Magical and Medical Approaches to the Wandering Womb in the Ancient Greek World

The idea that the womb moved freely about a woman’s body causing spasmodic disease enjoyed great popularity among the ancient Greeks, beginning in the classical period with Plato and the Hippocratic writers and continuing on into the Roman and Byzantine periods. Armed with sophisticated analyses of the medical tradition and new texts pertaining to the magical, this essay describes how both approaches to the wandering womb develop side by side in mutual influence from the late classical period onwards. Of special interest will be the tendency in both traditions to imagine both demons and errant wombs as wild animals and to use fumigations to control both. It concludes with a discussion of the historical development of and consequences for the idea that women alone possessed an internal organ that was variously interpreted as a mechanically defective body-part, a sentient and passionate animal, and finally a demon with malicious intent, who bites and poisons the female body. It also argues against the hypothesis or assumption that midwives or wet-nurses were the original source for the idea of the wandering womb, suggesting that the syndrome never fit comfortably into the category of gynecological illness, because the womb was not the site of disease, but rather a cause of spasmodic disease in other areas of the body.

The idea that the womb moved freely about a woman’s body causing a spasmodic disease similar to epilepsy enjoyed great popularity among the ancient Greeks, beginning in the classical period with Plato and the Hippocratic writers and continuing on with both doctors and exorcists down into the Roman and Byzantine periods. The medical history of this alleged illness and how it figured

Earlier and shorter versions of this paper were given at the University of Zaragoza (September 2005), as the Dennis A. George Lecture in Hellenic Culture at Tulane University (April 2006), at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hebrew University (July 2006), University of Southern California (February 2007), Columbia University (December 2007), William and Clark University (April 2008) and Bryn Mawr College (November 2008). I am grateful to my various hosts and for the questions and critiques I received at each venue. Different sections and versions of this paper have benefited from conversations with and the comments of Ann Hanson, Lesley Dean Jones, Brooke Holmes,
in the prognosis and treatment of “uterine suffocation” has, in fact, been well studied, but few have tried to trace the history of the wandering womb outside of the world of Greek medicine, in part because until recently little was known about the ritual techniques designed to control it. In the past two decades, however, a number of newly discovered or newly edited amulets from places as widespread as Lebanon, Egypt, and England provide precisely the needed data. Armed, then, with sophisticated analyses of the medical tradition and new texts pertaining to the magical, I aim here to describe how both approaches to the wandering womb develop side by side in mutual influence from the late classical period onwards. Of special interest will be the tendency in both traditions to imagine demons and errant wombs as wild animals and to use fumigations to control both.

This study is divided into three parts, which are for the most part arranged chronologically: (i) a survey of late-classical philosophical and medical ideas about the movement of the womb and their reception during the Roman Empire; (ii) a discussion of the late-classical and Hellenistic treatment of demons, especially those thought to cause spasmodic diseases; and (iii) a detailed analysis of a series of magical recipes and amulets of Roman and Byzantine date (some only recently available for study) that were used either to prevent a womb from moving or to force a dislodged womb back in place. I conclude with a discussion of the historical development of and consequences for the idea that women alone possessed an internal organ that was variously interpreted as a mechanically defective body-part, a sentient and passionate animal, and then finally a demon with malicious intent who bites and poisons the female body. I also argue against the hypothesis or assumption that midwives or wet-nurses were the original source for either the idea of the wandering womb or its treatment, suggesting that the syndrome never fit comfortably into the category of gynecological illness, because

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1. Aubert 1989 is mainly concerned with the magical texts, but briefly discusses some of the medical material; for recent work on the medical side, see, e.g., Hanson 1991: 103-104 and King 1993: 43-44, who each mention one magical text in passing. See also Krell 1975: 104, with n.59, who discusses the *PGM VII* recipe.


3. I use the noun “fumigation” and the verb “fumigate” throughout in a non-technical sense to mean “to subject a person, place or thing to the smoke of burning materials.” This definition embraces, e.g., incense burning at altars, walking around a room or patient with burning sulfur or pitch and the rather specialized medical practice of introducing fumes into a woman’s womb through a hollow reed.

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THE WANDERING WOMB FROM PLATO TO THE MEDICAL WRITERS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In Plato’s *Timaeus*, the eponymous interlocutor describes how the gods created desire for sexual intercourse by making the male penis and the female uterus animated creatures in their own right (91b–e): 5

Indeed, on account of this, the disobedience and self-rule characteristic of the genitals of men came into being—a sort of living animal (*hoion zoion*) that pays no heed to reason and tries to rule (i.e., the whole body) because of its stinging desires (*oistroteis epithumias*). So, too, in turn are the wombs (*mētrai*) and the so-called uteruses (*husterai*) in women—there being in them a living animal (*zōion*) desirous of childbearing (*epithumētikon paidopoitias*), whenever it is fruitless for a long time beyond its due season, being distressed it carries on with difficulty and by wandering (*planōmenon*) in every direction throughout the body, by fencing off (*apophratton*) the passages of breath, and by not allowing (the body) to catch its breath (*anapnein*), it throws it (the body) into the extremes of helplessness and provokes all other kinds of diseases.

Although Timaeus begins his discussion by describing both the penis and the womb in tandem, in the end he has much more to say about the womb: it alone can wander the body and cause illnesses, while the penis vanishes from his discussion entirely. This is one of the earliest explicit references to the wandering womb, although some scholars have suggested that the same idea may lie behind mythical accounts of female madness or sickness, most notably stories about young women at the point of menarche, who like the daughters of Proetus, refuse to marry, or who like Io are prevented from doing so. 6

The only other classical Greek sources that talk explicitly about the wandering womb are some medical treatises attributed to Hippocrates, which were probably composed by different individuals between 425 and 350 BCE, that is: roughly contemporaneous with Plato’s lifetime. The wandering womb appears in one of the earliest gynecological treatises: 7

5. See Adair 1996 for a recent discussion and full bibliography. He argues, in fact, that the idea of the wandering womb is too preposterous for Plato to have accepted it and therefore suggests an alternative reading of the text. This reading has not been persuasive; see, e.g., King 1998: 36; Dean Jones 2000: 211n.12. An earlier and popular view that the Egyptians and not the Greeks were the first to theorize a mobile womb is without merit; see Merskey and Potter 1989; Bednarski 2000.

6. See Lefkowitz 1981: 16-18, who also sees similar ideas at work in the chorus’ attempted “diagnosis” of Phaedra’s illness at the start of Euripides’ *Hippolytus*.

7. *Diseases of Women* 2.201, translation by Hanson 1975: ad loc.
If the uterus seems to sit under the diaphragm, the woman suddenly becomes speechless . . . and she experiences suffocation; she grinds her teeth and, when called, does not respond.

When the womb strikes the liver or abdomen . . . the woman turns up the whites of her eyes and becomes chilled; some women are livid. She grinds her teeth and saliva flows out of her mouth. These women resemble those who suffer from Herakles’ disease (i.e., epilepsy). If the womb lingers near the liver or abdomen, the woman dies of suffocation.

These passages reveal how Hippocratic writers typically focus on specific symptoms and their probable causes—in this case the womb interfering with the diaphragm or the liver—and are therefore disinclined to offer a general theory about why the womb gets displaced in the first place.

For example, they never say explicitly, as Plato does, that the womb is a “living animal” that wanders about the body. Instead they seem to imagine a set of more aggressive actions of shorter duration. They say, for instance, that the womb can “leap upon” (emballein and epiballein), “fall upon” (prospiptein), “rush (towards)” (thein) and “urge on” (parotrunai) various other internal organs and parts of the body: the heart, the liver, the lungs, the bladder, or even the head. As we shall see below, these kinds of sudden, violent movements are often attributed to demons who attack the body externally. The Hippocratic authors agree with Plato that the displaced womb can also “strangle” (anchein) or “suffocate” (pnigein) a female patient, when it presses against the diaphragm or blocks other passages in the body.

The Hippocratic doctors recommend a number of therapies for the displaced womb. To stop the womb from moving in the first place, they suggest that a woman should marry young (as close to menarche as possible), engage in repeated intercourse with her husband and bear as many children as possible, so that the womb will always be moist and heavy and thus incapable of movement.

8. Ancient and modern commentators generally agree that “Heracles’ disease” is epilepsy, but there were alternate ancient views; see von Staden 1992: 133-43 for a detailed discussion.

9. My discussion of the Hippocratics here and throughout this essay is deeply indebted to Green 1985: 19-22; Hanson 1991: 81-87; Demand 1994: 54-57; and Dean Jones 1996: 69-77. In this essay I focus (as the Hippocratics and later medical writers do) on the disruptive effects of the womb on breathing and consciousness, e.g., seizures, aphasia, fainting, but there is also evidence for local and more trivial complaints, e.g., pain around the eyes and nose, when the womb ascends to the head, strangury, when it reaches the bladder, and so forth; see Hanson 1991: 84-85.

