The role of magic and medicine in the lives of ancient Egyptian women and their children

Jennifer Witts

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Supervisor: Prof. Izak Cornelius

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the role that magic and medicine played in the lives of ancient Egyptian women and children. In a time when giving birth often ended in the death of the mother and child, and child mortality was extremely high, a variety of protective measures were undertaken by the ancient Egyptians. Medicine as the scientific treatment of ailments and women's health in general did exist in Egypt, however, life in Egypt was determined by religion and especially magic.

The health of the ancient Egyptian woman and her child was studied by looking at the way in which magic influenced medicine, as well as by looking at how this connection between magic and medicine influenced the life and health of ancient Egyptian women and children.

The research model followed was that of an interlinking society in which each aspect of Egyptian life had varying impacts on each other. The degree of impact of magic on aspects such as menstruation, conception and pregnancy was investigated, as well as, the magico-medical spells, amulets and other devices that were used to protect a woman and her baby.

A catalogue of sources is given, including written and non-written sources. The first included the medical papyri and magical spells against evil forces and sickness. The second group were visual representations, divine statuettes, amulets and the specialized magical stelae (*cippi*) and "magical wands" ("Zaubermesser").

This thesis attempts to better understand how feminine issues such as menstruation, pregnancy, and giving birth were perceived and contended with, as well as to shed some light on the medical and magical treatment and protection of the women and children in ancient Egypt.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die rol wat magie en medisyne in die lewens van vrouens en kinders in antieke Egipte gespeel het. In 'n tyd toe die geboorte van 'n kind baie keer die dood van die ma en haar baba veroorsaak het, en kindersterftes uiters hoog was, het die antieke Egiptenare 'n verskeidenheid beskermingsmaatreëls gebruik. Medisyne as die wetenskaplike behandeling van siektes en vroulike gesondheidsorg het in Egipte bestaan, maar die lewe in Egipte was egter bepaal deur die godsdiens en veral die magie.

Die gesondheid van die vroue en kinders van antieke Egipte is bestudeer deur te kyk hoe magie medisyne beïnvloed het, sowel as om te kyk hoe die verband tussen magie die medisyne die lewe en gesondheid van vroue en kinders in antieke Egipte bepaal het.

Die navorsingsmodel wat gevolg is, is van 'n samelewing waarbinne elke aspek van die lewe in Egipte 'n impak op die ander het. Die graad van impak van magie op aspekte soos menstruasie, konsepsie en swangerskap is ondersoek, sowel as die "magies-mediese" spreuke, amulette en ander middels wat as beskerming vir die vrou en haar baba gebruik is.

'n Katalogus van bronne is ingesluit en sluit beide skriftelike en nie-skriftelike bronne in. Onder die eerste groep val mediese papiri en magiese tekste teen bose magte en siekte. Die tweede groep gee aandag aan visuele voorstellings, godebeeldjies, amulette en die gespesialiseerde magiese stelae (*cippi*) en "toorstaffies" ("Zaubermesser").

Hierdie tesis poog om beter te verstaan hoe vroulike sake soos menstruasie, swangerskap en geboorte gesien en hanteer is, sowel as om meer lig te werp op die mediese en magiese behandeling en beskerming van vrouens en hulle kinders in antieke Egipte.

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Introduction

1. Research problem and theme

Whereas older studies by male Egyptologists like Aldred hardly even mention women and children, there has been great interest in women and children in Ancient Egypt since the eighties and nineties (e.g. the studies by prominent female Egyptologists like Feucht (1990), Lesko (1989), Robins (1993), Watterson (1994)). Emphasis has been on the social role of women in Egypt, the female pharaohs (especially Hatshepsut) and queens like Nefertiti and Nefertari (wives of pharaohs Akhenaten and Ramses II). The studies of Janssen and Janssen (1990) and Feucht (2001 a & b, 1995) expanded the interest to also include children.

But another specific dimension that has not received sufficient attention is how women and children survived in a time when giving birth often ended in the death of the mother and child, and child mortality was extremely high (Feucht, 2001: 193). Medicine as the scientific treatment of ailments and women's health in general did exist in Egypt, but that life in Egypt was determined by religion and especially magic (for which Egypt was already renowned in Classical times) is common knowledge (Ritner, 2001: 330). The health of the Egyptian woman and her child can only be studied by looking at the way in which magic influenced medicine. In what way did this connection between medicine and magic influence the life and health of Egyptian women and children? What medicinal and magical ways and devices existed to protect women and children and look after their health?

2. Research aim and content

The aim of this study will be to look at the way in which medicine and the close link it had with magic determined the health of Egyptian women and children. Attention will be given to various aspects and phases of womanhood such as the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and childbirth. Which practices existed in the different spheres of medicine?

- female health: gynaecology
- pregnancy and birth: obstetrics
- children's health: paediatrics

After collecting sources providing information on these aspects and analyzing these, the link with magic will be determined. Closely connected with this is the role that deities directly

involved in the health of women and children (for example: Isis, Horus, Taweret and Bes), played.

3. Research method and sources

The approach that will be followed is the one in which a culture is seen as a society made up of different facets, such as law, ecology, religion and economy. These facets, however, are not to be viewed as individual parts but as interlinking domains that make up a culture. A change in one domain of a culture results in a reaction to this change in all other domains. It will create a ripple effect (Rosman & Rubel, 2001: 4 – 20). What will differ within each domain is the intensity of the 'ripple' i.e. how much of an effect it has on various domains.

Through this method it will be determined how much of an influence magic had on women's medicine and the health of the women and children of ancient Egypt.

Material, visual, and written sources will be utilized.

There are depictions of women in childbirth in Egyptian art: Which methods (e.g. kneeling) were followed and why? What role did midwives play? (Feucht, 2001: 193). Did magic play a role? In addition depictions in the so-called mammisi (birth-place) of temples at Edfu, Dendera and Philae depicting the birth of, for example, Hatshepsut will be compared (Feucht, 2001: 193; Jannsen & Jannsen, 1990: 4-5).

The so-called "Magical Wands" which were presumably placed on the wombs of women will be studied with regard to iconography and function as a clear example of magical medicine (Ritner, 2001: 323)

Feeders and milk bottles depicting nursing mothers also served a magical function and will receive attention (Jannsen & Jannsen, 1990: 19).

Many magical Horus stelae (*cippi*) are known from later periods in Egypt (especially 747BCE – 395 CE). These depict the young god Horus standing on crocodiles and holding dangerous animals such as snakes and scorpions – i.e. he controls forces harmful to children. These contained magical spells and a liquid offering was poured over the *cippus* to protect the child against snake bites and scorpion stings (Ritner, 2001: 325). A selection of these will be studied with regard to iconography, texts and function.

It is especially in the magical and medical texts that the link between medicine and magic becomes clear (Ritner, 2001: 327-328). A representative selection will be studied. Magical spells (in translation) will be analyzed with regard to women and children's health. There are, for example, spells to restore a mother's milk (Janssen & Janssen, 1990:18)

Medical papyri (in translation) of importance that will also be studied are:

- Kahun papyrus (2000 BCE): ailments of women, especially of the womb and determination of fertility
- Berlin Papyrus (1550 BCE): the world's oldest pregnancy test
- Eber's Papyrus (1555 BCE): general gynaecological matters

In addition other general medical literature will be read for comparison and medical practitioners will be consulted for further information.

