

**Women's Life
in Greece and Rome**

A Source Book in Translation

Third Edition

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To our mothers, Mena Rosenthal and Nancy Brown

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husband, built [this tomb] for the well-deserving dealer in grains and vegetables from the middle staircase,⁵⁴ and for himself and for his freedmen and freedwomen and descendants and for Marcus Abudius Saturninus his son, of the senior body of the Esquiline tribe. He lived 8 years.

(6326) Optata Pasa, portress. Her friends put this up.

(6336) Posis, Statilia's attendant.

(6395) Hilara, slave of Hermia.⁵⁵ 14 years old.

From the tomb of the Statilii, Rome

(6362) The bones of Italia the weaver.

(6342) Italia, spinning girl. She lived 20 years. Scaeva, letter-carrier of Taurus, made this for his wife.

(6346) Urbana, veteran slave, a spinning girl. Here lie her bones.

336. *Occupations in Roman Athens. Athens, 2nd/3rd cent. AD* (IG².11244 [= Kaibel 121], 11205, 11496 [= Kaibel 102]. G)

(11244) Irene, salt vendor.

(11205) Dmois, worn out by her work; beloved by the household that raised her. When she died she received this tomb.

(11496) Eutychousa and Nais, unfortunate; sisters, both musical, both eloquent, both trained to play the harp and the lyre, here the earth covers them gently, O stranger.

337. *Jobs named on lead curse tablets. Patissia and Athens (IG III.iii.68, 69, excerpts. G)*

For lead curse tablets, see p. 298.

(68) Parthenia the grocer (her hands, feet) ... Arescusa the procuress (her hands, feet, tongue) ... Anyte the grocer (hands, feet, shop and everything in the shop) ... Lacaina Melas' concubine (her hands and feet) ... (69) Dionysius the helmet maker and his wife Artemeis the gilder (their household and workshop and work and livelihood) ...

IX. Medicine and anatomy

'There needs must be a female'

Philosophers observe nature

'A woman is an infertile male'

338. *Origins of the desire for procreation. Athens, 4th cent. BC (Plato, Timaeus 90e-91d. G)*

In this dialogue Plato attributes to a Pythagorean philosopher, Timaeus of Locri in Italy, an account of the creation of the universe. Timaeus, by comparing human genitalia to undomesticated animals, provides an aetiology for sexual desire and for female hysteria (cf. no. 346).

Of the men who were born in that generation, those who were cowardly and acted unjustly during their lifetimes, were (as required by logic) changed into women in the second generation.¹ For this reason at that time the gods created the passion for sexual intercourse, settling one living creature in us, and another in women. They made the two kinds in the following manner. They made the outlet for liquids, by which the drink goes through the lungs under the kidneys into the bladder, which receives it and expels it under pressure from air, and they drilled a channel for this outlet also into the marrow that is fixed from the head along the neck and through the back – the substance that we called the seed in our previous discussion. And this marrow, because it is alive and has acquired the power of respiration, ... produces in it a lively desire for emission, and so brings about the desire for begetting. For this reason in men the thing connected with the nature of the genitals is intractable and self-willed, like an animal that will not obey reason, and it tries to control everything because of its maddening desires.

It is the same for those things which are called mothering-places (*metrai*) and latter places (*hysterai*)² in women. They have an animal within them eager for conception, which whenever it goes without issue for a long time beyond its proper season, becomes angry and miserable, and wanders everywhere around the body, blocks the outlets for air, and prevents respiration, causing extreme helplessness and bringing on all sorts of other diseases, until the desire and passion of both the man and

the woman bring them together, and as if they were picking fruit from a tree, they sow into the field that is the womb (*metra*) living beings that are too small to be seen and formless, and then again they separate out the large beings within [the womb] and nourish them, and after that bring them to the light and so complete the generation of animals. Thus women and the female race in general were created.

339. *The female role in generation. Athens, 4th cent. BC (Aristotle, On the Generation of Animals, 716a5-23, 727a2-30, 727b31-3, 728b 18-31, 765b8-20, 766a17-30, 783b26-784a12. Tr. A.L. Peck, LCL. G)*

Aristotle's explanation of the process of conception is deduced from external secretions: male semen has primary generative importance, female semen (i.e. menstrual fluid, which also sustains the developing embryo) purely nutritive value.

Male and female defined

(716a5) As far as animals are concerned, we must describe their generation just as we find the theme requires for each several kind as we go along, linking our account on to what has already been said. As we mentioned, we may safely set down as the chief principles of generation the male [factor] and the female [factor]; the male as possessing the principle of movement and of generation, the female as possessing that of matter. One is most likely to be convinced of this by considering how the semen is formed and whence it comes; for although the things that are formed in the course of Nature no doubt take their rise out of semen, we must not fail to notice how the semen itself is formed from the male and the female, since it is because this part is secreted from the male and the female, and because its secretion takes place in them and out of them, that the male and the female are the principles of generation. By a 'male' animal we mean one which generates in another, by 'female' one which generates in itself. This is why in cosmology too they speak of the nature of the earth as something female and call it 'mother', while they give to the heaven and the sun and anything else of that kind the title of 'generator', and 'father'.