10. See Dean Jones 1996: 70-71, who concludes that the Hippocratics envisaged uterine motion as “violent and directed.” Green 1985: 20 notes, however, that the most frequent targets are the liver or the stomach. Movement through the diaphragm and into the chest was putatively facilitated by a tube connecting the vagina and the nostrils; see King 1998: 22-23; Dean Jones 1996: 72.


12. Demand 1994: 55-56; Dean Jones 1996: 188-89; Blundell 1995: 99. The doctors recommend the same cure for the so-called “maidens’ disease” (see next paragraph), which they attribute to
The alleged ability of the womb to move about, in short, provides an excellent justification for the patriarchal ideal of a woman’s life: early marriage and multiple pregnancies. But if a woman’s womb is already dislodged, the Hippocrates recommend a variety of treatments, including baths, uterine infusions, and a series of physical manipulations and bindings of the abdomen to force the womb back in place. They also recommend an elaborate set of fumigations: “You should fumigate her under her nose, burning some wool and adding to the fire some asphalt, castoreum, sulfur and pitch. Rub her groin and the interior of her thighs with a very sweet-smelling unguent.” The pleasant and foul smells are to be reversed, however, if the womb has shifted in the opposite direction and fallen out of the vagina.

These fumigations are certainly odd, but they do have a clear internal logic: acrid smells in the nose force the wandering womb down and away from the upper body, while sweet unguents below entice the womb back to its proper place in the lower abdomen. Scholars remain divided about the degree to which the Hippocratic womb was sentient. Some argue that, although Hippocratic writers do not describe the womb explicitly as a living animal, the fumigation therapy strongly implies that it had a sense of smell and could react to olfactory stimuli. Others suggest that over time the Hippocrates distance themselves from the odor therapies and that one can trace the development of an underlying theory that the womb moves mechanically—but without volition—when, for example, it has become dry and light and is therefore “attracted” to other organs, like the liver, that have more moisture. The author of the Hippocratic treatise *On the Illnesses of Maidens* suggests a similarly mechanical account of another spasmodic disease caused by the womb. In some girls just prior to menarche, he explains, if the first menstrual blood gets trapped in the uterus and finds no exit through the vagina, it can “burst forth” into the heart and diaphragm, manifesting the same symptoms as delayed menarche or blocked menses and for which they describe symptoms that are similar to those allegedly caused by the wandering womb.

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13. See, e.g., Demand 1994: 106 or Dean Jones 1991: 122: “In their explanations of womb movements, the Hippocrates were rationalizing the theories, not of the women themselves, but of a culture that needed to promote, and yet at the same time wished to maintain control over, women’s power of procreation.”
15. *Diseases of Women* 1.221, translation by Hanson 1975: ad loc.
17. E.g., Dean Jones 1994: 189-90. This is certainly how Soranus and Galen understand it; see below.
18. See, e.g., Krell 1975: 87; King 1993: 80-81; Dean Jones 1996: 70-71. Hanson 1991: 79, 82 suggests that within the Hippocratic corpus there is a growing tendency to juxtapose the odor therapies with more mechanical techniques (such as binding the womb from outside the body), a process that suggests the Hippocrates were gradually distancing themselves from the odor therapies as they moved towards a more mechanical understanding of uterine movement.
19. For text, translation and discussion, see Demand 1994: 56-57, 96-97; Flemming and Hanson 1998; King 1998: 76-80.
the wandering womb. Here, too, the Hippocratic author explicitly assimilates this condition to epilepsy and indeed his theory of causation (the blocked passage of the menses) is analogous to the explanation of epilepsy in another Hippocratic treatise, *On the Sacred Disease* (the blocked passage of phlegm).

The advent of human dissections about 50 years after Plato’s death strongly challenged the concept of the mobile womb among educated doctors and medical writers, for it finally proved what Aristotle had already surmised correctly on the analogy of the wombs of dissected mammals, namely that the womb was firmly anchored in place by ligaments. Surprisingly this discovery had little effect at the time. Indeed, four or five centuries later most doctors apparently continued to believe that the womb could move about the body and they treated their patients accordingly. Aretaeus of Cappadocia, for example, was a contemporary of Galen and he betrays the influence of both Plato and the Hippocrates when he says:

And in a word it (i.e., the womb) is entirely erratic (*planôdes*). It delights, also, in fragrant smells (*euôdesi osmêsesi*) and advances towards them. And it has an aversion to foul smells (*kakodmosi*) and it flees from them. And, on the whole, the womb is like an animal (*zôn*) within an animal (*zôn*).

Nonetheless he limits the range of motion to the chest up to the breastbone and to the right (the liver) and left (the spleen) and he notes the ligaments or membranes discovered by dissection, which “yield to the distension or contraction (i.e., of the womb) like the sails of a ship.”

Soranus of Ephesus, another eastern Greek of a generation earlier than Aretaeus, was a brilliant physician who greatly advanced the scientific study of gynecology. He was, moreover, quite skeptical of the wandering womb, but we get a clear sense that his view was still a minority one in the second century CE:

But the majority of the ancients and nearly all of the followers of the other sects (i.e., medical schools) employ ill-smelling odors (such as burnt hair, extinguished lamp wicks, charred deer’s horn, burnt wool, burnt flock,

21. Arist. *GA* 720a12-14, as discussed by Dean Jones 1996: 76.
23. The discussion of Soranus, Aretaeus, and Galen that follows in the next two paragraphs is heavily indebted to King 1998: 205-46.
24. *On the Causes and Symptoms of Acute Diseases* 2.11.1, translated by Adams 1972: 285-87. For discussion, see Dean Jones 1994: 200, who comments: “Aretaeus goes further than any previous medical writer in animating the womb,” and Dasen 2002: 171-73. Aubert 1989: 423 suggests that Aretaeus “revives” the idea of the wandering womb, but the quotation below from Soranus suggests that the idea remained popular in the second century and did not need revival.
27. *Gynecology* 3.29, as translated by Hanson 1998: 84, with my additions to the list of fumigated items that she elided.
skins and rags, castoreum—with which they anoint the nose and ears—pitch, cedar resin, bitumen, squashed bed bugs and all substances that are supposed to have an oppressive smell) as though the uterus flees from evil smells. As a result they have also fumigated with sweet smelling substances from below and have approved of suppositories made with spikenard <and> storax, so that the uterus by fleeing the former, but pursuing the latter, might transfer from the upper to the lower parts of the body.

Soranus goes on to criticize other kinds of contemporary treatments (e.g., massages, blowing air into the vagina, and subjecting the patients to loud sounds), but at the end of his harangue he returns one more time to the fumigation therapies, in which he includes, as we have seen, both the fetid and the acrid: “We, however, censure all of these men . . . for the uterus does not issue forth like a wild animal (thérion) from its lair, delighted by fragrant odors and fleeing bad odors.”28 He does, however, acknowledge the logic of these fumigations, when he agrees with the Hippocratic suggestion that sweet odors applied to the nose can cure uterine prolapse, because they make the uterus contract and pull itself back into the body.29

Soranus has, moreover, a different mechanical explanation for uterine suffocation: inflammation of the ligaments themselves causes them to contract and thereby lift the womb upward or bend it to the side.30 His notion of the womb flexing at its neck is based on his belief that the womb is shaped like an upside-down jug, an idea that is already implicit in Hippocratic texts at the level of metaphor and one that is best illustrated by a modern rendition of a drawing of the uterus in a ninth-century CE manuscript of Soranus.31

Fig. 1 Soranus drawing


29. Hanson 1998: 85-87 explains this inconsistency by suggesting that Soranus’ main worry was that the harsh or foul smells might hurt the fragile body of an ill woman, whereas the sweet-smelling ones would not.

30. This is most explicit at the very end of Book 3, where he, in a chapter labeled “On the Flexing, Bending and Ascent (Anadrome̊) of the Womb,” gives a more detailed discussion, which breaks off, unfortunately, before describing the ascent. See Green 1985: 34-35.