Chapter 1

A short survey of magic, medicine and religion

In order to ascertain how the Egyptians perceived their own remedies and treatments for various maladies and health problems definitions for magic, medicine, and religion need to be determined. In ancient Egypt there are many areas where classifying 'cures' as magical, medical or religious becomes rather difficult. Of course, these classifications are usually imposed by the scientific worldview and imposing modern definitions on ancient activities often results in conflicting ideas.

1.1 Magic

The concept of magic is one that has caused much debate and scrutiny in modern Egyptology. There is little agreement as to what distinguishes magic from its sister discipline, religion (Ritner, 2001:321). This is due to the fact that magic is often defined in its opposition to the non-magical elements that constitute religion (Liedeman, 2002: 1).

According to Brier (1980: 10), one of the reasons for the difficulties in defining what constitutes magic is because the word has had many meanings over the last four thousand years.

Magic is such a problematic concept that some academics have created the term 'magico-religious' when dealing with anything remotely related to magic or religion, whilst other academics have chosen to avoid classifying certain activities under magic or religion all together (Ritner, 2001: 321).

In recent decades, "magic" has come to mean falsity or trickery. A magician is someone who deceives. This association of magic with falsity is a relatively new development and can be accredited to the academic works of James Frazer (1959).

The word magic derives from *magus*, the Greek word for the wise men of Persia (Persian *magus* i.e. the *magi*) and Babylonia. These men were considered powerful, but their powers were foreign to the Greeks (Brier, 1980: 10).

In the Christian period, the Coptic term *hik* was equated with the Greek *mageia* and Latin *magia* as a term for wicked and illegal sorcery. Coptic *hik* was the offspring of pharaonic *heka* (*hq3*), which was neither wicked nor illegal in ancient Egypt before the arrival of the Christians (Ritner, 2001: 321).

The concept of magic as foreign, which started with the Greeks, influenced how people viewed magic for centuries. Eventually, this notion of magic as something effective but foreign changed to something still effective but essentially evil. Finally, there evolved the modern view of magic as impotent foolishness (Brier, 1980: 10).

Magic is often difficult to delineate from religion because both involve belief in the supernatural and deal with the realm of the unseen (Brier, 1980: 10). However, Egyptians did not consider magic to be supernatural. Magic, or *heka*, was a gift from the gods (Ritner, 2001 a: 322). In the *Instructions for Merikare* magic was listed as one of the gifts given by the creator to humanity: "It was in order to be weapons to ward off the blow of events that he made *heka* for them (humanity)" (Ritner, 2001 a: 322).

Heka, the god, was the personified form of *heka*, a primary cosmic force, which was considered a divinely sanctified force that permeated all of nature. *Heka* was not thought of as paranormal or evil. There are no categories of "white" or "black" magic documented in Egyptian sources so for modern Egyptologists to impress their classifications of magic as "good" or "evil" would be to distort how the ancient Egyptians experienced magic (Ritner, 2001 a: 321/2).

A look at how the Oxford Dictionary (Sykes, 1978: 523, 809 & 758) defines magic, science, medicine, and religion will help determine whether the classifications can be applied when analysing ancient Egyptian magic and medicine:

Magic: 'the supposed art of influencing course of events by occult control of nature or of spirits.'
Science: '(pursuit or principles of) systematic and formulated knowledge, organized body of knowledge on a subject.'
Religion: 'particular system of faith and worship.'
Medicine: 'art of restoring and preserving health, especially by means of remedial substances etc. as opposed to surgery etc.; substance, esp. one taken internally, used in this; (among primitive people) spell, charm, fetish.'

These definitions are problematic in that they were made with modern day standards in mind. One of the key problems when studying or analysing culture different from one's own is that each person views and analyses societies according to their own worldview (Rosman & Rubel, 2001: 21).

When presented with evidence or documentation from another culture, analysis is often made with the individual's own cultural perspective contaminating the conclusions drawn (Rosman & Rubel,

2001: 21). It is a natural tendency to impress modern terminology and definitions on ancient cultures that may have had no definition of what constituted, for example, magic.

In ancient Egypt, there existed no word for "science" or "religion." There was a term that could translate as meaning magic but the ancient Egyptian magician would not apply it to the same things as modern society would (Mertz, 1966: 196).

To the ancient Egyptians, as to most ancient societies, the categories that the dictionary distinguished were not mutually exclusive (Mertz, 1966: 197). According to Durkheim (1926: 45) magic and religion were entwined and almost formed its own entity in ancient societies.

Magic and medicine also had their overlapping areas but it would be an oversimplification to say that the difference between an Egyptian doctor and a modern medical doctor is that the former believed in magic. According to Mertz (1966: 197), there are two problem words: "magic" and "believe."

Magic is a word that conjures up many images, from witches casting evil spells to fairy godmothers and entertaining magicians such as David Copperfield. However, magic to ancient humankind was something altogether different (Mertz, 1966: 197).

The second problem word, "believe." Ancient people believed in magic. One of the greatest difficulties facing historians, archaeologists and ethnologists is the difficulty of really accepting a theorem that seems so alien to the present society. Therefore many people fail to really accept that ancient people truly believed that magic worked (Mertz, 1966: 197).

Frazer is a classic example of an academic who could not accept that ancient people would rely solely on magic. He believed the belief in magic was part of an evolutionary process that gave way to religious belief and then eventually scientific belief (Frazer, 1925: 54).

The problem with this theory of Frazer's is that it makes the assumption that magic and religion did not co-exist, and that magic was a primitive forbearer of religion. He believed that ancient people evolved from the use of magic to the use of religion thereby squeezing it out of society (Frazer, 1925:50). However, this is not the case for the majority of ancient cultures and, as Middleton (1986) pointed out, his "comparative" method of research is at a disadvantage because the data are not placed in their social and cultural contexts. Frazer also depends on his own assumptions about the behaviour of other peoples rather than on the categories the peoples themselves have formulated (Middleton, 1986: 83).

The theory of evolution which Darwin postulated in his 1859 *Origin of Species* (1926), influenced many academics when developing their theories of cultural systems and how these systems 'evolved' from primitive barbarianism to cultured, scientific reasoning.

Edward B. Tylor, an English scholar, was an associate of Darwin and is often called the 'father of ethnology.' Tylor (1871: 26-27) expressed his evolutionary viewpoint by saying:

> [By] simply placing [the European] nations at one end of the social series and savage tribes at the other end, [and] arranging the rest of mankind between these limits ... ethnographers are able to set up at least a rough scale of civilisation ... [representing] a transition from the savage state to our own. (Keesing, 1958: 141)

However, according to Keesing (1958: 326), Tylor did not follow the same lines as Frazer when it came to explaining how magic and religion developed within cultures. Tylor believed that it was simply a way for the ancient people to explain and understand dreams, hallucinations, sleep and death. His theory assumes the origin of religion is based on intellectual reasoning (Keesing, 1958: 326).

Frazer believed religion evolved from magic when magic failed as a means for 'early' man to control the external world (Keesing, 1958: 326). Neither academic likes to believe that magic was used because ancient people believed in it. Each tries to explain why this 'primitive' activity was in use in the ancient cultures, and how the ancient people could be 'fooled' into using magic.