Now male and female differ in respect of their *logos* in that the power or faculty possessed by the one differs from that possessed by the other; but they differ also to bodily sense, in respect of certain physical parts. They differ in their *logos*, because the male is that which has the power to generate in another (as was stated above), while the female is that which can generate in itself, i.e. it is that out of which the generated offspring, which is present in the generator, comes into being ...³

Male and female secretions

(727a2) This much is evident: the menstrual fluid is a residue, and it is the analogous thing in females to the semen in males. Its behaviour

shows that this statement is correct. At the same time of life that semen begins to appear in males and is emitted, the menstrual discharge begins to flow in females, their voices change and their breasts begin to become conspicuous; and similarly, in the decline of life the power to generate ceases in males and the menstrual discharge ceases in females. Here are still further indications that this secretion which females produce is a residue. Speaking generally, unless the menstrual discharge is suspended, women are not troubled by haemorrhoids or bleeding from the nose or any other such discharge, and if it happens that they are, then the evacuations fall off in quantity, which suggests that the substance secreted is being drawn off to the other discharges. Again, their blood vessels are not so prominent as those of males; and females are more neatly made and smoother than males, because the residue which goes to produce those characteristics in males is in females discharged together with the menstrual fluid. We are bound to hold, in addition, that for the same cause the bulk of the body in female vivipara⁴ is smaller than that of the males, as of course it is only in vivipara that the menstrual discharge flows externally, and most conspicuously of all in women, who discharge a greater amount than any other female animal. On this account it is always very noticeable that the female is pale, and the blood-vessels are not prominent, and there is an obvious deficiency in physique as compared with males.

Now it is impossible that any creature should produce two seminal secretions at once, and as the secretion in females which answers to semen in males is the menstrual fluid, it obviously follows that the female does not contribute any semen to generation; for if there were semen, there would be no menstrual fluid; but as menstrual fluid is in fact formed, therefore there is no semen ...

(727b31) There are some who think that the female contributes semen during coition because women sometimes derive pleasure from it comparable to that of the male and also produce a fluid secretion. This fluid, however, is not seminal; it is peculiar to the part from which it comes in each several individual; there is a discharge from the uterus, which though it happens in some women does not in others. Speaking generally, this happens in fair-skinned women who are typically feminine, and not in dark women of a masculine appearance. Where it occurs, this discharge is sometimes on quite a different scale from the semen discharged by the male, and greatly exceeds it in bulk. Furthermore, differences of food cause a great difference in the amount of this discharge which is produced: e.g. some pungent foods cause a noticeable increase in the amount ...

(727b18) Further, a boy actually resembles a woman in physique, and a woman is as it were an infertile male; the female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort, viz. it lacks the power to concoct semen out of the final state of the nourishment (this is either blood, or its counterpart

in bloodless animals) because of the coldness of its nature. Thus, just as lack of concoction produces in the bowels diarrhoea, so in the blood vessels it produces discharge of blood of various sorts, and especially the menstrual discharge (which has to be classed as a discharge of blood, though it is a natural discharge, and the rest are morbid ones).

Hence, plainly, it is reasonable to hold that generation takes place from this process; for, as we see, the menstrual fluid is semen, not indeed semen in a pure concoction, but needing still to be acted upon. It is the same with fruit when it is forming. The nourishment is present right enough, even before it has been strained off, but it stands in need of being acted upon in order to purify it. That is why when the former is mixed with the semen, and when the latter is mixed with pure nourishment the one effects generation, and the other effects nutrition ...

The role of heat

(765b8) Now the opinion that the cause of male and female is heat and cold, and that the difference depends upon whether the secretion comes from the right side or from the left, has a modicum of reason in it, because the right side of the body is hotter than the left; hotter semen is semen which has been concocted; the fact that it has been concocted means that it has been set and compacted, and the more compacted semen is, the more fertile it is. All the same, to state the matter in this way is attempting to lay hold of the cause from too great a distance, and we ought to come as closely to grips as we possibly can with the primary causes.

We have dealt already elsewhere with the body as a whole and with its several parts, and have stated what each one is, and on account of what cause it is so. But that is not all, for (1) the male and the female are distinguished by a certain ability and inability. Male is that which is able to concoct, to cause to take shape, and to discharge, semen possessing the 'principle' of the 'form'; and by 'principle' I do not mean that sort of principle out of which, as out of matter, offspring is formed belonging to the same kind as its parent, but I mean the proximate motive principle, whether it is able to act thus in itself or in something else. Female is that which receives the semen, but is unable to cause semen to take shape or to discharge it. And (2) all concoction works by means of heat. Assuming the truth of these two statements, it follows of necessity that (3) male animals are hotter than female ones, since it is on account of coldness and inability that the female is more abundant in blood in certain regions of the body. And this abundance of blood is a piece of evidence which goes to prove the opposite of the view held by some people, who suppose that the female must be hotter than the male, on account of the discharge of menstrual fluid.

When the 'principle' is failing to gain the mastery and is unable to effect concoction owing to deficiency of heat, and does not succeed in reducing

the material into its own proper form, but instead is worsted in the attempt, then of necessity the material must change over into its opposite condition. Now the opposite of the male is the female, and it is opposite in respect of that whereby one is male and the other female. And since it differs in the ability it possesses, so also it differs in the instrument which it possesses. Hence this is the condition into which the material changes over. And when one vital part changes, the whole make-up of the animal differs greatly in appearance and form. This may be observed in the case of eunuchs; the mutilation of just one part of them results in such a great alteration of their old semblance, and in close approximation to the appearance of the female. The reason for this is that some of the body's parts are 'principles', and once a principle has been 'moved' (i.e. changed), many of the parts which cohere with it must of necessity change as well ...

(766a17) Also, the fact that the menstrual discharge in the natural course tends to take place when the moon is waning is due to the same cause. That time of month is colder and more fluid on account of the waning and failure of the moon (since the moon makes a summer and winter in the course of a month just as the sun does in the course of the whole year) ...