31. See Hanson 1990: 321-22; Demand 1994: 57n.37; and Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann 2006: 240-41, who go on (245-49) to trace the idea of the jug-womb in Etruscan iconography and votive practices. The drawing is after Tempkin 1955: 9, Figure 1, which is in turn based on the Muscio text of about 900 CE (Brussels MS 3714).
In the end, then, Soranus is able to maintain that the uterus was held in place by the ligaments detected by dissection, but he nevertheless allows that it could shift about in a limited manner and thus cause the seizures and suffocation noted by earlier writers.\textsuperscript{32}

Galen, a Greek doctor practicing in Rome about a generation after Soranus, quotes Plato’s description of the wandering womb and then summarizes the later Hippocratic explanation that the womb (see n.18 above), when it becomes dry, shifts closer to other organs like the liver because it “desires” to be moistened.\textsuperscript{33} He concludes: “The womb certainly does not move from one place to another like a wandering animal, but it is pulled back by the tension (i.e., of the ligaments).”\textsuperscript{34} Although here Galen clearly rejects the idea of a fully mobile womb, elsewhere in his corpus he suggests using the Hippocratic odor-therapy that Soranus criticizes so vehemently.\textsuperscript{35} And like the Hippocrates, he claims that a kind of uterine suffocation can also be caused by the retention of the menses, explaining that, if semen or blood gets trapped inside of the womb and festers, it can poison the womb, like the saliva of a rabid dog or the poison of a scorpion, and thus cause the womb to swell and interfere with other internal organs.\textsuperscript{36}

Here, then, ends our brief survey of the philosophical and medical approaches to the wandering womb.\textsuperscript{37} Where did such a strange idea come from? Since the Hippocratic writers, especially in their gynecological works, freely admit to borrowing some of their ideas and treatments from midwives and wet-nurses, some scholars suggest, plausibly enough, that these women were also the source for the prognosis of the wandering womb and its attendant therapies, since these, too, are found only in the gynecological works.\textsuperscript{38} There is, however, evidence that such

\textsuperscript{32} In some ways Plato’s sentient penis might have provided a good parallel here, for it too can greatly change shape and size, but remain anchored at its base.

\textsuperscript{33} “These were Plato’s words. But some added that whenever the wombs, while wandering through the body, encounter the diaphragm, they interfere with (sc. the patient’s) breathing. Others deny that the uterus wanders like an animal, but (they say) that when it is dried up by the suppression of the menstrual flow, it moves up (anatrechein) towards the internal organs because it desires (pothousan) to be moistened,” \textit{On the Affected Parts 6.5} (Kühn 8.425-26); translation based on King 1998: 223. The verb “to run up” (anatrechein) to describe the motion of the womb seems to be a technical term of sorts, as is “ascent” (anadrome), a noun derived from its aorist tense that is used in one of Soranus’ chapter headings (see n.30 above). As we shall see below, the same verb shows up in a rubric for a magical recipe designed to stop the womb from wandering.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{On the Anatomy of the Womb} 4, as translated and discussed by Dean Jones 1994: 202.

\textsuperscript{35} Green 1985: 50-51; King 1998: 233.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{On the Affected Parts 6.5} (Kühn 8.420). See Flemming 2000: 335; Green 1985: 47-52 (see 49 for the sepsis of the trapped liquids).

\textsuperscript{37} For the reception of the idea of uterine suffocation in later antiquity, see Gourevitch 1998.

\textsuperscript{38} E.g., Rousselle 1980: 1090-91, 1988: 122; Longrigg 1993: 3-4; Demand 1994: 94. Lloyd 1983: 76-79, Hanson 1990, and King 1995 rightly suggest a more complicated process by which raw data borrowed from female practitioners is filtered, reformed, or mediated by Hippocratic theory. Hanson 1990: 309-10 points out that doctors encountered two very different kinds of women: the inexperienced, who had little knowledge about their own bodies and needed medical instruction or advice, and the experienced, who were well versed in traditional lore and who could instruct the
fumigations were deployed even more widely in the Greek world, in areas where men, not women, were experts. One of the sources of the *Geoponica*, an eclectic late-Roman handbook on agriculture, recommends, for example, in the case of a vineyard infested by vermin that we fumigate it by burning the hair from the head of a woman; he adds as an afterthought that the same fumigation cures the upward movement of the uterus.³⁹ This passage suggests that the Hippocratic fumigations fit comfortably within the knowledge of a male landowner or steward. In what follows I shall argue, in fact, that the wandering womb and the treatments for it probably always lay within the ritual expertise of male performers, be they ritual or medical,⁴⁰ primarily because the Greeks did not consider the wandering womb a gynecological problem *per se*, but rather they treated it like other spasmodic diseases with similar symptoms. In the next section, I reconstruct the curative techniques of these ritual healers and we shall discover that nearly all of the evidence points to itinerant male practitioners who deal with both demons and errant wombs by performing rites of expulsion, exorcism, or purification in the late-classical and Hellenistic periods.

RITUAL RESPONSES TO SPASMODIC DISEASE
IN THE CLASSICAL AND HELLENISTIC PERIODS

A century or so before Soranus and a small handful of doctors begin to distance themselves from the treatment of the wandering womb, it appears for the first time in the repertoire of another group of professional healers, the exorcists, who believed that certain kinds of illness, especially spasmodic diseases like epilepsy, strokes or violent fevers, were caused by demons or other supernatural forces who penetrate the bodies of healthy people and “possess” them from within.⁴¹ These healers, moreover, used different techniques to force demons out of the body: purifications (including fumigations) and either incantations that bid the demon “flee” (*pheugein*) from the patient or exorcisms...
that forced the demon to "come out" (exelthein) of the patient's body. It is, at first glance, astonishing that these exorcists treat the wandering womb in the same way as a demon who causes epilepsy, but the symptoms of what the doctors called "uterine suffocation" were indeed, as the Hippocratics had noted several centuries earlier, much like epilepsy or other kinds of seizures, which were also signaled by difficulty in breathing, speechlessness, and even unconsciousness. The exorcists of the late-Hellenistic and Roman periods did not, however, invent out of whole cloth their ritual treatment of demons and wandering wombs, and in order to appreciate fully the techniques of these later periods, it is necessary to examine similar rituals performed in the Classical and early Hellenistic eras.

In these earlier periods Greeks seemed to think that spasmodic illnesses like strokes or epileptic seizures were the body's reaction to external blows from the invisible assaults of a god or demon, and therefore they sought cures from the realm of ritual, for example, by sacrificing to angry gods, by burning incense and immersing the patients in special baths, or by singing incantations to drive away an attacking demon. The Hippocratic author of On the Illnesses of Maidens, for instance, criticizes the families of girls suffering the disease, because they try to cure it by making offerings to Artemis, on the grounds that the goddess has inflicted the illness. As we saw above, he argues instead for a mechanical cause for the disease: the trapped menses that eventually burst into other organs and thereby cause the symptoms. The Hippocratic author does, however, give us valuable information about how the disease was perceived outside of the medical world. These girls, for instance, seem to see and hear demons who urge them to commit suicide. Thus, what the Hippocratic doctor sees as delusions brought on by the internal pressure of the trapped menses, contemporaries describe as the attack of demons, who threaten the girls from without. In the Wasps Aristophanes gives us a similar view: he likens himself to a kind of Herculean hero and explains how by writing his comedies he protects the Athenians from the attacks of pernicious informers, who, like hostile shivering-fits and fevers, were choking their fathers and strangling their grandfathers as they lay in their beds. Here, too, in the

42. See Kotansky 1995 for the origins and development of exorcistic formulas.
43. For Hippocratic assimilation of the symptoms of the wandering womb to those of epilepsy and other spasmodic diseases, see Hanson 1991: 87. For the later medical tradition, see Flemming 2000: 174-75.
45. Demand 1994: 98 quotes another passage from the Hippocratic Superfetation that equates and to some degree confounds the wandering womb and blocked menses as causes of epilepsy-like symptoms.
47. Wasps 1037-43. Demand 1994: 98-99 points out the parallels in language between this description and that of the virgins’ disease discussed above. The Herculean metaphors are apt, because Heracles and other heroes like Theseus were often imagined as “purifying” the land of monsters; see Parker 1983: 211.
course of an attack the afflicted person seems to see, hear, and respond to external supernatural beings. 48

We find a similar description of such non-medical diagnoses by yet another Hippocratic writer, who is again laying claim to therapeutic territory occupied or contested by the traditional ritual-workers he criticizes: 49

They make a different god responsible for each of the different forms of the complaint (i.e., epilepsy). If the patient imitates a goat, if he grinds his teeth or suffers convulsions on the right side, they say the Mother of the Gods is responsible. If he utters a piercing and loud cry, they liken him to a horse and blame Poseidon. Should he pass some excrement, as often happens under the stress of the disease, the surname Enodia (i.e., of Hecate) is applied. If he utters sounds more frequent and thin like those of birds, it is Apollo Nomios. If he foams at the mouth and kicks, Ares is to blame. When at night there are fearful things and terrors, delirium, leaps-from-the-bed and dashes-out-of-doors, they say these are the assaults of Hecate and the attacks of the heroes.