Many cannot comprehend that the ancient Egyptians could sometimes rely solely on magic and nothing else to solve a crisis. But for the ancient Egyptians magic would have been the perfect tool for such situations. As Mertz says, "magic was not a game, or the last resort of the incompetent ... it was a tool – possibly the most important tool" (Mertz, 1966: 199).

Magic and science are not on opposite poles of the spectrum, they have more in common than is realised. Like science, early magic was an attempt to formulate principles through which the forces affecting man could be understood and manipulated. These principles had to be based on assumptions about the world. When the assumptions were false, ancient people got magical principles; when they were correct, they had science. In this sense magic might be called a pseudo-science, for ancient people had no way of telling false assumptions from true assumptions (Mertz, 1966: 200).

However, what Frazer and other academics have referred to as primitive science has been challenged and rejected by many modern anthropologists. This is because Frazer and others suppose a cause and effect relation in magic such as seen in scientifically controlled experiments where the 'laws of nature' are predictable. But, according to Keesing (1958: 332), 'science implies the unknown,' while magic operates within what is defined in the specific culture as the supernatural and unknown.

Malinowski maintains that ancient humankind knew quite well the difference between magic and the rational techniques that might be called primitive science. Malinowski (1944: 199) described magic as ritualised optimism (Malinowski, 1944: 199). Mertz (1966: 201) maintains that ancient people did not resort to magic only when unpredictable factors such as luck might influence the results. Magic was often used to cover all aspects and ancient people's definitions of the predictable and the unpredictable were not necessarily the same as modern societies. Most ancient cultures believed powerful forces acted directly on their weak bodies and their humble possessions. Mertz maintains that, "to assume that he recognised a qualitative difference between his rational and non-rational techniques is to make an assumption which the evidence does not justify" (Mertz, 1966: 201).

Malinowski maintains that both religion and magic arose from situations of emotional distress and that "Science ... is based on the normal universal experience of everyday life ... founded on observation, fixed by reason. Magic is based on specific experience of emotional states in which man observed not nature but himself" (Malinowski, 1948: 84).

One of the core differences between magic and science, then, lies in the soundness of the assumptions that underlie their structures. However, it is not always easy to distinguish between false and true assumptions. The best way of recognising a true assumption is to see whether it actually works out, in practice. It is an ironic fact that when magic works, it is no longer magic, but science (Mertz, 1966: 201).[1]

If magic did not always work and the same spells did not always get the same results, surely one of the magician's "patients" would have cottoned on to this fact? Not necessarily, if a person truly wants to believe in something they will. Take, for example, the television show produced by Universal Pictures called "Crossing over with John Edward." The audience members so badly want to contact their dead loved ones that they will grasp onto any hope that they are really

[1] Hypnotism, once an attachment of the black art, is now semi-respectable and unglamorous (Mertz, 1966: 201).

'connecting' with them through John Edward, the medium. They might not even notice the countless times when John gets the reading wrong, and furiously clutch at the very few things he reads right. A concerned member of the audience wrote the following in an article entitled, "Demystifying John Edward of Crossing Over":

> I was on the John Edward show. He even had a multiple guess "hit" on me that was featured on the show. However, it was edited so that my answer to another question was edited in after one of his questions. In other words, his question and my answer were deliberately mismatched. Only a fraction of what went on in the studio was actually seen in the final 30-minute show. He was wrong about a lot and was very aggressive when somebody failed to acknowledge something he said (http://www.re-quest.net/entertainment/movies-and-tv/tv/john-edward/#studio).

People don't see the things they don't want to see; they have selective imaginations. Furthermore, the magicians were men of superior intelligence and craft. According to Mertz (1966: 204), this is another characteristic of magic that distinguishes it from science; much of its effectiveness depends on the personality of the magician. The scientist who eventually discovers the cure for AIDS may be an unpleasant man personally, but his character will have no effect on the AIDS virus itself. A good magician, however, must have a lot of personality, or that quality called "charisma" – the ability to move men (Mertz, 1966: 204).

There is no profession in which charisma is more useful than in magic – unless it is politics. Take the field of medicine, which was, in ancient times, riddled with magical techniques. The "psychosomatic"[2] ailments, which may include everything from backache to blindness, are not affected by modern surgery or medicine; but imagine the effect upon them of a powerful assertive personality, strengthened by the patient's belief in magic. The patient is bound to feel some relief and sense of comfort. Even the pain of physical ailments could be alleviated (Mertz, 1966: 204). Even today doctors' attitudes towards their patients have deep psychological effects that can improve recovery. Today there are faith healers who often heal by their assertive and persuasive personality and the patient's undying belief in being truly healed.

Another reason why magic seemed to work was because it did work; it worked because people believed in it, and they believed in it because it seemed to work. This is not as paradoxical as it sounds. Expressed hostility and malevolent intent can certainly cause anxiety and fear, nervous indigestion, and illness. A curse can kill – if the victim believes in it. Conversely, a potent protective

[2] Psychosomatic is generally a term "pertaining to that which is presumed to have both psychic (mental) and somatic (body) components" (Reber, 1985: 597).

charm (cf. figs. 3.5.1 – 3.5.12) may act as a psychological prop, increasing a man's self-confidence (Mertz, 1966: 205).

Keesing (1958: 332) states that "if you live in the same world of understandings and beliefs as a person who is making magic affecting you, and you actually *get to hear* that the magic is being brewed, it is *going* to have some effects since you will *believe* its influence is potent. Unless you set in motion some counter-magic it will actually "get" you."

The "placebo effect" has a certain amount of relevance in the Egyptian's belief in magic (Nunn, 1996: 97).

The placebo effect is defined as the measurable, observable, or felt improvement in health not attributable to "real" treatment but is in fact "caused" by a placebo. A placebo (Latin for "I shall please") is a medication or treatment believed by the administrator of treatment to be inert or innocuous. Placebos are dummy pills and are a preparation "with no medicinal value and no pharmacological effects" (Reber, 1985: 550). Even "fake" surgery and "fake" psychotherapy are considered placebos.

The placebo is used in experimental procedures known as the "double-blind" where neither the subject nor the person carrying out the experimental procedure is aware of the expectations of the experiment (Reber, 1985: 215). In drug studies a control group of subjects are given medication; some receive 'real' medication and some receive placebos. Neither knowing who has what and neither being aware of what type of medication they received, i.e. anti-depressant, sleeping tablet, caffeine tablet, etc.

The point of the experiment is to separate the pharmacological effects of the drug from any preconceptions as to what the drug is and is not supposed to do (Reber, 1985: 215). An interesting question arises out of this: If you are given the wrong medication for an ailment you are suffering, but you are unaware of it, do the pharmacological reactions still take place because of your belief that the medication will work?

Some researchers believe that the placebo effect is psychological, due to "a belief in the treatment or to a subjective feeling of improvement." Many tests were done to support this theory and it was found that a large percent of the drug's effectiveness lay purely in the expectation of improvement that the patient has (Vyse, 1997: 136). The patients are obviously not informed that they are taking "fake" pills otherwise it would not work because the whole principle lies in the fact that the patient believes that the drugs are real, and that the doctor prescribing them is doing so as to alleviate the

symptoms of illness. The whole basis of why ancient Egyptian magic worked might lie in the placebo effect.

