Weihegaben* . . . , pp. 136-138.

Museum of Archaeology at Toronto.⁵⁸ The reverse calls for no comment; the ouroboros encircles a well-cut "vessel" with the key as usual, but no divinities are shown. The obverse shows a naked woman standing, or rather, in a position between standing and squatting; the legs are wide apart, and the knees are turned outward and bent almost to right angles. Her swollen body may indicate pregnancy, and her hands are pressed to the sides of her abdomen. The posture suggests violent straining to relieve pain. Round the edge runs an inscription, *ουρωρερμιθαθ η ουρωριουθ*; the last word is a mere variant of the significant name Ororiouth. There is also a short inscription, *καταστιλον* (*κατάστειλον*), beginning over the woman's head and ending at the right side opposite the knee. In connection with a previously discussed Cairo gem we have seen that *στέλλω* and its derivatives, when used in a medical sense, have such meanings as "check," "contract," "reduce"; and the imperative on this Toronto stone must be addressed to Ororiouth as *μήτρας γυναικῶν κύριος*, adjuring him to relieve the tortured womb of its burden, whether giving easy delivery of a child or reducing an abnormal congestion.

A British Museum gem (red jasper) has something in common with the Toronto specimen.⁵⁹ We examine the reverse side first. Here also a woman is represented in a half-squatting position, but she is holding a sword in her right hand. The simplest explanation is that she holds it merely as a threat to the powers whom she invokes with the aid of the amulet; one may compare the remarkable vase painting of the two nude women armed with swords, who are drawing the moon down from heaven.⁶⁰ The lower part of the stone has been broken away, and some uncertain cuttings at each side of the woman's feet may be the ligaments of a uterine symbol occupying the lower part of the surface. The obverse of this stone presents the familiar design of Herakles throttling the Nemean lion. The three kappas which usually go with this type were cut on the reverse, though one has been lost with the fragment broken off the bottom. This combination of types — Herakles and the lion with the suffering woman — suggests that in the minds of the common folk a remedy for colic would also help abdominal pains originating in the uterus. A connection between these disorders, however absurd from a scientific point of view, seems to have been firmly established in various popular superstitions. The subject has been treated at some length by Drexler, in connection with the "Medusa" type of uterine amulet and the charm accompanying it.⁶¹

Another remarkable amulet in the British Museum deserves a minute description.⁶² This is a well-preserved red jasper set in a modern gold ring. The obverse shows a naked woman seated in a very wide low chair, with her knees far apart. The arms, front legs, and back of the chair are shown, and the woman's feet rest on a line which is probably not merely an indication

⁵⁸ D. 147.

⁵⁹ D. 146.

⁶⁰ Article "Magia" in Daremberg-Saglio, *Dict. des Ant.*, p. 1516, fig. 4785.

⁶¹ *Philol.* 58, 599 ff.; see also F. Pradel, *ARW* 12, 152.

⁶² D. 145.

of the ground level, but is meant for a brace connecting the front feet of the chair and serving as a footrest. The woman's head is turned to her right, and her hair hangs loose over her left shoulder. Her hands grip the arms of the chair, and this position, taken in connection with the wide-open knees and the swollen abdomen, suggests the straining of parturition. The woman's loose hair is another indication that this interpretation is right, for a wide-spread popular superstition holds that a knot or band confining any part of the body is a hindrance to easy delivery. The design is encircled by the ouroboros, and outside this, round the rim, is the inscription *αηιουωθ ορωριφρασι οροριουθ*. The second member is usually written *αρωριφρασι(s)* or *αρρωριφρασι(s)*, and is found on several amulets with the type of Aphrodite drying her hair.⁶³ The third normally accompanies all designs of this uterine class.

On the reverse, at the top, are the letters KKK, which we have seen associated with colic amulets showing the type of Herakles with the lion (p. 63), and which were also cut on an amulet of the uterine class described above (B. M. 56364). Below them is a scarab beetle, and below it a symbol of the octopus form.