(783b26) So that if you reckon up (a) that the brain itself has very little heat, (b) that the skin surrounding it must of necessity have even less, and (c) that the hair, being the furthest off of the three, must have even less still, you will expect persons who are plentiful in semen to go bald at about this time of life.⁵ And it is owing to the same cause that it is on the front part of the head only that human beings go bald, and that they are the only animals which do so at all; i.e. they go bald in front because the brain is there, and they alone do so, because they have by far the largest brain of all and the most fluid. Women do not go bald because their nature is similar to that of children: both are incapable of producing seminal secretion. Eunuchs, too, do not go bald, because of their transition into the female state, and the hair that comes at a later stage they fail to grow at all, or if they already have it, they lose it, except for the pubic hair: similarly women do not have the later hair, though they do grow the pubic hair. This deformity constitutes a change from the male state to the female.

340. *Menstruation. Athens, 4th cent. BC (Aristotle, On Dreams 459b-460a. G)*

An illustration of how the eye affects what it sees.

In the case of very clean mirrors, if a woman who is menstruating looks into the mirror, the mirror's surface becomes bloody-dark, like a cloud. It isn't easy to wipe off the stain if the mirror is new, but if it is old it is

easier. The reason for this is that vision, as we have said, is not only affected by the air, but indeed it also affects and does something to it⁶ ... Eyes are affected like any other part of the body when the monthly period occurs, since by nature they happen to be full of blood vessels. Accordingly during the monthly period, there is a difference [in the eyes] because of the disturbance and inflammation of the blood – invisible to us, but none the less there, for that is the effect of the seed and the menstrual period; the air is disturbed by them, and it has an effect on the air on the surface of the mirror, similar to how it itself has been affected, and the mirror's surface is affected accordingly ...

Writings of practising physicians

'If they become pregnant, they will be cured'

The Hippocratic Corpus

341. *Intercourse, conception and pregnancy. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, On the Generating Seed and the Nature of the Child 4-7, 13, 30.4 = VII.474-80, 488-92, 536-8 Littré. Tr. I.M. Lonie. G)*

Doctors, who were throughout antiquity with very few exceptions male (see below, p. 264), concerned themselves only with diseases. The normal female functions of menstruation, childbirth, nursing, menopause, were dealt with by women – midwives and wet-nurses. Hence few records exist of normal procedures and reactions.

(4) In the case of women, it is my contention that when during intercourse the vagina is rubbed and the womb is disturbed, an irritation is set up in the womb which produces pleasure and heat in the rest of the body. A woman also releases something from her body, sometimes into the womb, which then becomes moist, and sometimes externally as well, if the womb is open wider than normal. Once intercourse has begun, she experiences pleasure throughout the whole time, until the man ejaculates. If her desire for intercourse is excited, she emits before the man, and for the remainder of the time she does not feel pleasure to the same extent; but if she is not in a state of excitement, then her pleasure terminates along with that of the man. What happens is like this: if into boiling water you pour another quantity of water which is cold, the water stops boiling. In the same way, the man's sperm arriving in the womb extinguishes both the heat and the pleasure of the woman. Both the pleasure and the heat reach their peak simultaneously with the arrival of the sperm in the womb, and then they cease. If, for example, you pour wine on a flame, first of all the flame flares up and increases for a short period when you pour the wine on, then it dies away. In the same way the woman's heat flares up in response to the man's sperm, and then dies away. The pleasure

experienced by the woman during intercourse is considerably less than the man's, although it lasts longer. The reason that the man feels more pleasure is that the secretion from the bodily fluid in his case occurs suddenly, and as the result of a more violent disturbance than in the woman's case.

Another point about women: if they have intercourse with men their health is better than if they do not. For in the first place, the womb is moistened by intercourse, whereas when the womb is drier than it should be it becomes extremely contracted, and this extreme contraction causes pain to the body. In the second place, intercourse by heating the blood and rendering it more fluid gives an easier passage to the menses; whereas if the menses do not flow, women's bodies become prone to sickness.

(5) When a woman has intercourse, if she is not going to conceive, then it is her practice to expel the sperm produced by both partners whenever she wishes to do so. If however she is going to conceive, the sperm is not expelled, but remains in the womb. For when the womb has received the sperm it closes up and retains it, because the moisture causes the womb's orifice to contract. Then both what is provided by the man and what is provided by the woman is mixed together. If the woman is experienced in matters of childbirth, and takes note when the sperm is retained, she will know the precise day on which she has conceived.

Male and female sperm

(6) Now here is a further point. What the woman emits is sometimes stronger, and sometimes weaker; and this applies also to what the man emits. In fact both partners alike contain both male and female sperm (the male being stronger than the female must of course originate from a stronger sperm). Here is a further point: if (a) both partners produce a stronger sperm, then a male is the result, whereas if (b) they produce a weak form, then a female is the result. But if (c) one partner produces one kind of sperm, and the other another, then the resultant sex is determined by whichever sperm prevails in quantity. For suppose that the weak sperm is much greater in quantity than the stronger sperm: then the stronger sperm is overwhelmed and, being mixed with the weak, results in a female. If on the contrary the strong sperm is greater in quantity than the weak, and the weak is overwhelmed, it results in a male. It is just as though one were to mix together beeswax with suet, using a larger quantity of suet than of the beeswax, and melt them together over a fire. While the mixture is still fluid, the prevailing character of the mixture is not apparent: only after it solidifies can it be seen that the suet prevails quantitatively over the wax. And it is just the same with the male and female forms of sperm.