It was even shown in tests that a person's beliefs and hopes about a treatment, combined with their suggestibility, might have a profound biochemical effect. Sensory experience and thoughts can affect neurochemistry. The body's neurochemical system affects and is affected by other biochemical systems, including hormonal and immune systems. Therefore a person's hopeful attitude and beliefs may be very important to their physical well being and recovery from injury or illness (Wallace *et al*, 1996: 712-724, 780-781).

In one experiment, university students were given decaffeinated coffee but were told it was caffeinated. The students reported that they felt more attentive and edgy after drinking the coffee. Further tests showed that the coffee-drinkers even had significant changes in blood pressure (Kirsch, 1985: 1192).

The expectancy a patient has that a drug will have a specific physiological, behavioural, or psychological effect is known as the "response expectancy" and placebo effects are thought to be produced as a result of this expectancy (Vyse, 1997: 136).

It is important to note that whilst placebos appear to cure the common colds and headaches, the long-term effects of placebos on serious illnesses such as cancer is yet to be fully explored.

There are many other theories about why and how the placebo works but the main purpose of this was to show just how easy it might have been for the ancient Egyptians to believe they were healed with certain spells and drugs because even people today are easily 'healed' by drugs that theoretically are supposed to do nothing.

For the sake of this essay Ritner's (1993: 69) definition of magic as "any activity which seeks to obtain its goal by methods outside the simple laws of cause and effect" will be followed when evaluating the primary sources and evidence of magic and medicine relating to the health of ancient Egyptian women and children.

1.2 Religion

If there is some science in magic, there is also a lot of magic in some religions. According to Rosman and Rubel (2001: 209), "religion is defined as the cultural means by which humans deal with the supernatural." Keesing (1958: 332) defines magic as "a variety of methods by which man purports to influence automatically the course of events by mechanisms that touch the supernatural."

Conventionally, magic and religion are distinguished by the means employed to affect the supernatural beings with whom both fields deal. Magicians command and threaten demons; priests adore and beseech gods (Mertz, 1966: 207). Frazer believed that magic "is the direct coercion of natural forces by man; religion is the propitiation of divinities by the believer" (Malinowski, 1944: 200).

Rosman and Rubel (2001: 212) stated that "magic is ... manipulative and religion is supplecative." The fact that people try to manipulate the supernatural through magic is what separates magic from other aspects of religion.

The priests of some ancient religions seem to have adopted a blackmailing tone more suitable to a shaman than a humble worshiper. Sometimes ancient magicians invoked the assistance of supernatural beings, gods or demons, but they could, and did, use spells which required no outside aid – spells which, it was believed, worked directly upon the object to be affected (Frazer, 1981: 10-11).

The supernatural beings invoked by ancient magicians were normally divine rather than diabolic so that the professions of priest and magician often overlapped. Indeed, the notion of magic as Black Art did not gain real strength until after the spread of the monotheistic religions. Their gods were jealous gods, and their priests regarded themselves as the only legitimate intermediaries between man and the supernatural. The Egyptians even sought immortality not only through moral rectitude but also through the crudest of magic trickery – spells that would deceive or control the divine tribunal that judged the soul (Mertz, 1966: 207).

In Egypt, religion and science had their areas of overlap too. The deities were the first scientists – Thoth, who invented numbers and writing, Khnum, the divine potter, Osiris, who taught men the science of agriculture. And some scientists, such as Imhotep, became deified (Mertz, 1966: 207).

Magic is understood to be a private matter between a magician and a client. And whilst religion is a communal matter, which serves to sustain the community, magic is seen as being individualistic and almost selfish. Magic is usually used to serve the purpose of the individual (Durkheim, 1926: 45).

According to Brier (1980: 11), there are two characteristics that do seem to delineate magic from religion: magicians and priests.

In magic there is an immediacy lacking in religion. When the magician says an incantation, it is he who brings about the desired effect; whereas, when a priest prays for something, it is a deity, who

brings about the effect. In magic the magician is the agent; in religion the priest is only the intermediary between the mundane world and the supernatural agent. This leads to a second difference between magic and religion (Brier, 1980: 11).

In religious ritual, such as prayer, there is often an ultimate goal in sight, but the goal is not essential. It is possible to worship a god for the sake of worshipping the god. Religious rites highlight and acknowledge the powerlessness of the people (Rosman & Rubel, 2001: 212). The worshipper does not have to be asking for something. In magic this is not possible. A magician never recites a spell for its own sake – magic is never an end in itself, it is always a mean to an end. Magic is a direct attempt by the practitioner to control supernatural forces to achieve a specific goal (Brier, 1980: 11).

Keesing (1958: 332) defined the magical act as being "a rite carried out to twist nature in a specific way to satisfy human desire." There are three essential elements in the magical act: the spell, the ritual, and the magician (Brier, 1980: 11). The spell or incantation is what must be said for the act to have its required effect – the magic is created by speech (Ritner, 2001 a: 324). It may be crucial that the words be uttered properly, with a certain intonation (Brier, 1980: 11). To the ancient Egyptian, words were extremely powerful: The word was the deed; "by naming one creates." The worst fate for any person was to see his name destroyed (Jacq, 1985: 49). This is why names were so important in Egypt. When one pharaoh overthrew another, usually the first thing he did was eradicate the name of his predecessor on all monuments. If the name no longer existed, the predecessor no longer existed. For this reason ancient Egyptians had several names, only one of which was the real name. This real name was never revealed, so that, if someone tried to work a spell on a person by using the name that person commonly went by (which was not his real name), the spell could have no effect on him. In ancient Egypt if someone wanted to indicate that a person was extremely powerful, he would say, "Even his mother does not know his name." *No one* could work magic against such a person (Brier, 1980: 11). This strongly influenced the power of amulets (cf. 3.5.11 – 3.5.12), which will be discussed in detail later.

The second essential element in the magical act, ritual, is the action the magician performs while reciting the spell. It was in the ritual that the apparatus of the sorcerer was employed (Brier, 1980: 12). There were wands to be waved (magic by rite), wax images to be formed (magic by property), incense to be burned, and potions to be drunk (Ritner, 2001 a: 324).

The magician, the last element in the magical act, usually came from the ranks of the priests of the temples. He usually kept his knowledge of the occult practices secret, so that ordinary people held him in awe. The ancient Egyptian believed that, with the proper combination of spell, ritual, and magician, virtually anything was possible (Brier, 1980: 12).

According to Kamil, every religion is composed of two parts: ritual practices and intellectual conceptions (1996:89). Ritual practices in ancient Egypt were, in the first place, closely related to burial practices and belief in the afterlife, which were sincere and deep-rooted; secondly, there was faith in the effectiveness of prayers and offerings. As for the intellectual view of nature and the origins of the universe, this came later. There are several cosmologies in ancient Egypt; the earliest is known as the Heliopolis Doctrine. It describes the period from the creation of the physical world up to the triumph of Horus as king (Kamil, 1996: 89).

Religion was an integral part of the lives of the ancient Egyptians and permeated most aspects of everyday existence in addition to laying the foundation for their funerary beliefs and customs (David, 1999: 101). Religion was not something that could be separated from aspects such as magic as most of the 'mythological' basis of ancient Egyptian religion tied into most of the magical spells used.

1.3 Medicine

What constituted Egyptian medicine is quite complex as it is a blend of magic, religion with actual potions and remedies. Many of the ingredients used in potions were believed to have had certain magical properties, for example, the milk of a mother who had borne a son was often attributed certain healing powers (Ritner, 2001 b: 328).