If we ignore the hyperbole and distortion of an obviously hostile witness, we can discern some system of diagnosis here. In the last sentence the nocturnal attacks of heroes and Hecate are quite similar to the assaults against grandfathers and great grandfathers described by Aristophanes. 50 Elsewhere the author of On the Sacred Disease explains that epileptics, when they feel an attack coming on, flee to their houses or a private place, “because they are ashamed, not, as most people think, because they are afraid of the demon (daimonion).” 51 There was, in short, a popular theory that epilepsy, like violent nightmares and other spasmodic diseases, was caused by externally attacking demons. The detail of patients crying out like animals can, moreover, be better explained as evidence of an attack by a theriomorphic demon: the patients grind their teeth like a goat or cry out like a horse, because the supernatural forces attacking them take the form of such animals. 52

49. On the Sacred Disease 1.38 (Grensemann). My translation follows Holmes 2008: 238. Regarding the competitive context, Hanson 1991: 87 remarks: “Hippocratic doctors were inserting themselves into areas of heath-care previously reserved for practitioners other than doctors, and they now claimed the right to treat sudden seizures of madness and uterine suffocation.”
50. Other fifth-century sources confirm some of these diagnoses: Hecate and the Mother of the Gods are both named as possible assailants of the ailing Phaedra in Euripides’ Hippolytus; see Jouanna 1999: 187-88.
52. The linkage of horses to Poseidon and birds to Apollo is well known, but, unlike Hecate and the Mother of the Gods, they are not usually thought to make individual people sick, although Poseidon in the form of a bull-shaped wave kills Hippolytus at the end of Euripides’ play. Apollo, of course, is a plague god in Ionia (as in Iliad 1), but plague requires ritual on a civic, rather than personal, scale.
Theriomorphic demons do, in fact, appear in some of the earliest extant magical amulets, for example, a late fourth-century BCE lead tablet from Crete that orders a dog and she-wolf to flee (pheugein) back to their own homes, a goal pursued in a number of other Greek expulsion and scapegoat ceremonies in which demons or off-scorings are transported back to their homes in the barren sea or desert. The first-century BCE “Philinna Papyrus” preserves an incantation that likewise assimilates a headache to a group of similarly predatory animals: “Flee pain of the head! [Lion] flies under a rock! Wolves flee and single-hooved horses flee propelled by the blows of my perfect charm!” Both of these incantations belong to an old and widespread Greek incantatory tradition of forcing demons “to flee” (pheugein) or “to withdraw” (anachoıroun) from people, houses or towns.55 Later versions add the threat that a powerful entity is pursuing them. Pliny, for example, quotes a Greek chant for curing impetigo, which assimilates the disease to beetles: “Flee beetles, a fierce wolf pursues you!” On others a hero is the pursuer, e.g., Perseus holding the head of Medusa on a gem that reads “Flee gout, Perseus pursues you!” or Heracles strangling the Nemean Lion with the inscription: “Withdraw bile, the divinity pursues you!” In all of these cases, the addressee of the command is a monster, like Medusa (= gout), or wild animals assimilated to illnesses, for example, a lion, wolf, or horse (= headache), beetles (= impetigo), or a lion (= bile).

A similar expulsive strategy lies behind a silver amulet of first-century CE date, which describes how a migraine demon named Antaura emerged from the sea and “shouted like a hind and cried out like a cow.” In the narrative Artemis of Ephesus confronts the demon and either sends her back to the ocean or into the head of a bull grazing on a far-off mountain. Here, again, it is easy to imagine that the demoness Antaura was thought to manifest herself theriomorphically as a cow or hind in the agonized cries of a migraine victim, and the alternate command that she go into the head of a bull suggests that she could also enter the head of a human patient—a phenomenon similar to that of the indwelling demons of the Roman period, who are likewise thought to possess and speak from the body of an.

54. PGM XX and Supplementum Hellenisticum no. 900. For discussion, see Faraone 2001, 2006.
56. Plin. HN 27.75.100; see Edmonds 1959: 542-44 no. 38a.
57. Heim nos. 59-60. I give the traditional translation here, but as Prentice 1906: 139 notes, the word for “divinity,” theion (if that is the right restoration), is oddly neuter here and might actually refer to “sulfur,” a material that was thought to make demons flee. Amulet cases have, in fact, been found filled with sulfur; see, e.g., Johns and Potter 1983: 99 no. 30 (a gold example from the “Thetford Treasure”), who cite another example in the British Museum.
58. GMA 13. The text begins with the rubric: “For migraine.” See Kotansky’s commentary ad loc., which reconstructs the missing final part of the story from later Christian versions in which Christ replaces Artemis.
epileptic or madman. In early Greek myth, moreover, stories about mad Io or the daughters of Proetus being transformed into animals may also derive from a similar diagnosis, according to which young women suffering from seizures or madness roar in pain or confusion and their cries are thought to reveal the canine or bovine identity of the attacking demon.

What, then, is the non-medical cure for such demonic attacks? In the passage from the *Wasps* discussed earlier, it is the arrival of a supernatural “protector from evil” (*alexikakos*) and a purifier (*kathartês*) of the land, a reference, most likely, to Heracles. According to the author of *On the Sacred Disease*, however, the traditional healers of his day claim to cure the disease with “purifications (*katharmoi*) and with incantations (*epaôidai*),” as well as by banning baths and certain kinds of food and clothing. He describes, however, only one kind of purification ritual in detail: the healer smears the patient with blood, washes the blood off, and then carries the off-scourings away to the mountains or throws them into the sea, a form of purification that Melampus used to cure the daughters of Proetus in one version of the story. The Hippocratic author does not, of course, give the full repertoire of purifications known to these ritual workers and indeed he has probably fastened upon the use of smeared blood tendentiously, because he considers it to be the most contradictory or outrageous.

The blood-smearing ritual described by the Hippocratic author is, in fact, an expulsive one (*apopompê*): the disease is washed off and escorted away from the patient and eventually away from the civilized world. This also seems to be the “plot” of the Antaura amulet, in which the headache demon is ordered away from the head of the patient and into the head of a bull grazing on some far-off mountainside. Such expulsive ceremonies often show up in alternate narratives about the purification of pollution. The burning of acrid substances is a good example. Odysseus fumigates his palace with sulfur directly after the suitors are slaughtered (*Ody.* 22.481-94) and the scholia explain that he is purifying the

59. This added feature fits the Roman date of the amulet, a date for which (as we shall see in the next section) we have much evidence for indwelling demons.
60. Faraone 1999: 88-93, with Table 3.
61. Parker 1983: 211 notes in another context the dual titles of Heracles in his role as culture hero: *Alexikakos* and *Kathartês*.
62. 1.43 (Grensemann); see Parker 1983: 229-30.
63. A gem of the early imperial period shows Melampus holding a slaughtered pig over the heads of the girls; see Platz-Horster 1987: 23 no. 41. The scene is similar to classical vase paintings of Apollo purifying Orestes at Delphi.
64. The criticism of the idea of purifying “blood with blood” had a previous history in the philosophic literature; see Parker 1983: 230.
66. When the Spartans, for example, allow their regent Pausanias to die in a temple, they experience some kind of disaster, which Thucydides describes as an *agos* (“pollution”) needing purification. Plutarch, on the other hand, knows another tradition, which claims that the temple was haunted by Pausanias’ ghost and that the Spartans needed to bring in ritual experts to drive the ghost out with purifications and incantations; see Faraone 1991: 185-87, 1992: 83.
blood-pollution incurred by the murders; indeed we might even understand the action as a practical measure to overcome the stench of the corpses. But it could also be explained as a ritual designed to expel the ghosts of his victims, who as untimely dead and violently killed persons would have been likely to hang around and haunt the palace. Fumigation also plays a role in mythological accounts of the treatment of female madness and seizures. In his parody of the purification of the daughters of Proetus (who act like dogs during their illness), the comic poet Diphilus portrays Melampus using a torch, as well as sulfur and bitumen, and most scholars rightly presume that Melampus was thought to have fumigated the girls with these two substances. According to some versions of the myth, the daughters of Proetus were driven mad by Hera and their symptoms recall the Hippocratic description of uterine suffocation and of the Maidens' Disease. There are, in fact, different versions of their eventual cure: in one they are successfully purified by Melampus, but in another they regain their senses only after their father dedicates an altar to Artemis. There were, then, at least three etiologies for female spasmodic disease in the classical period: (i) the anger of a deity (usually Artemis or Hera); (ii) a mechanical problem (e.g., the retention of the menses or a displaced womb); and (iii) some kind of fearful demonic attack that causes theriomorphic cries or behavior. Supplicatory sacrifice and prayer are the traditional cures according to the first explanation; menarche, sexual intercourse, or the forcible return of the womb by binding, massage, or fumigations according to the second; and blood-wiping rituals (followed by an apopompè), incantations, or fumigations according to the third.