(7) Now that both male and female sperm exist in both partners is an inference which can be drawn from observation. Many women have borne daughters to their husbands and then, going with other men, have

produced sons. And the original husbands – those, that is, to whom their wives bore daughters – have as the result of intercourse with other women produced male offspring; whereas the second group of men, who produced male offspring, have with yet other women produced female offspring. Now this consideration shows that both the man and the woman have male and female sperm. For in the partnership in which the women produced daughters, the stronger sperm was overwhelmed by the larger quantity of the weaker sperm, and females were produced; while in the partnership in which these same women produced sons, it was the weak which was overwhelmed, and males were produced. Hence the same man does not invariably emit the strong variety of sperm, nor the weak invariably, but sometimes the one and sometimes the other; the same is true in the woman's case. There is therefore nothing anomalous about the fact that the same women and the same men produce both male and female sperm: indeed, these facts about male and female sperm are also true in the case of animals.

A spontaneous abortion

(13) As a matter of fact I myself have seen an embryo which was aborted after remaining in the womb for six days. It is upon its nature, as I observed it then, that I base the rest of my inferences. It was in the following way that I came to see a six-day-old embryo. A kinswoman of mine owned a very valuable danseuse, whom she employed as a prostitute. It was important that this girl should not become pregnant and thereby lose her value. Now this girl had heard the sort of thing women say to each other – that when a woman is going to conceive, the seed remains inside her and does not fall out. She digested this information, and kept a watch. One day she noticed that the seed had not come out again. She told her mistress, and the story came to me. When I heard it, I told her to jump up and down, touching her buttocks with her heels at each leap. After she had done this no more than seven times, there was a noise, the seed fell out on the ground, and the girl looked at it in great surprise.⁷ It looked like this: it was as though someone had removed the shell from a raw egg, so that the fluid inside showed through the inner membrane – a reasonably good description of its appearance. It was round, and red; and within the membrane could be seen thick white fibres, surrounded by a thick red serum; while on the outer surface of the membrane were clots of blood. In the middle of the membrane was a small projection: it looked to me like an umbilicus, and I considered that it was through this that the embryo first breathed in and out. From it, the membrane stretched all around the seed. Such then was the six-day embryo that I saw, and a little further on I intend to describe a second observation which will give a clear insight into the subject. It will also serve as evidence for the truth of my whole argument – so far as is humanly possible in such a matter.

(30) ... In fact it is impossible for pregnancy to last longer than ten months, and I shall explain why. The nutriment for growth which the mother's body provides is no longer sufficient for the child after ten months are up and it is fully grown. It is nurtured by drawing the sweetest part of the blood towards itself, although it is fed to some extent from the milk as well. Once these are no longer sufficient and the child is already big, in its desire for more nutriment than is there it tosses about and so ruptures the membranes. This occurs more frequently in women who are bearing their first child; with them, the supply of nutriment for the child tends to give out before the ten months are up. This is the reason: the menstrual flow of some women is sufficiently abundant, while with other women the flow is less. (If this is always the case it is the result of the constitution which the woman has inherited from her mother.) Now it is the women whose menses are small in quantity who also provide their infants with insufficient nutriment towards the end of their term when the infant is already large, and so cause it to toss about and bring on birth before ten months are up. The reason is their small flow of blood. Usually too these women cannot give milk; this is because they have a dry constitution and their flesh is densely packed.

342. *A contraceptive. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, Nature of Women 98 = VII.414 Littré. G)*

If a woman does not want to become pregnant, make as thick a mixture of beans and water as you can, make her drink it, and she will not become pregnant for a year.⁸

343. *Women's illnesses. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, Diseases of Women 1.1, 2, 6, 7, 21, 25, 33, 62 excerpts. = VIII.12-22, 30-4, 60-2, 64-8, 78, 126 Littré. Tr. A. Hanson. G)*

Problems with the female sexual organs were thought to affect the woman's organism as a whole. It was believed that normal conditions could be restored in the first instance by sexual intercourse and pregnancy, and then (if that were not possible) by manipulation of the affected areas and the insertion into the vagina of medicinal pessaries or fumigations, intended to expel accumulated blood or fluid and/or restore a displaced uterus to its proper position. Along with a wide range of vegetable substances, doctors employed strong drugs like Spanish fly and substances that they did not use with such frequency on their male patients, such as animal dung and urine.⁹

(1) The following concerns women's diseases. I say that a woman who has never given birth suffers more intensely and more readily from menstruation than a woman who has given birth to a child. For whenever a woman does give birth, her small vessels become more easy-flowing for

menstruation (because the birth process stretches the vessels and so makes menstruation easier). ...

I say that a woman's flesh is more sponge-like and softer than a man's: since this is so, the woman's body draws moisture both with more speed and in greater quantity from the belly than does the body of a man ...

And when the body of a woman – whose flesh is soft – happens to be full of blood and if that blood does not go off from her body, pain occurs, whenever her flesh is full and becomes heated. A woman has warmer blood and therefore she is warmer than a man. If the existing surplus of blood should go off, no pain results from the blood. Because a man has more solid flesh than a woman, he is never so totally overfilled with blood that pain results if some of his blood does not exit each month. He draws whatever quantity of blood is needed for his body's nourishment; since his body is not soft, it does not become overstrained nor is it heated up by fullness, as in the case of a woman. The fact that a man works harder than a woman contributes greatly to this; for hard work draws off some of the fluid.