Spells were often said over the prescription before giving it to the patient (Ritner, 2001 b: 327). The cause of many illnesses was attributed to demons and evil deities (Pinch, 1994: 140).

It is important to note that medical and magical cures ran side by side in most of the surviving papyri (Pinch, 1994: 133). That the healing magic spells and medical cures were written together as prescriptions indicates that the Egyptians did not view medicine separate from magic. The so-called "rational" was used in conjunction with the "irrational" treatments (Pinch, 1994: 134).

According to Pinch (1994: 134), what is meant, "by 'rational medicine' is treatments that are in accord with the scientific world view which we believe to be objectively true."

Medicine would be predominant in treating ailments such as a broken arm or leg. In ailments such as a headache or nauseous stomach, magic spells would be more predominant in the treatment.

The Egyptians seemed to have been aware of something evil entering the body from the outside that then resulted in an illness (Nunn, 1996: 60). The ancient Egyptian's believed, however, that what entered the body were "sickness demons" as opposed to viruses and bacteria (Nunn, 1996: 60).

Often the remedies prepared were based on the principle *similia similibus*. Certain ingredients are picked for medicinal purposes based on their resemblance to an organ requiring treatment, or because of a characteristic trait such as good eyesight (Nunn, 1996: 97).

According to Nunn (1996: 98), some magicians practiced medicine independently of a conventional doctor or in association with the doctor.

In this essay, medicine will be regarded as treatments that are aimed at healing the patient through the administering of various mixtures and tonics, whether applied internally or externally.

Chapter 2

Women and Children in ancient Egypt

In this chapter the role that women and children played in family life and society will be examined.

2.1. A Woman's role in society

Women in pharaonic Egypt had a relatively high social status when compared to other ancient societies such as the Greeks or the Hebrews. In Greek society the women were expected to carry out the domestic duties and had to stay at home. Menander, the Greek playwright, wrote of the Greek woman, 'The loom is woman's work and not debate' (Watterson, 1994: 25). Herodotus, however, wrote of the Egyptians:

> "The Egyptians, in their manners and customs, seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind. For instance, women attend market and are employed in trade, while men stay at home and do the weaving."
>
> (Watterson, 1994: 25)

During the Ptolemaic period, Greek women living in Egypt would have enjoyed a higher status than that of the Greek woman living in their own country. This may have been because Ptolemaic Egypt, unlike Classical Athens, was a monarchy in which queens often played an important role in the government and warfare (Watterson, 1994: 25). This led to more involvement in the domestic and public economy from the women.

Although Egyptian women enjoyed more freedom and status than other societies of that time, they were still bound by set rules and norms that were determined by the society within which they lived. So although ancient Egyptian women may have been viewed as being more liberated, they still lived in a fairly male dominated society (Tyldesley, 1994: 17, 83).

The mothers of families had a certain amount of authority in the home and they were respected in society in general (Watterson, 1994: 23). However, women held none of the important offices of the government and, apart from a handful of female pharaohs, women maintained little political power (Watterson, 1994: 23, 137 - 172).

It was expected of women to get married and to bear and raise children. Childbearing and rearing as well as domestic chores occupied most of their time. Children were a top priority amongst the upper and lower class women as children would grow up to help support their aged parents as

well as provide free labour in the fields. Because of this expectation of women to produce and raise children, women were more involved in the domestic and household life. In elite families the women were often concerned with management of the household rather than doing the actual labour themselves (Robins, 2001: 511 – 514).

2.1.1 Marriage

Marriage in ancient Egypt was not the same as the Westernised idea of marriage.[3] The ancient Egyptians regarded marriage as a very personal affair between the two individuals and the close families. A marriage between two people required no formal acts (Toivari-Viitala, 2001: 49). The state played no role in the marriage and there was no civil or religious ceremony (Tyldesley, 1994: 52 & Fox, 1985: 230).

A marriage in ancient Egypt needed no legal registration and although marriage contracts could be drawn up either at the time of the so-called wedding or afterwards, it was not compulsory (Tyldesley, 1994: 52 & Fox, 1985: 230). In ancient Egypt marriage was simply constituted by a man and a woman living together (Robins, 2001: 511).

There is no Egyptian word which has been found to mean "wedding" and there seems to be no evidence to support the idea that the ancient Egyptians even had a wedding ceremony (Tyldesley, 1994: 53).

There is mention of a wedding festivity in the Ptolemaic story of Setne Khamwas (Setne I), a woman says that her husband[4], on the day of her marriage, "made holiday with me, and he entertained all Pharaoh's household" (Lichtheim, 1980: 128).

Monogamous marriages were the norm in ancient Egypt although; there were some exceptions to this rule (Fischer, 1989: 8). Polygamous marriages, however, were not a common occurrence in the ancient Egyptian society. Despite there being no laws prohibiting polygamy, multiple marriages were few and far between. This may be because polygamy "has always been a rich man's sport" (Tyldesley, 1994: 49). Only the wealthy upper-class of society could really afford more than one wife.

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[3] The term marriage poses a problem when academics try to interpret what was deemed a marriage in iconographical reliefs, etc as well as in textual sources. According to Toivari-Viitala (2001: 49), the term is problematic as it is culture-specific.

[4] Her husband was the king's son (Fox, 1985: 230).

The husband's funerary stela (fig. 1.1) is what gave rise to the idea that ancient Egyptian men indulged in polygamy more often than was true. The husband would often depict one or more of his dead first wives along with his most recent living wife on his funerary stela (Tyldesley, 1994: 49).

The purpose of marriage was mainly to produce children (Robins, 1993: 75). In the New Kingdom *Instruction of Ani* the author advises his male readers to:

> "Take a wife while you are young,
> That she make a son for you;
> She should bear for you while you are youthful.
> It is proper to make people.
> Happy the man whose people are many,
> He is saluted on account of his progeny."
> (Robins, 1993: 75).

Women were viewed as "fertile fields" for their husbands and although a woman was a means to an end in terms of having children, this does not mean that marriage was without love (Robins, 1993: 75). Love poems from ancient Egypt demonstrate the affection and love that men and women had for each other within a relationship and marriage (Watterson, 1994: 8).

The following love poem describes the love a woman had for a man:

> "My heart beats rapidly when I think of my love for you.
> It does not allow me to act sensibly but jumps from its place.
> It does not allow me to put on a dress, or to drape myself with my shawl.
> I put on no eye-paint, nor do I anoint myself at all.
> 'Don't wait, go there,' it says to me, as often as I think of him.
> Don't act the fool, my heart, why do you flutter?
> Be still until my brother comes to you.
> Many eyes will come as well, so don't let people say about me, 'A woman
> distraught with love!' But be still when you think of him. My heart don't beat so rapidly!"
> (Watterson, 1994: 54 – 55)

In the following love poem the girl is describing how she has become entangled in the web of love. According to Fox (1985: 19 – 20), this poem represents how both boy and girl became entangled in this web:

"The voice of the wild goose[5] cries out when it is caught by the bait.
My love of you ensnares me, I cannot free myself.
I shall cut my nets, but what shall I say to my mother, to whom I go every day laden with my catch[6].
Today I have set no traps for love of you ensnares me."

(Watterson, 1994: 55).