Our direct sources for the pre-exorcistic ritual treatment of epilepsy and similar diseases are, then, few and problematic. The two Hippocratic treatises give us, as we have seen, tendentious and selective accounts of the non-medical means of diagnosis and treatment, and the two other important texts come from comic sources (Aristophanes and Diphilus), the latter of which survives only in a relatively short fragment. There is, however, one neglected text that gives us a friendly, complete, and detailed description of a ritual used to drive away a deadly demon. The apocryphal Book of Tobit, a romance originally composed in Greek or Aramaic in the fourth or third century BCE, records how Tobias is

68. Frag. 126: “cleansing the daughters of Proetus and their father Proetus, the son of Abas, and the old woman to make five in all, with one torch and one squill for all those people, and with sulfur and pitch and much resounding sea, drawn from the deep and gentle-flowing Ocean.” See Parker 1983 for discussion.
71. Wiping and fumigation could apparently go together. A Menandrian slave, exasperated with his hypochondriac master, exclaims: “Go to the women to wipe you round in a circle and fumigate you!” Men. Phasma 50-56; Parker 1983: 207.
72. The date and original language of Tobit remain controversial. The text survives in two recensions in the Septuagint and bears many signs of Greek origins, but fragments found at Qumram.
unable to marry his beloved Sarah, because a demon named Asmodeus is living in her bedchamber and has killed her previous bridegrooms. The disguised angel Raphael, however, helps the young Tobias capture a special fish and he instructs the young lover to fumigate her room with the fish’s heart and liver to drive the demon away (6.8.16-17). Tobias does as he is told, and the horrible smell forces the demon to flee (8.2-3). There are hints that this fumigation reflects an actual ritual, in one of the two principal recensions of the text, Raphael’s commands to Tobias resemble the instructions we find in later Greek magical handbooks, and in Chapter 18 of the Testament of Solomon we learn that this same demon Asmodeus can be warded off by saying thrice “Raphael pursues you!” while fumigating with fish bile. The goal of making the demon flee and the threat of a pursuing Raphael both recall the Greek tradition of flee-formulae discussed earlier, while the fumigation reflects either a late-Babylonian ritual or a Greek expulsion rite —since it is possible to claim Near Eastern antecedents for most Greek fumigations, the question is moot.

Although some scholars have indeed noted that the Hippocratic use of sweet smells to attract the womb back to the lower body is quite similar to the use of incense in Greek sanctuaries to entice beneficial gods to come and receive sacrifice, only one, to my knowledge, has noted the parallel between the Hippo-

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73. Kotansky 1995: 258-59. Raphael’s instructions are sometimes called an “exorcism”; see most recently Bohak 2008: 89-90, with earlier bibliography, but this is imprecise and overlooks important differences. The term itself, derived from the Greek verb ex-horkizein (“to put under an oath, to adjure”), technically refers to the oath (horkos) used to convince an indwelling demon to “come out” of a human body. There is no hint in the text of Tobit that Tobias speaks to Asmodeus or places him under oath and the demon is never said to inhabit Sarah’s body.

74. Kotansky 1995: 258-59 suggests that the author of the BA recension of Tobit used an early form of magical handbook as his guide.

75. Chapter 18 of the Testament once circulated independently as a Greek magical handbook. In the BA manuscripts, the demon says that Raphael and the fumigation chase him away. In manuscript P, which as we now know preserves important early details about ritual, we are told to repeat the phrase “Raphael pursues you” thrice, while fumigating the liver and gall of the fish. For the recent appreciation of the early and superior quality of manuscript P, see Daniel 1983.

76. For the Babylonian ritual, see Dion 1976. For the Greek, see Kotansky 1995: 276: “Certainly older Greek ideas of warding off demons—particularly the ‘flee-formulae’—persist into the Hellenistic Jewish rites of exorcism (e.g., the Book of Tobit).”

77. The Greek stem kathar- used in the verb katharizein (“to purify”) as well as the term katharmos (“purification ritual”) probably derives from the Semitic root KTR (“to smoke,” “to purify by fire”) and the names of most incenses as well as the name and shape of the typical Greek incense burner are borrowed from the East. See von Staden 1992: 17-18, who quotes Burkert and gives further discussion.

78. E.g., Manuli 1980; Rousselle 1988: 123; Dean Jones 1991: 123.
cric use of acrid smells at the woman’s nose and the similar use of sulfur and pitch in Greek and Near Eastern purificatory rituals to drive away evil demons and ghosts. The putrid fumigations of fish-guts or bile in the Book of Tobit, moreover, provide important parallels to the use of castoreum in Hippocratic fumigations and other foul, but not acrid smells:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attracting Gods or Wombs</th>
<th>Repelling Demons, Wombs or Vermin</th>
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<tr>
<td>Babylonian ritual</td>
<td>sweet incense (gods forward)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek ritual</td>
<td>sweet incense (gods forward)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hippocratic</td>
<td>“very sweet-smelling unguent”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soranus description</td>
<td>spikenard and storax (womb forward)</td>
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<td>Tobit</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geoponica</td>
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Greek doctors, then, seem to be employing a form of ritual technique known early on throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and by doing so they not only treat the womb as a sentient animal (like vermin in a vineyard), but also as a powerful supernatural entity (like gods or ghosts), who can be attracted to and driven from places by the fumigation of fragrant or repulsive odors.

INDWELLING DEMONS AND WANDERING WOMBS IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

People continue to fear the external attacks of demons well into the Roman period and beyond. Plutarch, for example, writing in roughly the same period as Soranus and Galen, speaks generally about people who attribute all their misfortunes to the “beatings” (plegai) of a god and the “assaults” (prosbolai) of a demon, pouring special scorn upon the “superstitious” man, who regularly

fears that an angry god “will set his teeth into your body and bite it through, or he will get hold of your little child and beat him to death” (Mor. 170a). Similar accounts persist in the stories of demonic attack in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, where demons continue to “strike,” “lash,” and “strangle” their victims without entering them. By Plutarch’s day, however, a new theory and therapy had emerged with regard to spasmodic diseases: they are now caused by demons, who insinuate themselves into the bodies of their victims, who, in turn, can only be cured by forcing the demon out of the body. This technique seems to have been invented sometime in the first century BCE in the eastern Mediterranean basin, in a Greek-speaking community of the Jewish diaspora. In the Acts of the Apostles, for example, Luke describes itinerant Jewish exorcists (Ioudaioi exhorkistai), who were competing with Paul as he preached among the Ephesians, and in the second century CE, the writer Lucian speaks of this kind of practitioner as a well-known type (Lover of Lies 16):

Everyone knows about the Syrian from Palestine, the expert in this technique, how many he takes in hand, who fall down in the moonlight, rolling their eyes and foaming at the mouth. . . . He nevertheless stands them up and sends them away sound of mind, after having delivered them from their difficulties for a large fee. For whenever he stands near them as they lie on the ground and asks “How came you into this body?” the sick man himself is silent, but the demon answers, either in Greek or in the barbarian tongue from whence he came, saying how and from whence he came into the person. And he (i.e., the Syrian) by forcing oaths (horkous) upon the demon and—if he does not agree—by threatening him, drives him out. Indeed, I myself saw one coming out, black and smoky in color.

Anecdotes like these and many more reveal that as early as the Augustan period peripatetic exorcists claimed to use the secret and powerful names of the

80. Bonner 1932; Dunbabin 1989: 35-37; Bremmer 2002: 57-58. All of these demons are eventually driven away by the saint in scenes that Bremmer imprecisely calls exorcisms. While it is true that modern parlance does talk about exorcising demons from places as well as people, it is important that we distinguish between the Greek tradition of expulsion rites that force external demons (who hit, bite, and strangle their victims) “to flee” places, often with a threat that a higher power will “pursue” them (e.g., the Phalasarna tablet and Tobias’ treatment of Asmodeus), and the Jewish tradition of forcing indwelling demons to take oaths before a supreme monotheistic god and thereby promise to “come out” of the host’s body. Bremmer, for example, suggests (60) that the verb discedere, which appears twice in commands to demons in Latin translations of the AAA, is comparable to the Greek verb exelthein, which is typical in Jewish exorcisms, but according to Lewis and Short s.v., the primary meanings of discedere are “to leave” or “to depart” from place or person and thus the verb is much closer to the verbs pheugein and anachôrein that belong to the Greek tradition of expulsive rites.


82. Acts 19.11-12: “Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists (Ioudaioi exhorkistai) tried to use the name of Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits (i.e., those who were possessed), saying ‘I adjure (exhorikizo) you by the Jesus, whom Paul proclaims.’ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.” For discussion and earlier bibliography see Strange 1987.
Jewish or Christian god to expel evil demons from the sick by forcing oaths upon them, from whence comes the eponymous speech-act: *exhorkizô se*, “I adjure you” or “I put you under an oath.”