(2) Whenever in a woman who has never given birth the menses are suppressed and cannot find a way out, illness results. This happens if the mouth of the womb is closed or if some part of her vagina is prolapsed. For if one of these things happens, the menses will not be able to find a way out until the womb returns to a healthy state. This disease occurs more frequently in women who have a womb narrow at the mouth or who have a cervix which lies far away from the vagina. For if either of these conditions exists and if the woman in question does not have intercourse and if her belly is more emptied than usual from some suffering, the womb is displaced.¹⁰ The womb is not damp of its own accord (as, for example, in the case of a woman who does not have coitus) and there is empty space for the womb (as, for example, when the belly is more empty than usual) so that the womb is displaced when the woman is drier and emptier than normal.

There are also occasions when, after the womb is displaced, the mouth happens to be turned too far, such as in a case where the cervix lies far away from the vagina. But if her womb is damp from coitus and her belly is not empty, her womb is not easily displaced.

The following things also happen. For some women, when two months' menses are accumulated in quantity in the womb, they move off into the lungs whenever they are prevented from exiting. The woman suffers all the symptoms which have been mentioned in the discussion of phthisis¹¹ and she cannot survive ...

(6) If a woman is healthy, her blood flows like that from a sacrificial animal and it speedily coagulates. Those women who habitually menstruate for longer than four days and whose menses flow in great abundance, are delicate and their embryos are delicate and waste away. But those women whose menstruation is less than three days or is

meagre, are robust, with a healthy complexion and a masculine appearance; yet they are not concerned about bearing children nor do they become pregnant.

(7) If suffocation occurs suddenly, it will happen especially to women who do not have intercourse and to older women rather than to young ones, for their wombs are lighter. It usually occurs because of the following: when a woman is empty and works harder than in her previous experience, her womb, becoming heated from the hard work, turns because it is empty and light. There is, in fact, empty space for it to turn in because the belly is empty. Now when the womb turns, it hits the liver and they go together and strike against the abdomen – for the womb rushes and goes upward towards the moisture, because it has been dried out by hard work, and the liver is, after all, moist. When the womb hits the liver, it produces sudden suffocation as it occupies the breathing passage around the belly.

Sometimes, at the same time as the womb begins to go towards the liver, phlegm flows down from the head to the abdomen (that is, when the woman is experiencing the suffocation) and sometimes, simultaneously with the flow of phlegm, the womb goes away from the liver to its normal place and the suffocation ceases. The womb goes back, then, when it has taken on moisture and has become heavy ... Sometimes, if a woman is empty and she overworks, her womb turns and falls towards the neck of her bladder and produces strangury – but no other malady seizes her. When such a woman is treated, she speedily becomes healthy; sometimes recovery is even spontaneous.

In some women the womb falls towards the lower back or towards the hips because of hard work or lack of food, and produces pain.

Diseases of pregnant women

(21) Now I shall discuss the diseases of pregnant women. Some women conceive a child easily, but are not able to carry it full term; the children are lost through miscarriage in the third or fourth month – even though the woman has suffered no physical injury nor eaten the wrong kind of food. In such women the cause of the circumstances mentioned is especially when the womb releases matter which would make the embryo grow. The woman's bowels become upset: weakness, high fever, and lack of appetite affect them during the time in which they are aborting their children. The following is also a cause, namely if the womb is smooth – either naturally or due to the presence of lacerations in the womb. Now if the womb is smooth, sometimes the membranes which envelop the child are detached from the womb when the child begins to move – because these membranes are less a part of the womb than they ought to be, due to the fact that the womb is smooth. Anyone would know all these details if he would carefully ask about them. Insofar as the smoothness of the womb is concerned, let another woman touch the womb when it is empty,

for the smoothness is not immediately distinguishable. If the menses flow in these women, they come copiously. Occasionally some of these women carry their embryos to full term, and when such women are cared for, they have hope of a normal birth ...

(25) I say that if menses flow each month for a woman who is two or three months pregnant or more, she is necessarily thin and weak. Occasionally a fever grips her during the days until the menses flow. When the menstrual blood flows, she becomes pale, yet very little flows out. Her womb has come to gape open more than it ought to and it releases matter which would make the embryo grow. Blood comes down from all the body when a woman is pregnant and gradually enters the womb, encircling that which is inside it; the blood makes it grow. But if the womb gapes open more than it should, it releases the blood each month just as it has been accustomed to do in the past, and that which is in the womb becomes thin and weak. When such a woman is cared for, the embryo also is better and the woman herself is healthy. If she is not cared for, she loses her child and, in addition, she runs the risk of having a long-lasting disease ...

There are also many other dangers by which embryos are aborted; if, for example, a pregnant woman is sick and weak, and if she picks up a burden with all her bodily strength, or if she is beaten, or leaps into the air, or goes without food, or has a fainting spell, or takes too much or too little nourishment, or becomes frightened and scared, or shouts violently. Nurture is a cause of miscarriage, and so is an excessive drink. Wombs by themselves also have natural dispositions by which miscarriage can occur: wombs that are flatulent, for example, or tightly packed, loose, over large, over small, and other types which are similar.

If a pregnant woman feels distressed in her belly or in her lower back, one must fear lest the embryo bring on a miscarriage, since the membranes which surround it have been broken.

There are also women who lose their children if they eat or drink something pungent or something bitter contrary to their usual habits – if the child is in an early stage of its development. For whenever something happens to a child contrary to its usual habits, it will die when it is little, especially if the mother drinks or eats the kind of thing that strongly upsets her stomach when the child is in an early stage of development. For the womb perceives when a diarrhoetic flux comes down from the belly ...