The following poem, in the Papyrus Harris 500, is about a man who decides to pretend to be ill so that he can attain the attention of the girl he loves. At the end of the poem, however, he indicates to a real illness from which he is suffering – love-sickness (Fox, 1985: 13):

"I will lie down inside, and then will I feign illness.
Then my neighbours will enter to see,
and then (my) sister will come with them.
She'll put the doctors to shame,
(for she) will understand my illness."
(Fox, 1985: 13)

A man besotted with a girl writes[7]:

"If only she would come that [I might] see [her]! ...
I would hold festival to god, who makes her to be not distant (again).
May he grant me (my) lady every day!
May she [ne]ver be separated from [me]!
If I spend a moment without seeing her, [I] get sick to my stomach.
[So] I [shall hurry] to respond."
(Fox, 1985: 38).

According to Foster (2001: 316), ancient Egyptian love poems express and celebrate the love between humans and not between gods. The emotions expressed in the poems range from innocent, tenderness to erotic lust (Foster, 2001: 316).

If a person's feelings were not reciprocated, magic love spells were made use of:

"Hail to thee, O Re-Horakhte, Father of the Gods!

[5] The goose represents the boy caught up in the net of love (Fox, 1985: 19 – 20).

[6] The catch represents the girl in love (Fox, 1985: 19 – 20).

[7] Poem is found in the Cairo Love Songs dating from the 19th Dynasty to the 20th Dynasty (Fox, 1985: 38).

Hail to you, O ye Seven Hathors who are adorned with strings of red thread!
Hail to you, ye Gods lords of heaven and earth!
Come make so-and-so (fem.) born of so-and-so come after me, like an ox after grass, like a servant after her children, like a drover after his herd!
If you do not make her come after me,
Then I will set fire to Busiris and burn up Osiris."
(Fox, 1985: 233).

The spell above makes use of threatening the gods to attain the desired result.

The love that may have been felt between a couple did not negate the fact that one of the main reasons for marriage was for the bearing of offspring (Robins, 1993: 75). However, there was no real way of determining whether the woman was able to conceive or give birth to a child.[8] For this reason, some men preferred an arrangement known as a 'year of eating', a trial marriage. This period would be used to gauge whether the woman could have children (Tyldesley, 1994: 66).

2.1.2 Divorce

Divorce was a possible option for a marriage that had disintegrated. Divorce could be initiated by either spouse but it seems likely that it was more sought after by the men than the women. This is because one of the main reasons for divorce was the wife's inability to conceive (Robins, 1993: 75)

"Do not divorce a woman of your household if she does not conceive and does not give birth."
(Late Period Scribal advice, Tyldesley, 1994: 59).

For the ancient Egyptian men, the lack of children produced by the wife was considered a valid reason for divorce. It is interesting to see how the infertility is placed on the woman and not the man.

"I have dismissed you as wife, I have abandoned you, I have no claim on earth upon you. I have said to you, 'Take a husband for yourself in any place to which you will go."
('A divorce formula to be recited before witnesses', Watterson, 1994: 70).

[8] There were fertility tests (3.9.2.2) that could be taken and spells to be worn (figs. 3.5.1 – 2) but the ancient Egyptians probably observed that the practices were not always effective. Therefore the men resorted to such practices as having a trial year of marriage to determine the fertility of the future wife.

Divorce was seen as one partner moving out of the marital home (Robins, 1993: 75).

> "Do not fornicate with a married woman. He who fornicates with a married woman on her bed, his wife will be copulated with on the ground."
> (Late Period advice to young men, Tyldesley, 1994: 60)

In a divorce a woman would keep her financial rights unless she had committed adultery. Adultery was viewed in a very serious light. As a result of her infidelity the wife would often lose her financial rights in a divorce[9] (Robins, 2001: 512).

> "Do not make love to a married woman. He who makes love to a married woman is killed on her doorstep."
> (Ankhsheshonq's advice, Watterson, 1994: 70)

One of the most serious marital offences was adultery but whilst for a woman having an affair was completely forbidden, for a man it was simply frowned upon. Men were cautioned against having affairs for the pure reason that they might be caught by the cuckolded husband and face his wrath (Tyldesley, 1994: 60 – 61 & Watterson, 1994: 70).

Adultery was often seen as the woman's fault, as the temptress corrupting a weak but essentially innocent man. There are examples of ancient Egyptian myths and wisdom texts, written by men, which advise other men to steer clear of other men's wives because they (the wives) would use their seductive charms to ensnare and bed him (Tyldesley, 1994: 60 – 61).

> "Then she spoke to him, saying 'You are very strong. I see your vigour every day.' And she desired to know him as a man. She got up, took hold of him, and said 'Come, let us spend an hour lying in bed together. It will be good for you, and afterwards I will make you some fine new clothes."
> (New Kingdom *Tale of Two Brothers*, as quoted by Tyldesley, 1994: 61)

The Tale of Two Brothers is reminiscent of the story of the biblical Joseph where Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph (Gen 39: 10).

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[9] According to Watterson (1994: 71 – 72), women forfeited their right to a share of the communal property if the divorce was the result of some action she did. However, men just had to share out various incomes he received as well as return his wife's dowry (*nkwt n shmt*) if he was the cause for divorce.

The Egyptian community sympathized with both a wronged husband and wronged wife. Although in theory the punishment for a wife who had committed adultery was death, in practice divorce and social humiliation seem to have been the appropriate response. A woman's reputation was shattered once the community knew that she had had an affair (Tyldesley, 1994: 61 – 62).

2.1.3 Land Ownership

Property of land was passed down the female line which accorded the women with a certain amount of influence in the domestic realm. The reason behind this seems to be because maternity was "a matter of fact," whilst paternity was "a matter of opinion" (Watterson, 1991: 23). For this reason, ancient Egyptian men would usually describe himself by giving his mother's name rather than his father's, for example: Ahmose, son of (the mother) Abana (Watterson, 1994: 23).

Despite descent and kingship being traced through the female line, the men still had the power and authority in ancient Egypt. Only men could hold offices of state and be involved in the government (Watterson, 1994:24).

2.1.4 Religious Activities

Praying at the temples was permitted for both men and women. Hathor was the more popular deity with the women. Her popularity was possibly due to the goddess' connections with fertility, sexuality and childbirth (Robins, 2001: 512 – 513).

Temple statues were mainly owned by men although there are a few stelae that belong to women. Robins (2001: 513) believes that economic reasons alone cannot account for the lack of women owning temple statues.[10]

2.1.5 Funerary Customs

Whilst women and men held the same funerary beliefs (the same funerary formulas appear on the false doors where offerings were deposited), they did not share the same level of funerary treatment (Fischer, 1989: 13). Men's burials tended to be more lavish than the women on any given socioeconomic level. The burial given to a man was determined by his social standing and therefore also determined his success in the afterlife. A woman's burial was dependent on the social standing of her husband or father (if she was unmarried). Only queens were given independent burials (Watterson, 1994: 24).

[10] See 3.3.5 for an example of a temple statue presumably owned by a male. It is interesting that while it was predominantly men that owned the temple *cippi* of Horus with their attached basins (Pinch, 1994: 102), the *cippi* were more for protection of the mother, infant and child (cf. 3.3.1 – 3.3.6)

Tomb chapels were the most expensive part of the funeral therefore only the high ranking officials owned one. The art depicted inside these chapels had the male owner as the primary figure. The other figures depicted were family members including the wife and were all in inferior positions to the owner of the chapel. The funerary rites were the same for both man and women. The rites were always carried out by male priests whilst the women usually took on the role of mourners. Two women would play the role of the goddesses Isis and Nephthys mourning the dead Osiris. A large number of funerary statues depict the husband with his wife. The funerary cult was traditionally performed by the eldest son but there are stelae that reveal that the wife and daughters of the deceased also could perform the rites (Robins, 2001: 513).