In the most famous literary examples exorcism seems to be entirely a “talking cure”: the indwelling demon is interrogated, upbraided, placed under oath, and then commanded to leave the host body. The result is a forced conversation, not unlike that between Artemis and the headache demon Antaura, in which demons are forced to reveal their names and powers, often protesting that they are being mistreated. It is important to note, however, that strong odors placed at the nose and body-fumigations also played an important role in some exorcisms in the Roman period. Josephus, for example, reports that in the presence of the emperor Vespasian a Jewish exorcist named Eleazar freed a possessed man from a demon by placing under his nose a ring which contained “one of the roots Solomon prescribed”; as the man was smelling it, Eleazar successfully drew the demon out of his body through his nostrils. A Greek magical handbook of fourth-century date likewise claims that if you put asphalt and sulfur to the nose of a possessed person, the demon will speak and then go away (*PGM* XIII 243), and the Talmud attributes to the first-century CE rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai the following description of an exorcism: “They take roots and make a smoke beneath him and sprinkle water on him and the demon flies away.”

If Eleazar’s root is, as some suggest, the foul-smelling *ba’aras* plant used elsewhere in the expulsion of demons, the goal of his technique would be different than that of Hippocratic fumigations: when placed under the nose of the patient, it forced the demon to come out of the nose, rather than retreat deeper into the body. It may, on the other hand, have been a sweet-smelling root that enticed the demon out of the nose. In any event, because Josephus tells us that Eleazar employed “one of the roots Solomon prescribed,” we should imagine that there were other burning

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83. See Bonner 1943-1944 for a good summary of the various speech acts.
84. Bohak 2008: 89-94 stresses fumigation as an important technique for forcing demons out, one that is independent of verbal action.
85. *AJ* 8.42-49; see Duling 1985 for a full discussion. Note that it is the smell that forces the demon out and that the exorcistic part of the operation (the oath-swearing) is after the fact, to prevent re-possession.
86. See Twelftree 1993: 43 for text and discussion. Bonner 1943: 39-40 discusses a recipe in the *Cyanides* for a gemstone depicting Nemesis underneath which one places a plant called *nekua*. The recipe ends with the claim that “if one brings this ring near to a possessed person, straightaway the demon will confess himself and flee.” One wonders, too, if a tubular amulet case stuffed with sulfur also belongs to this tradition, since it, once suspended under the chin, would continually fumigate the nose of the patient; see Johns and Potter 1983: 99 no. 30.
87. Joseph. *Bell.* 7.78-85; see Duling 1985: 22, 24, where he also quotes (without citing) a passage from Strabo (quoting Posidonius) to the effect that the Jews also used asphalt in such rituals; see Herrman 1954-1955. The use of fetid smells, however, also seems to be attested in an epigram in the *Palatine Anthology* (11.427), which claims that the bad breath of an exorcist, rather than the oaths he makes, forces the demon out of the body; see Bohak 2008: 96-97. On the other hand, we find in *Testament of Solomon* 20 instructions to apply ground coriander (a sweet spice) to the lips before saying the exorcistic formula.
roots in the Solomonic repertoire that could be brought to bear at an exorcism. All of the other anecdotes, however, talk of putrid (fish guts) and acrid smells (sulfur and asphalt) like those described in the Hippocratic corpus. 88

It is also during the Augustan period that we begin to find evidence that healers are using the same exorcistic techniques to force the wandering womb to return to its proper place. 89 Although these popular healers did not leave behind any theoretical treatises or detailed gynecological handbooks, their handiwork does survive antiquity in the form of amulets and magical recipes. Our earliest evidence for a magical spell used to control the movement of a womb is inscribed in Greek on a small gold tablet found near Beirut: “I adjure (exhorkizō) you, womb of Ipsa, whom Ipsa bore, in order that you never abandon your place, in the name of the lord god, the living, the unconquerable: remain in the spot of Ipsa, whom Ipsa bore.” 90 This gold sheet was found rolled up inside a cylindrical amulet-case and it was clearly worn by a woman as an amulet to prevent her womb from moving. The text is dated by its handwriting to the first century BCE or CE and, because it seems to have been copied out of a handbook, it probably reflects an even earlier tradition. 91

A series of hematite gemstones of Roman imperial date (like the one shown in Figure 2) were also designed to combat the movement of the womb. 92

88. It may seem imprudent to use Greek and Jewish traditions and sources together here, but, since exorcism appears first in our sources in Hellenized Jewish communities (e.g., in Ephesus in Asia Minor), it is best to understand it as a syncretism of Greek and Semitic purificatory traditions, which (in the case of fumigations) can both be traced back to Babylonian rituals; see n.38 above.

89. For general discussion, see Aubert 1989; Betz 1997. Faraone 2003 collects the relevant texts.

90. Brilliantly re-edited by Kotansky 1994: no. 51. The text is corrupt at the very end. Parallels suggest that it should read: “And stay in the place [which god has given you, o womb] of Ipsa, whom Ipsa bore.” For full discussion see Faraone 2003: 197.

91. “Ipsa,” the supposed name of the woman and her mother, is the Latin word for “herself” and probably is shorthand for “put the name of the patient here.” So it would appear that the professional magician who inscribed this text forgot to replace the word “Ipsa” with the name of his client; his mistake shows us, however, that charms like this were already circulating in handbooks around the eastern Mediterranean around the turn of the millennium. See Kotansky GMA ad loc.

92. BM 351 is pictured here. For a full discussion of this type, see Delatte 1914: 76-80; Bonner 1950: 83-84; Barb 1959: 370-71; Michel 2004: 179-82. We usually find it on hematite gemstones, except for the two gems from Athens published by Delatte 1914 and described as “black jasper,” perhaps in error as hematite has many shades of color and densities; see Hanson 1995: 281-82. Hematite (literally: “bloodstone”) was believed to have the power to stop the flow of blood and was frequently used for amulets concerned with menorrhoea; see Barb 1952: 279-80; Hanson 1995: 290-91.
On all of them we find the traditional medical image of a womb as an inverted jug\(^93\) accompanied by commands to the womb, for example: “Stop (\textit{stathētī} womb!” or simply “Stop!”\(^94\). Since two of these gems preserve a full iambic trimeter, using a different imperative (“Contract [\textit{staleṭī} womb, lest Typhon seize you!”) it is quite likely that they reflect an even earlier oral tradition.\(^95\) These longer versions, moreover, recall the traditional hexametrical flee-formulas discussed earlier, where we also encountered the combination of command (“flee”) and threat (“because Perseus pursues you!”). These gems, in short, are not exorcisms, but rather belong to the Greek tradition of expulsive incantations like those on the Phalasarna amulet. We have no evidence that either the Beirut amulet or the gemstones were accompanied by fumigations, but Josephus’ reference to a presumably odorous root under the bezel of Eleazar’s ring and the use of plant and animal additives to a recipe for an exorcistic ring in the \textit{Cyranides} increases the possibility.\(^96\)

The commands on the hematite gems imply that the womb is already causing problems and therefore needs to stop or contract, unlike the gold tablet from Beirut, which orders the womb to remain where it is. They would seem, then, to be curative amulets, whereas the Beirut charm is a preventative one. The Beirut

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93. Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann 2006: 250-51 make the same point, but use the term “medical cupping vessel,” a metaphor used by the Hippocrates (see ibid. 240-41). Dasen 2002: 176-79 points out that the much rarer depiction on these gems of the womb as an octopus—15 examples out of more than 200 (see Michel 2004: 338-39)—also seems to reflect metaphors and comparisons used by medical writers.

94. Delatte 1914: no. 34; Philipp 1986: no. 184; BM 351. For discussion see Bonner 1950: 83-84; Barb 1959: 370-71.

95. Barry 1906: no. 3; SMA: no. 140; BM: no. 379; Delatte 1914: no. 33. For the medical use of the verb \textit{stellein}, see Bonner 1950: 84n.23, 92; and Hanson 1995: 296n.14, who notes that “everyday usage of the verb” suggests some idea of motion in the imperative, e.g., “Collapse!” or “Be sent!” For the wider and earlier Greek tradition of iambic incantations, see Faraone 2009.

96. Bonner 1943: 39-41 discusses the \textit{Cyranides} passage.
amulet, moreover, threatens the womb in a more complicated way: it adjures the problematic womb “by the name of the living and unconquerable lord god,” an unmistakable reference to Jahweh, the god of the Jews, who is, as we saw above, regularly invoked in Roman-period exorcisms. In 1997 a similar exorcism of the womb came to light in West Deeping, England, this one inscribed in Latin on a lead sheet, which was then rolled up like an amulet:

Womb, I say to you, stay in your place, [which the god X] gave to you. I adjure you by Iao and by Sabaô and by Adônaï so that you do not hold onto the side, but stay in your place, and not hurt Cleuomedes, daughter of A[ . . .]