(33) If in the case of a pregnant woman the time for birth is already past, if labour pains are present, and if for a long time the woman has been unable to bring forth the child without injury to herself, usually the child is coming in lateral or breech position – yet it is better for it to come out head-first. The pain involved is of the following sort: as if, for example, someone would throw an olive pit into a small-mouthed oil flask, the pit is not naturally suited to be taken out when it is turned on

its side. In this way, then, the birth of the embryo laterally presented is also a very painful experience for the woman; it just doesn't go out. The pains are even more difficult if the embryo proceeds feet-first; many times the women die, or the children, or even both. A major cause of the embryo not going out easily is if it is dead, or paralysed, or if there are two of them ...

62. All these diseases, then, happen more frequently to women who have not borne a child; yet they also happen to those who have. These diseases are dangerous, as has been said, and for the most part they are both acute and serious, and difficult to understand because of the fact that women are the ones who share these sicknesses. Sometimes women do not know what sickness they have, until they have experienced the diseases which come from menses and they become older. Then both necessity and time teach them the cause of their sicknesses. Sometimes diseases become incurable for women who do not learn why they are sick before the doctor has been correctly taught by the sick woman why she is sick. For women are ashamed to tell even of their inexperience and lack of knowledge. At the same time the doctors also make mistakes by not learning the apparent cause through accurate questioning, but they proceed to heal as though they were dealing with men's diseases. I have already seen many women die from just this kind of suffering. But at the outset one must ask accurate questions about the cause. For the healing of the diseases of women differs greatly from the healing of men's diseases.

344. *Displacement of the womb. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, Places in Human Anatomy 47 = V. 344-6 Littré. G)*

As for what are called women's diseases: the womb is responsible for all such diseases. For the womb, when it is displaced from its natural position, whether forward or back, causes diseases. When the neck of the womb has been moved back and does not bring its opening towards or touch the lips of the vagina, the problem is minor. But if the womb falls forward and brings its opening towards the lips, it first of all causes pain when it makes contact, and then because the womb is cut off and obstructed by the contact of its neck with the lips of the vagina, there is no so-called menstrual flow. This flow if retained causes swelling and pain. If the womb descends and is diverted so that it approaches the groin, it causes pain. If it ascends and is diverted and cut off, it causes illness through its compression. When a woman is ill because of this problem, she has pains in her thighs and her head. When the womb is distended and swollen, there is no flow, and it becomes filled up. When it is filled, it touches the thighs. When the womb is filled with moisture and distended, there is no flow, and it causes pain in both the thighs and the groin, something like balls roll through the stomach, and cause pain in the

head, first in one part, and then in all of it, as the disease develops.

The treatment is as follows: if the womb has only moved forward and it is possible to apply ointment, use any foul-smelling ointment you choose, either cedar or myssoton, or some other heavy and ill-scented substance, and fumigate, but do not use a vapour-bath, and do not give food or a diuretic liquid during this time, or wash her in hot water. If the womb has turned upwards and is not obstructed, use sweet-smelling pessaries that are also inflammatory. These are myrrh, or perfume, or some other aromatic and inflammatory substance. Use these in pessaries, and from below apply fumigations with wine vapour, and wash with hot water, and use diuretics. It is clear that the womb is turned upwards and is not obstructed, because there is a flow.

If the womb is obstructed, then there is no so-called menstrual flow. This disease must be treated first with a vapour-bath; put wild figs into the wine, and heat it and put a gourd around the mouth of the vessel in which the wine is heated. Then do as follows: cut the gourd through the middle and hollow it out, and cut off a bit of its top, as if you were making a nozzle for a bellows, so that the vapour can go through its channel and reach the womb. Wash with hot water, and use pessaries made of inflammatory drugs. The following inflammatory drugs bring on menstruation: cow dung, beef bile, myrrh, alum, galbanum, and anything similar; use as much of these as possible. Evacuate from below by laxative drugs that do not cause vomiting, diluted, so that it does not become a purgative by being too strong. Use pessaries as follows, if you want them to be strong. Use half-cooked honey, and add some of the substances prescribed to bring on menstruation; after you have added them, make the pessaries like pellets used for the anus, but make them long and thin. Make the woman lie down, and elevate the feet of the bed towards her feet, insert the pessary, and apply heat either on a chamber-pot or on some other vessel, so that the pessary melts. If you want to make the pessary less strong, wrap it in linen. And if the womb is filled with fluid, with its mouth swollen, so that amenorrhoea results, heal it by bringing on menstruation with medicinal pessaries, using both inflammatory pessaries as described, as in the case of the preceding amenorrhoea. If there is an excessive flow, do not use hot water or any other kind, nor diuretics or laxative foods. Raise the foot of the bed higher, so that the inclination of the bed does not encourage the flow, and use astringent pessaries. The flow, if her period comes directly, is bloody, if it diminishes, it contains pus. Young women bleed more, and the so-called menstrual periods of older women contain more mucus.