Ancient Egypt was a patriarchal society where women were excluded from kingship and from the bureaucracy of the government. However, this did not mean that women were completely dominated by the men or that they had no say in society. According to Robins (2001: 515), women had authority over certain areas and even shared authority with the man. Authority could also be influenced by status. For example, an elite woman would have had authority over her household male servants. Women could also, subtly but effectively, influence her husband or sons' decisions and choices. Obviously this influence was relative to each individual relationship.

2.2 A Woman's role in the family

2.2.1 Mothering Instincts

A woman's most important role in the family was to bear children and as a mother she was highly revered by the ancient Egyptian society (figs. 1.1 – 1.3). Society treated mothers with respect, perhaps stemming from the recognition that childbirth was a dangerous risk for a woman. Even in the *Instructions of Anii* a man is advised to respect his mother:

> "Double the bread that you give to your mother. Support her as she supported you. She had a heavy responsibility in you, but she did not abandon you. When you were born at the end of your months, she still carried you around her neck; and her breast was in your mouth for three years. As you grew, your excrement was disgusting, but she was not repelled, she did not exclaim, 'What am I going to do!' She sent you to school, so that you could be taught to write, and she watched over you daily with bread and beer from her house. When you become a young man and take a wife, and settle in your own house, be mindful of how your mother brought you up. Do not give her cause to blame you so that she lifts up her hands to god for him to listen to her complaints."
>
> (*Instructions of Anii*, Watterson, 1994: 120)

Raising her children was an arduous task but the mother carried it out with much love and affection. Although parentage was shared between husband and wife, it was the wife that cared for and looked after the children's day to day needs. There is not a lot of evidence of child-care practices in the archaeological record so there is little information available on how the children were raised (Tyldesley, 1994: 80).

In ancient Egypt family was considered very important. Ancient Egyptian society revolved around family to a large extent. A nuclear family (fig. 1.3), i.e. a wife, husband and children, was the ideal. The husband was the head of the house whilst the wife was in control of domestic issues and general running of the household. The children were brought up under the guidance of both their parents (Watterson, 1994: 120).

As bearing and raising children was held in such high esteem and it was encouraged, one can see how a married woman's status was somewhat enhanced by having children (Watterson, 1994: 122).

2.2.2 "Mistress of the house" (*nbt pr*)

> "Do not control your wife in her house when you know she is efficient. Do not say to her 'Where is it? Get it' when she has put something in its correct place. Let your eye observe in silence; then you will recognize her skill, and it will be a joy when your hand is with her. There are many men who don't realize this, but if a man desists from strife at home he will not find it starting. Every man who establishes a household should hold back his hasty heart."
>
> (New Kingdom scribal advice, Tyldesley, 1994: 82)

Although women had no real authority in society, they did have authority and power within the home environment. She was the "mistress of the house" (*nbt pr*)[11] and her duty was to run the house efficiently and effectively as well as raise her children (Watterson, 1941: 120-125 & Robins, 2001: 514).

a) Housework

In ancient Egypt housework was seen as women's work. The men and women had very clearly defined roles they each played within the house and society around them. The housewife was

[11] Scholars have agreed to a certain degree that *nbt pr* was a title for a married woman (Toivari-Viitala, 2001: 15).

mainly responsible for all the domestic tasks which often involved a great deal of tough physical labour (Tyldesley, 1994: 82-83).

The woman's social status naturally influenced the amount of housework she would have to carry out each day. An upper-class, wealthy wife, for example, would have had many servants to carry out the various house duties. She would only be needed to supervise the servants as well as co-ordinate their activities. The more average, middle- to lower-class wife, however, would have to rely on extra help from the other female members of the family (Tyldesley, 1994: 82-83).

Archaeological evidence suggests that although the nuclear family was the ideal, the extended family was actually the norm. As a result there was a complete lack of privacy in the average Egyptian home. Sleeping quarters would often be shared amongst five or six family members (Tyldesley, 1994: 83).

Because of so many family members living in the same house there were more helping hands available to assist with domestic and field work. Therefore the "mistress of the house" often had extra help with her chores (Tyldesley, 1994: 83).

The daughters of the family would have been expected to help the mother with her chores whether or not the family had servants. It was considered as good training for one day when the girls would have to run their own homes (Watterson, 1994: 125).

b) Cleanliness

Personal cleanliness was of utmost importance to the ancient Egyptian and therefore household cleanliness was one of the top priorities of the housewife (Tyldesley, 1994:92).

There was a lack of basic sanitation within the ancient Egyptian society or settlements which ultimately resulted in infestations of insects and vermin such as rats and mice from time to time. In order to combat these pests many women would burn incense which would not only mask any foul odours but also served as a fumigator (Tyldesley, 1994: 92-93).

c) Laundry

Laundry was also an important task for the women. The Egyptians were well known for their sparkling clean clothes and even Herodotus passed comment that their clothes were '*constantly fresh washed and they pay particular attention to this*' (Tyldesley, 1994: 93). As a profession, washing the laundry was a man's job and washermen would be employed by large temples and

wealthy families to clean clothing. But in the average Egyptian household the women would wash the laundry (Tyldesley, 1994: 94).

2.3 It is a man's world: Occupations for women in ancient Egypt

In ancient Egypt education and literacy were considered to be assets that only the wealthy could afford. Because of this exclusivity most of the Egyptian population were illiterate and as girls were not expected to attain a high-status profession, education was seen as futile or pointless. Educating a girl was not objected to by the ancient Egyptian society; it was just not really heard of. In fact, the only depiction of a woman writing is of the goddess of writing, Seshat (Tyldesley, 1994: 118).

The word *seshet* is the feminine form of the male title *sesh* 'scribe' and, according to Robins (1993: 111), is a title only found in the Middle Kingdom. The word *seshet* has sparked debate as to whether or not female scribes existed in Ancient Egypt (Robins, 1993: 111).

Seshet has been interpreted as a shortened form of a female title translated as 'painter of her mouth' or 'cosmetician' (Robins, 1993: 111). As there has been a lack of evidence to substantiate the existence of female scribes,[12] there can be no definitive conclusion (Robins, 1993: 111). There is a possibility that female scribes existed in ancient Egypt, if they did then they were most probably few and far between.

According to Robins (1993: 113), there have been no depictions found at any period of 'working female scribes'. There are, however, New Kingdom scenes that depict women with scribal kits under their chairs. It has been suggested that the women were celebrating their skill in reading and writing (Bryan, 1984: 17 – 32); however, Robins (1993: 113) argues that in all except one case, the scribal kit could possibly have belonged to the husband or son depicted in the scenes.[13]

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[12] There is a *seshet* Idwy of the Middle Kingdom who apparently owned a scarab seal which, according to Robins (1993: 111), was unlikely to have belonged to a low status professional cosmetician. In the Late Period, there is a woman who is called *sesh-sehemet*, 'female scribe' and is in the service of the god's wife at Thebes (Robins, 1993: 113).