Unlike the author of the much earlier gold tablet from Beirut, who can imagine the possibility, at least, that the womb might abandon its normal place entirely, this Latin amulet, although clearly based on a Greek model, seems to abide by the later view of Soranus and other medical writers that the womb can only twist or move to one side or the other in a tightly restricted manner. We get a much fuller sense of this tradition of womb-exorcisms from a fourth-century ce recipe in a Greek magical handbook discovered in upper Egypt:

For the Ascent (Anadromê) of the Womb:

I adjure you, womb, [by the] one established over the abyss, before heaven, earth, sea, light or darkness came to be, who created the angels . . . and who sits over the Cherubim, who bears his own throne(?): return again to your seat and do not lean into the right part of the ribs nor the left part of the ribs, nor take a bite from (apodeêkseis) into(?) the heart, like a dog, but stop and remain in your proper places without chewing (memasêmenê) as long as I adjure you by the one who in the beginning made heaven and earth and all that is therein. Hallelujah! Amen!

Here, like the Beirut amulet, the spell addresses the womb directly and adjures it by an unnamed creator god, who with his angels and his Cherubim must again be identified as the Jewish god.

97. Jahweh’s popularity on amulets for the wandering womb is clearly connected to his role as a creator god, who in the beginning placed the womb in its “proper place” in a woman’s body and who is consequently invoked to make sure the womb returns to its appointed spot. Betz 1997: 51, 53 gives a thorough and learned discussion of the “creation theology” that informs the PGM VII exorcism and the Aramaic one from the Cairo Geniza (both quoted and discussed below).

98. See Tomlin 1997, who dates the text to the fourth century CE. I use his text and translation with the slight changes suggested in Faraone 2003.

99. Tomlin 1997 points out that the use of the Greek letter omega instead of the Latin “o” in the spelling of the three Jewish names (Iaô, Sabaô and Adônaï) points to the same Greek tradition of womb-exorcism.

100. PGM VII 260-71; I give the translation of Scarborough in GMPT, ad loc., with some minor changes. For general discussion, see Aubert 1989: 424-25; Betz 1997: 52-54; Kotansky 1995: 266-68. For this translation and discussion of the text, see Faraone 2003.

101. For the creation theology evident here, see Veltri 1996; Betz 1997: 52-54.
With the exception of the “biting” and “chewing” in this last example, all of the uterine activities mentioned here are familiar from the medical and magical texts discussed earlier. It is, moreover, instructive that the rubric to this recipe—“For the Ascent (Anadrome) of the Womb”—seems to echo the one that we find at the end of the title of Soranus’ chapter on treatments for the dislodged womb: “On the Flexion, Bending and Ascent (Anadrome) of the Womb.” The parallel usage suggests that the person who composed this magical recipe may have been familiar with current medical taxonomy and nomenclature, and may have even read a medical handbook. Here, too, the sorcerer-scribe does not imagine that the womb travels freely throughout the body; its movements are instead limited to the lower chest, and the command not to lean to one side or the other is in complete harmony with Soranus’ revised theory of the stationary but flexible uterus.

But why does this recipe include “biting” and “chewing” among the possible actions of the womb? Oddities in the text of this late antique recipe suggest, in fact, that they are scribal errors, later innovations, or some combination of both. Regardless of the cause of these adaptations, they reveal a changing understanding of the womb itself: the person who copied or adapted this recipe in the fourth century CE seems to imagine a womb that sinks its teeth into the internal organs of a woman and then chews on them. These creative variations in the fourth-century PGM magical recipe—biting and chewing—figure the womb as a dangerous wild animal. This is not an entirely new idea, of course, since Plato and some of the later medical writers, for example Aristaeus, do indeed describe the womb as a wild beast (therion). There is also the advice in the Geoponica to use the same fumigation (human hair) on vineyard vermin and wandering wombs. But none of these texts ever mention a womb that bites or poisons and they seem instead mainly concerned with the quick and violent movements of the womb or the fact that it is in the wrong place. The idea of a venomous womb may lie hidden,

102. See n.30 and the Geoponica passage quoted in n.39 above.
103. Faraone 2011.
104. The translation given above, for example, purposely illustrates the awkward syntax of the main command, where the verb apodaknein, literally “to take a bite from” or “out of” is used with the preposition “into.” What we would expect here with the prepositional phrase “into the heart” is, in fact, some verb of motion, for example anadromein, a verb that is indeed anticipated by the rubric of this very spell—“Against the ascent (anadrome) of the womb”—but never appears in it. The participle of the verb “to chew” (memase[m]ene) likewise appears in the same place where in the earlier parallel texts we find forms of the verb “to remain” (menein). In later Byzantine texts, the womb is described by a similar sounding participle, memisomen (“detested one”) that may be a source for the corruption here, or a variant of it. See Faraone 2003 for texts and full discussion.
105. We can see these differences most clearly when we focus on the variations in an Aramaic version of the recipe, which reads “and that you do not swell(?) like a dog and strangle the heart.” Here the actions of swelling and strangulation fit easily within the modified medical understanding in the Imperial period that the womb could swell up and cause uterine suffocation without actually leaving its place. For the relationship between the Greek and Aramaic versions, see Schäffer and Shaked 1994: 114; Betz 1997; Bohak 2008: 237-38.
however, in Galen’s assimilation of the poisonous sepsis of trapped menses to the poison of a rabid dog or scorpion.\textsuperscript{106}

A series of much later Byzantine amulets for the wandering womb show a similar crossover between hostile wild animals and wombs.\textsuperscript{107} They usually take the form of a gemstone or metal disk that depicts a snaky, but rather silly, Gorgon’s head (see in Figure 3 the drawing of an onyx pendant once owned by the painter Peter Paul Rubens) and the inscription: “O womb, black and blackening, eat blood and drink blood. As a serpent you coil, as a lion you roar. Lie down like a sheep!”

Fig. 3 After I. Macarius and I Chifflet, Abraxas seu Apistopistus (Antwerp 1657) plate 17 no. 70.

Here, as on the hematite gems, the complicated formula of exorcism is replaced by a simple command. The iconography of the womb itself has also changed in a dramatic way between the third and sixth centuries ce: a snaky-haired Gorgon has replaced the innocuous jug-shaped womb of the earlier gemstones (Figure 2), and the womb itself (designated here by the word \textit{hystera}, not \textit{mêtra} as in most of the previous texts) is imagined as a black, coiling animal that roars like a lion.\textsuperscript{108} Here, then, at the very end of this ancient tradition of incantations against the wandering womb, we find a fully demonic womb “black and blackening”—much like the “black and smoky” demon described by Lucian as it left the body of an epileptic after a successful exorcism.\textsuperscript{109} As was discussed earlier, the phrases “like a snake” or “like a lion” recall the similes used to describe the headache demon Antaura bellowing “like a cow” or the womb in the exorcistic amulets biting or swelling up “like a dog.” One is reminded, of course, of the eccentric theriomorphic behavior of the daughters of Proetus or the description in \textit{On the Sacred Disease} of patients grinding their teeth like a goat or making sounds like horses or birds.

\textsuperscript{106} See n.36 above. The Aramaic version, (see previous n.), asks that the womb “not swell up(?) like a dog”—perhaps a rabid one?

\textsuperscript{107} The examples discussed below are taken from Spier 1993. Dasen 2002 discusses these amulets as part of the long Greek tradition of imagining the womb as a wild animal. For a fragmentary bronze version from Byzantine Sicily, see Giannobile 2002 and Mastrocinque 2005.

\textsuperscript{108} Cf. \textit{PGM} XIII 249-50: a spell to ward off snakes uses the imperative “Stop!” (\textit{stêthi}).

\textsuperscript{109} See Faraone 2007 for a fuller discussion.
CONCLUSIONS

The idea of the wandering womb was fairly widespread, both chronologically and geographically, in the ancient Greek world. The concept does not, however, remain static over time, and therefore it has a history that is worth charting and thinking about. Plato raises the idea theoretically in a cosmogonical passage, the Hippocratic doctors treat it as a practical medical matter, and—if Soranus is to be believed—it was still a cardinal tenet of most medical schools in the second century CE. Even influential critics, like Soranus and Galen, retain modified views of the causes of uterine suffocation and in a few cases continue to prescribe the use of the Hippocratic fumigations. I have suggested above that throughout this period doctors and ritual workers competed to treat the wandering womb and often shared techniques and ideas with one another, for example, the Hippocratic use of fumigations or the idea of the womb as an inverted jug. Even the banging of bronze, another treatment criticized by Soranus, was used in Greek rituals to frighten away demons or menacing deities.110

There are, in fact, several different yet interlocked conceptions of the womb in evidence: (i) the womb is a movable internal part that can mechanically cause female illnesses when it shifts out of place (treatment: massage, binding or percussion); (ii) the womb moves like an animal, has desires and can smell sweet and foul odors (treatment: fumigation) or be frightened by loud sounds (treatment: clanging bronze) or by verbal commands or threats (treatment: incantation or exorcism); (iii) the womb is attached by ligaments, but can nevertheless swell up or shift to the side and cause disease (treatment: same as in ii); and (iv) the womb is like a dangerous demon or animal that maliciously bites, stings, or poisons a woman’s internal organs (treatment: incantation or exorcism). We can, in some cases, trace the historical progression of these ideas: for example, as far as we can tell the malicious demonic womb appears for the first time only in the fourth century CE and then flourishes in Byzantine times. But it is important to note that the demonic womb never completely replaces the displaced or wandering ones, but seems to develop alongside them. Indeed the mechanical medical model (as revised by Soranus and Galen) continues to be taught until the early modern period, and the Aramaic recipe from the Cairo Genizah (n.105) shows us that exorcisms of a sentient, but non-demonic, womb continue in Egypt at least as late as the Arab conquest.