345. *Hysterical suffocation. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, Diseases of Women 2.126, 123 = VIII. 271-3, 266 Littré. G)*

(126) When the womb remains in the upper abdomen, the suffocation is

similar to that caused by the purgative hellebore, with stiff breathing and sharp pains in the heart. Some women spit up acid saliva, and their mouths are full of fluid, and their legs become cold. In such cases, if the womb does not leave the upper abdomen directly, the women lose their voices, and their head and tongue are overcome by drowsiness. If you find such women unable to speak and with their teeth chattering, insert a pessary of wool, twisting it round the shaft of a feather in order to get it in as far as possible – dip it either in white Egyptian perfume or myrtle or bacchar or marjoram. Use a spatula to apply black medicine (the kind you use for the head) to her nostrils. If this is not available, wipe the inside of her nostrils with silphium, or insert a feather that you have dipped in vinegar, or induce sneezing. If her mouth is closed tight and she is unable to speak, make her drink castoreum in wine. Dip your finger in seal oil and wipe inside her nostrils. Insert a wool pessary, until the womb returns, and remove it when the symptoms disappear. But if, when you take the pessary out, the womb returns to the upper abdomen, insert the pessary as you did before, and apply beneath her nostrils fumigations of ground-up goat or deer horn, to which you have added hot ashes, so that they make as much smoke as possible, and have her inhale the vapour up through her nose as long as she can stand it. It is best to use a fumigation of seal oil: put the coals in a pot and wrap the woman up – except for her head. So that as much vapour as possible is emitted, drip a little fat on it, and have her inhale the vapour. She should keep her mouth shut. This is the procedure if the womb has fallen upward out of place . . .

(123) When the womb moves towards her head and suffocation occurs in that region, the woman's head becomes heavy, though there are different symptoms in some cases. One symptom: the woman says the veins in her nose hurt her and beneath her eyes, and she becomes sleepy, and when this condition is alleviated, she foams at the mouth.

You should wash her thoroughly with hot water, and if she does not respond, with cold, from her head on down, using cool water in which you have previously boiled laurel and myrtle. Rub her head with rose perfume, and use sweet-scented fumigations beneath her vagina, but foul-scented ones at her nose. She should eat cabbage, and drink cabbage juice.

346. *Dislocation of the womb. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, Nature of Women 8, 3 = VII. 322-4, 314-16 Littré. G)*

(8) If her womb moves towards her hips, her periods stop coming, and pain develops in her lower stomach and abdomen. If you touch her with your finger, you will see the mouth of the womb turned towards her hip.¹²

When this condition occurs, wash the woman with warm water, make her eat as much garlic as she can, and have her drink undiluted sheep's milk after her meals. Then fumigate her and give her a laxative. After the

laxative has taken effect, fumigate the womb once again, using a preparation of fennel and absinthe mixed together. Right after the fumigation, pull the mouth of the womb with your finger. Then insert a pessary made with squills; leave it in for a while, and then insert a pessary made with opium poppies. If you think the condition has been corrected, insert a pessary of bitter almond oil, and on the next day, a pessary of rose perfume. She should stop inserting pessaries on the first day of her period, and start again the day after it stops. The blood during the period provides a normal interruption. If there is no flow, she should drink four cantharid beetles¹³ with their legs, wings and heads removed, four dark peony seeds, cuttlefish eggs, and a little parsley seed in wine. If she has a pain and irregular flow, she should sit in warm water, and drink honey mixed with water. If she is not cured by the first procedure, she should drink it again, until her period comes. When it comes, she should abstain from food and have intercourse with her husband. During her period she should eat mercury plant, and boiled squid, and keep to soft foods. If she becomes pregnant she will be cured of this disease ...

(3) When her womb moves towards her liver, she suddenly loses her voice and her teeth chatter and her colouring turns dark. This condition can occur suddenly, while she is in good health. The problem particularly affects old maids and widows – young women who have been widowed after having had children.

When this condition occurs, push your hand down below her liver, and tie a bandage below her ribs.¹⁴ Open her mouth and pour in very sweet-scented wine; put applications on her nostrils and burn foul-scented vapours below her womb ...

347. *Dropsy in the womb. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, Nature of Women 2 = VII. 312-14 Littré. G)*

When there is a dropsy in her womb, her monthly periods become smaller and weaker, and then stop suddenly, and her stomach bloats up, and her breasts dry out, and everything else suffers, and she seems to be pregnant – this is how you know she has dropsy. A further indication is the condition of the mouth of the womb: when she touches it, it seems withered. Fever and swelling attack her. As time goes on, pain develops in her lower stomach and loins and abdomen. This disease is usually brought on by miscarriage, but there are other causes.

When swelling in the womb occurs, one should wash the woman with warm water and apply warm poultices where she has pain. One should make her drink a laxative. After the laxative, put her in a vapour bath made with cow dung, then insert a pessary made with cantharid beetle, and after three days a pessary made of bile. Leave this in for one day, and then after three days give her a vinegar douche. Then if her stomach becomes soft and her fever goes away, and her period comes, have her

sleep with her husband. If not, follow the previous procedure over again, until her period comes, and have her use some suppositories. In the days between suppositories have her drink samphire bark and dark peony berries, and eat as much mercury plant as possible, and garlic both raw and cooked. Have her eat soft foods such as squid and other soft animals. If she gives birth, she will be cured.

348. *The dangerous first and sixth 40-day periods during pregnancy. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, On the Seventh-Month Child 3-4 = VII. 438-42 Littré. G)*

The author shows some impatience with women who do not seem to understand the logical medical explanation for miscarriages during the early stages of pregnancy and for still-births in the later stages.¹⁵

(3.1) At the age of seven months most foetuses, when the membranes relax, move to the yielding part of the body and get their nourishment there. There they spend the first 40-day period [after the move],¹⁶ for better or for worse, because of the transition they have made from the places that had nourished them [previously], and because the umbilical cord is pulled and displaced, and because of the discomfort suffered by the mother. (3.2) When the membranes are stretched and the umbilical cord is pulled, it gives pain to the mother. The foetus, once released from its old binding, becomes heavier. Many women develop fevers when this happens, and others even die, along with their foetuses. All women agree on this point. For they say that during the eighth month¹⁷ it is most difficult for them to carry their bellies, and they are correct. But this eighth month is not the only critical time; there are also the days that are added from the seventh month and the ninth month [to make up the 40-day period].