It is natural to interpret this stone as a birth amulet, and this view of it is strengthened, if not absolutely confirmed, by the form of the chair in which she sits. It is the *δίφρος μαιωτικός*, or accouchement chair, which Soranus mentions as required for the handling of obstetric cases, and which he describes at some length.⁶⁴ It must be broad, and a large semicircular section is to be cut from the front part of the seat. The arms of the chair are to be provided with Π-shaped handles, so that the woman may brace herself by gripping them, and there must be a back to support her in the intervals of her pangs. The sides of the chair are to be covered in down to the ground, but back and front are left open for the convenience of the midwife and other helpers. If we make some allowance for the mediocre skill of the engraver, the chair on the London amulet answers Soranus' requirements fairly well. It is very broad and is provided with a back and arms, on the ends of which the sufferer's hands rest; and the circumstance that no part of the seat of the chair is to be seen despite the wide-open position of the woman's thighs can be explained by the removal of the semicircular section.⁶⁵

Until quite recently the amulet just described seemed to be the only extant representation of the ancient birthchair; but in 1940 Guido Calza published a noteworthy terracotta relief which shows a parturient woman seated in such

⁶³ For example, King, *Gnostics*, Pl. E 2; *Southeast N 23*.

⁶⁴ Soranus, 2, 2, (ed. Ilberg); 2, 3. In the Cesnola collection of antiquities from Cyprus there is a small sculptured group "in careless Hellenistic style" representing a woman, who has just given birth to a child, supported from behind by a standing attendant. The mother reclines on a high couch, or perhaps a backless seat, which, however, shows no sign of having been made specially for a birthstool. See Myres, *Handbook of the Cesnola Collection*, pp. 188 f., No. 1226 (Cesnola's *Descriptive Atlas*, I, lxvi, 435).

⁶⁵ Besides the passages in Soranus cited above cf. Antyllus ap. Orib. 10, 19, 2 (p. 425, ed. Bussemaker-Daremborg); also Hippocr. *Mul.* 2, 114 (p. 246, ed. Littré), *Superf.* 8 (pp. 480, 482). But the words in the last two passages might refer to an ordinary commode or closetstool.

a chair and tended by a midwife and another helper (Pl. XXIII, Fig. 3).⁶⁶ It was found in tomb 100 of the necropolis of Isola Sacra (Ostia). In this relief the chair is seen from the side, which makes it impossible to compare it in all details with Soranus' description. There is nothing visible that differs from it, and one detail, the provision of special grips on the arms of the chair, is in accord with his directions. Birthchairs which might almost have been made from the pattern recommended by Soranus are still used in Egypt. A good photograph of one is shown in Miss Blackman's work, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt*.⁶⁷

Besides several passages in medical works which mention the birthchair, there is an interesting one in a book of a different kind, the *Life of Porphyrius*, by Mark the Deacon.⁶⁸ Referring to the recent confinement of the Empress Eudoxia (401 A.D.), the author says, ἡ δὲ δέσποινα, ἧ μόνον ἔτεκεν καὶ ἀνέστη ἐκ τοῦ λοχηφόρου δίφρου, ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς ἡμᾶς . . ., "on the very day of her delivery and her rising from the birthchair, she sent a message to us," etc.

Some who examine these uterine amulets may have lingering doubts about the identity of the principal feature of the type, because of its striking resemblance to a pottery vessel. It must be remembered, however, that the layman's idea of an internal organ will always be rendered in a schematic form, and even the surgeon trained in anatomy will be obliged, in describing it to one who has not had the advantage of an autopsy, to use some approximate comparison. Some of our dictionaries describe the uterus as a pear-shaped organ; and Soranus compared its form to a physician's cupping vessel (*σικύα*) used in bloodletting, broad and round at the base, and contracting towards the mouth.⁶⁹ The stylized uterus of these amulets departs no farther from nature than the conventional modern representation of a heart from the actual appearance of that organ.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ G. Calza, *La necropoli del Porto di Roma nell'Isola Sacra*, pp. 248-249 (fig. 148), 367. The relief was found in the tomb of a midwife who had been married to a surgeon.

⁶⁷ P. 63, fig. 28.

⁶⁸ Chap. 44, p. 37, 9-10, in the edition by Grégoire and Kugener, Paris, 1930.

⁶⁹ 1, 9 (ed. Ilberg). See also Celsus *De medicina* 2, 11 for the form of this instrument (*cucurbitula*). The best illustrations from archaeological sources are to be found in Gurlt, *Gesch. d. Chirurgie*; Nos. 45 and 47 on Plate I correspond almost exactly to the shape that prevails on the uterine amulets.

⁷⁰ Since most uterine amulets are of Egyptian origin, attention may be called to the Egyptian sign resembling a cup or bowl (the lower half of an oval with a wavy line across the top), which was originally used for a well, but came to be employed (as a substitute for an older sign) for the female organ (Gardiner, *Sign-list*, N 41-42).