These historical developments in the medical and magical conceptions of the wandering womb also have much to tell us about how the female body was differently constructed and ultimately controlled by men. In the medical model women are imagined to have a faulty body with a loose part: a womb liable to

110. Gow 1952 in his comments on the beating of bronze to keep nefarious Hecate away (Theoc. 2.36) cites a number of parallels from Greek and Roman literature. Bronze was beaten as well in Mesopotamian exorcisms; see Barbu and Rendu-Loisel 2009: 323-24.
shift out of place and cause problems. Plato and some post-Hippocratic doctors attribute even more autonomy to the womb, which is “like a wild animal” that has frenetic needs and desires, but is without reason or self-control. Here, too, the different models for male and female bodies and behavior are instructive. We noted at the start of this essay that although Plato briefly introduces the idea of a sentient and desiring penis as a parallel to the wandering womb, there is no tradition in ancient Greek medicine or magic of a willful penis causing illness in men. And there are no fumigations or exorcisms designed to get an unruly penis to stop roaring like a lion and lay down like a lamb. This can be explained in part by the various Greek philosophical traditions that perpetuated an exclusively male regime of self-control over the body’s desires, including the desire for sex. The problem of the sentient penis—if indeed it ever arose—would presumably have been constructed as a moral dilemma, not a medical one. There do not seem to be, however, any philosophic techniques designed to teach women to overcome the movements of their sentient wombs. This discrepancy arises, of course, from the awkward parallel that Plato draws between the penis’s desire for sex and the womb’s desire for bearing children. Indeed, as we saw earlier, the popular patriarchal cure for the wandering womb was more sex, not less. The wandering womb, moreover, is from the very beginning thought to be pathological: Plato says that “it provokes all kinds of diseases,” and the Hippocratic doctors fear that it can cause death as well. Medical or magical intervention is necessary, it seems, only in the female case.

The situation only gets worse: in Late Antiquity women become the natural and permanent hosts for a demonic womb, which—unlike the demons that regularly possess men—can never be forced out of their bodies, but must remain, in the best of circumstances, in their lower abdomens. Or, to put it another way, any demon residing in a male body could eventually be driven out by exorcism and that body could be made healthy again; in the case of a woman, however, the demonic womb can be controlled, but never banished completely. The parallel with demonic expulsion may, moreover, give us some further insights into how evil is mapped on to a woman’s body. Most standard expulsions aim at driving the demon out of the body and then out of the civilized areas of the world. Thus Antaura or Asmodeus are instructed to go far away to wild and destitute places where demons naturally dwell: for example, deserts, mountain-tops, the wilderness or the sea. The adaptation of the exorcism ritual to the womb suggests, therefore, that the body of a woman could sometimes be imagined as a miniature and complete landscape of its own, in which health and order are maintained by commanding her demonic womb to stay in or return to the wild and desolate lower abdomen.

111. Dean Jones 1992.
112. See, for example, the end of the story from the Book of Tobit, in which the demon flees to the desert, or Luke 11:24, where the exorcised demon is imagined going to “arid places.” For a general discussion, see Versnel 1985.
regions of her body and not to cross over into the “civilized” area of her upper body, which according to Greek ideas held the faculties for thought and judgment.

Let me return, finally, to the origins of the idea that the womb can wander about the body of a woman. In most traditional cultures health problems concerned with menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth are almost always treated by women, not men, and indeed in the Hippocratic treatises and in Soranus we repeatedly find evidence that Greek doctors were, in fact, often attentive to what they could learn from midwives, nurse maids, and their female patients (see n.38 above). There is, however, one persistent feature of the magical and medical texts surveyed here: the healers of and writers on the wandering womb are exclusively male. This is not surprising, of course, in the case of the medical tradition, because women were not regularly trained as doctors until the late Roman period. But, as it turns out, the same exclusion seems to hold true for exorcists; indeed as far as I have been able to discover there is no extant example from the Greek or Roman periods of a woman performing an exorcism of a womb, or for that matter of a demon, and in the modern Mediterranean rites of exorcism (albeit not for the wandering womb) are still performed—in both the eastern and western churches—by male clergy. This persistent exclusion of women from performing exorcisms is especially striking since we have so much evidence that women regularly performed many other kinds of magical rituals and spells—including those designed to protect or heal.

I would suggest, therefore, that female healers did not diagnose or attempt to cure the wandering womb, because it was never perceived as a gynecological complaint per se, primarily because it was not signaled by gynecological or obstetrical dysfunctions, such as abnormal menorrhea or the inability to get pregnant. The diagnosis of the wandering womb was always triggered by a dysfunction in some other organ of the body, especially the liver and lungs, and by the catastrophic onset of seizures, suffocation or unconsciousness. The wandering womb was, in short, not a site of illness, but rather a blunt instrument that caused symptoms and disease in other parts of the body and thus was treated as a cause of more general medical problems. On the professional side of things this means that those male ritual practitioners, who traditionally treated illnesses, like epilepsy or high fever, would inevitably get involved in treating uterine suffocation, which they theorized as a uniquely female version of these spasmodic diseases.

But if the women themselves did not invent and then treat the wandering womb, where did the idea come from? This is, I think, impossible to say with any precision, but it is quite clear that by the classical period the idea becomes

113. Despite the title of her article, Lesses 2001 can provide only one “probable” example of a woman who acts as an exorcist, “Komish, daughter of Mahlapta,” who seems to be the author of an Aramaic magical bowl from Nippur.
114. For the widespread belief in the Roman period that women were more adept at magic than men, see Dickie 2001: 79, 175.
a popular one that, for men at least, is “good to think with,” in part because it was useful in controlling female behavior and enforcing patriarchal ideals of early marriage and serial pregnancies. I would suggest, moreover, that both the medical and magical technologies derive from the same traditional source and evolve side by side. We have seen, for example, that the doctors and exorcists use similar language to describe the “ascension” of the womb and that the representation of the womb on the hematite gemstones is strikingly similar to the inverted jug that medical writers describe. We should not, moreover, assume that there existed great differences in the social class or education of these two types of healers, since both belong to loosely knit groups of literate and often itinerant men, who in the Roman period find themselves fighting over the same therapeutic turf. the treatment of women suffering from seizures. Both agree that the womb is responsible, but they disagree as to the cause and the treatment. Neither of their therapeutic approaches, moreover, would be acceptable medical practice nowadays, as each embrace systematic theories based on imagination (humors and demons), rather than empirical research, and both use equally bizarre therapeutic techniques (fumigation, exorcism, or the clanging of bronze).116

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115. Most ancient doctors, even many of those hired by cities at public expense, were not part of the socio-political elite, but were rather associated with craftsmen; see Pleket 1995 and Nutton 1995, the latter of whom draws attention to texts (e.g., 11-12) where doctors and magicians are treated as belonging to the same social and economic class.

116. This essay has taken nearly a decade to be born and as a result I am grateful to the midwifery of many audiences for their comments, criticisms, and help over the years at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), Madrid in June 2002, at the “Women’s Rituals in Context” conference at the University of Illinois, Urbana, the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of Minnesota and the University of Western Ontario, all in October 2002, at Northern Illinois University in November 2003, at the Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Antropologici sulla Cultura Antica, University of Siena in November 2004, at the conference “The Spirit Within: Inspiration, Possession and Disease in the Ancient Mediterranean Basin” at the University of Chicago in March 2005, at the conference “Prácticas mágicas en el imperio romano latinoparlante desde fines de la República a la antigüedad tardía” at the University of Zaragoza in September 2005 and at the Dennis A. George Lecture in Hellenic Culture at Tulane University in April 2006. A much shorter and different version of the argument appeared as “The Rise of the Demon Womb in Greco-Roman Antiquity” in M. Parca and A. Tzanetou, eds., 2007, Finding Persephone: Women's Rituals in the Ancient Mediterranean, 154-64, Bloomington. I owe thanks to Roy Kotansky, Julie Laskaris, Gideon Bohak, and the readers for the journal for advice on various details and I am especially grateful to my old friend and former classmate Lesley Dean Jones for answering a continual barrage of questions about ancient medicine and providing me with all kinds of helpful bibliography and advice.
ABBREVIATIONS FOR CORPORA OF MAGICAL TEXTS


BIBLIOGRAPHY