(3.3) But women do not talk about these [additional] days in the same way and do not know about them. They lose track because the period is not always the same, since sometimes a greater number of days from the seventh month are added to the 40-day period and sometimes from the ninth month. It all depends on when during the month and on the time of day that she happens to have conceived. The eighth month, however, is unambiguous, because this is the critical time, and the month is a unit among ten, so that it is easily remembered.

(4.1) You cannot disregard what women say about child-bearing. For they are talking about what they know and always inquiring about; they could not be persuaded either by deed or word that they do not know rather more [than you do] about what is happening in their own bodies. It is possible for those [doctors] who wish to say something different, but it is the women who make the judgments and who award the prize, and they always will inquire about this subject and will insist that they give

birth to seventh-month and eighth-month and ninth-month and tenth-month and eleventh-month babies, and that the eighth-month babies do not survive, but the others do. (4.2) For they confirm that the majority of miscarriages occur in the first 40 days.¹⁸

When the membranes are broken in the seventh month, and the embryo descends, the discomfort begins that is said to arise around the time of eighth month and the sixth forty-day period. After that time has passed, in women for whom matters go well, the inflammation of the foetus and mother disappears, and the belly is softer. And the weight descends from the upper abdomen and the flanks to the lower region for its convenience in turning for birth. (4.3) During the seventh 40-day period, the foetus rests there for most of the time; there is a soft place for it, and its movements are easier and more frequent. Women carry their bellies in the last days of this 40-day period most easily until the foetus tries to turn. After this there are labour pains and discomfort until the mother is delivered of the child and the after-birth.

349. *Hysteria in virgins. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, On Virgins = VIII.466- 70 Littré. G)*

As a result of visions, many people choke to death, more women than men, for the nature of women is less courageous and is weaker. And virgins who do not take a husband at the appropriate time for marriage experience these visions more frequently, especially at the time of their first monthly period, although previously they have had no such bad dreams of this sort. For later the blood collects in the womb in preparation to flow out; but when the mouth of the egress is not opened up, and more blood flows into the womb on account of the body's nourishment of it and its growth, then the blood which has no place to flow out, because of its abundance, rushes up to the heart and to the lungs; and when these are filled with blood, the heart becomes sluggish, and then, because of the sluggishness, numb, and then, because of the numbness, insanity takes hold of the woman.¹⁹ Just as when one has been sitting for a long time the blood that has been forced away from the hips and the thighs collects in one's lower legs and feet, it brings numbness, and as a result of the numbness, one's feet are useless for movement, until the blood goes back where it belongs. It returns most quickly when one stands in cold water and wets the tops of one's ankles. This numbness presents no complications, since the blood flows back quickly because the veins in that part of the body are straight, and the legs are not a critical part of the body. But blood flows slowly from the heart and from the phrenes.²⁰ There the veins are slanted, and it is a critical place for insanity, and suited for madness.

When these places²¹ are filled with blood, shivering sets in with fevers. They call these 'erratic fevers'. When this is the state of affairs, the girl

goes crazy because of the violent inflammation, and she becomes murderous because of the decay and is afraid and fearful because of the darkness. The girls try to choke themselves because of the pressure on their hearts; their will, distraught and anguished because of the bad condition of the blood, forces evil on itself. In some cases the girl says dreadful things: [the visions] order her to jump up and throw herself into wells and drown, as if this were good for her and served some useful purpose.²² When a girl does not have visions, a desire sets in which compels her to love death as if it were a form of good. When this person returns to her right mind, women give to Artemis various offerings, especially the most valuable of women's robes, following the orders of oracles, but they are deceived. The fact is that the disorder is cured when nothing impedes the downward flow of blood. My prescription is that when virgins experience this trouble, they should cohabit with a man as quickly as possible. If they become pregnant, they will be cured. If they don't do this, either they will succumb at the onset of puberty or a little later, unless they catch another disease. Among married women, those who are sterile are more likely to suffer what I have described.

350. *Case histories. Cos, 4th cent. BC (Hippocrates, Epidemics 5.12 and 25 = V.212, 224 Littré. G)*

(12) In Pheres a woman for a long time had headaches and no one could help her at all, not even when she had her head drained. It was easier for her when her period passed easily. When she had a headache, scented pessaries in her womb were helpful, and she was drained [of the fluid in her head] somewhat. But when she became pregnant, her headaches disappeared.

(25) In Larissa a servant in Dyseris' household, when she was young, suffered severe labour pains whenever she had intercourse – otherwise she had no pains. She had never been pregnant. When she was 60, she felt labour pains in the middle of the day, as severe as if in childbirth. Before that she had eaten a large number of leeks. When a pain came that was more severe than any she had had before, she stood up and felt something rough in the mouth of her womb. Then, after she had fainted, another woman inserted her hand and squeezed out a rough stone, like the whorl of a spindle. And the woman recovered immediately and stayed well thereafter.

Galen

351. *Comparison of male and female anatomy. Pergamum, 2nd cent. AD (Galen, On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body 14.6-7, excerpts. Tr. M.T. May. G)*

Galen, born and educated in Pergamum, the great Hellenistic seat of