[13] Each scene except for one depicts the woman sitting with her husband and son in such a manner that there is little space to put the scribal kit under the man's chair. It is therefore possible that the kit was pushed back under the woman's chair (Robins, 1993: 113). According to Robins (1993: 113), these scenes are reminiscent of a scene where a man's dog is placed under the woman's chair. As a result of these comparisons it can not be concluded that the scribal kit, in fact, did belong to the women in the depictions.

According to Toivari-Vitala (2001: 189), reference is made to a female student in the Late Ramesside Letters. The girl is known as the daughter of Hasw-ms and she was encouraged to learn and study hard.

Toivari-Vitala (2001: 189), maintains that the lack of reference to female students is due to some extent to 'the male-orientedness of the textual source material, rather than being due to the non-existence of female pupils." Although she stresses that it does not mean that all women took part in schooling.

Reference is made by Robins (1993: 113) to a 20th Dynasty letter telling the recipient: "And you shall see this daughter of Khonsmose and have her write a letter and send it to me."

Perhaps the daughter of Khonsmose was able to write the letter herself although it is also possible that she dictated the letter to a scribe. Again no definite conclusion can be made.

Being uneducated and without any formal training, women were excluded from many professions. Society also saw women's main profession, when they were married, as that of running the household. Considering that most women were married off at the average age of fourteen, there was not a lot of time for a woman to be trained for a profession. Bearing and raising her children, as well as running the household, was considered a full time job (Tyldesley, 1994: 119, 121).

2.3.1 Servants

There were some women who worked outside of the home but their work was a lot more limited than men. The women could work as household servants (Robins, 2001: 514). Servants (figs. 1.4 – 1.6) were paid little and therefore most middle- and upper-class households had at least one servant; it was fairly common work (Tyldesley, 1994: 134).

There are even depictions of the women serving guests in 18th Dynasty banquet scenes (fig. 1.4) (Robbins, 2001: 514). In upper class households it was the custom for male servants to serve the men and female servants to serve the women (Fischer, 1989: 14).

2.3.2 Bread and Beer Making

One of the most important jobs, after nurturing the children, was the making of bread and beer (figs. 1.7 – 1.9). Bread was a staple diet of the rich and the poor, and clean water was a rare luxury therefore beer was the thirst quencher for the ancient Egyptians (Tyldesley, 1994:104).

Women are most often portrayed in the task of bread-making. Whilst the men are pounding whole grains in the mortar, the woman are grinding the flour. Administrative documents dating to the reign of Sety I give evidence that grinding flour was an occupation reserved for women. The documents relate to bread-making at the royal palace at Memphis. They list the amount of grain given to twenty six women for grinding, as well as the amount of flour produced. At Deir el-Medina households were provided with female slaves by the government to grind grain (Robins, 2001: 514). In the Old Kingdom women sometimes carried out all the work involved in making bread (Fischer, 1989: 17).

2.3.3 Textile and Craft Labourers

Textile production and the manufacturing of clothes was traditionally a woman's work (Robins, 2001: 514). It is important to note that no term has been identified with clothes making (Fischer, 1989: 17). It is simply a natural assumption that someone made clothes from the archaeological findings. In large households it is possible that female servants were employed to make the garments (Robins, 2001: 514).

The lower class people were very involved in craft production. They were employed in the workshops of the king, temples, and noble officials. Women were only allowed to be weavers (Robins, 2001: 514). Weaving (fig. 1.10) was entirely a woman's profession until the New Kingdom when men began weaving (Fischer, 1989: 16).

2.3.4 Agricultural work

Women were hardly involved in agricultural activities. During the Old Kingdom women were depicted winnowing the grain but in later periods this was taken over by men. From late Old Kingdom onward the women would follow the male reaper with a basket and collect the fallen ears of grain. During the 18th Dynasty women were even depicted harvesting flax (fig. 1.11) (Robins, 2001: 514). Apart from these few activities, women were quite excluded from agricultural work.

2.3.5 Medical auxiliaries

Archaeological evidence shows women working as hair-dressers (fig. 1.12), wet-nurses (fig. 1.13) and even nannies (Robins, 2001: 514). The latter two are of great importance with regards to this research paper. Women played a large role as medical help rather than as actual medical practitioners, working as midwives and wet-nurses (Ritner, 2001: 353).

Practically all known medical doctors were male. Before the Late Period only one female physician (*swnw.t*) is referred to: Peseshet of the Old Kingdom (5th or 6th Dynasty). Peseshet (fig. 1.14) was

given the title "Overseer of Female Physicians" therefore it is assumed that other female doctors must have existed (Ritner, 2001:353).

Apart from one other example of an Egyptian female physician known as Tawa (*t3w3*) who lived around 300 BCE and one example of a midwife (*iatrini*) who lived in the third century CE, there is little evidence of the existence of female medical practitioners or helpers. There is no archaeological evidence, as of yet, which indicates that there was even a development of medical specialities in feminine health such as gynaecology or paediatrics (Ghalioungui, 1983: 92).

2.3.6 Performers: *hnr*

There is evidence in tomb scenes from the Old Kingdom to the 18th Dynasty that show women as dancers and musicians (Robins, 2001: 514). Dancers (figs. 1.15 – 1.18) performed mostly in separate groups of men and women. The female dancers were often under the supervision of a man or woman called *sb3* or *sb3t* "instructor." The professional musicians (figs. 1.15 – 1.16, 1.19 – 1.21) were almost always men, although the harp (figs. 1.19, 1.21), clap-sticks, sistrum, lute (figs. 1.19, 1.20) and other such instruments could be played by women (Fischer, 1989: 15 – 116).

During the Old and Middle Kingdom there were professional musicians and dancers known collectively as the *hnr.*[14] The *hnr* would perform at important festivals as well as funerals. The *hnr* were, initially, all women up until the late Old Kingdom when male performers started to be depicted and male officials were named (Spencer, 2003: 115).

Ritual dancing was an important element of an ancient Egyptian funeral. Dancers helped the mourners to bid farewell to the deceased as well as aided in the celebrations of his journey into the afterlife (Spencer, 2003: 116).

A papyrus found at the Graeco-Roman city of Arsinoe describes how a "castanet dancer" named Isidora is asked by a woman named Artemisia to perform in her village for a certain payment,

> "To Isidora, castanet dancer, from Artemisia of the village of Philadelphia. I request that you, assisted by another castanet dancer – total two – undertake to perform at the festival at my house for six days beginning with the 24th of the month of Payni according

[14]The term *hnr* had been previously interpreted as 'the harem and its inhabitants' or 'harem woman.' Nord (1981: 137 – 145) argued that for the Old and Middle Kingdom *hnr* should be translated as 'musical performers.' The context within which *hnr* has been interpreted as 'harem' was deemed inappropriate by Nord (1981: 137). He maintains that the depictions of women dancing, clapping, singing and playing instruments were not of harem women but rather, of musical performers (Nord, 1981: 137 – 145)

> to the old calendar, you (two) to receive as pay 36 drachmas for each day, and we to furnish you in addition 4 artabas of barley and 24 pairs of bread loaves, and on condition further that, if garments or gold ornaments are brought down, we will guard these safely, and that we will furnish you with two donkeys when you come down to us and a like number when you go back to the city."
> (Spencer, 2003: 120).

Professional dancers in ancient Egypt were well paid and this could have been because of the unstable nature of their employment. This idea of performers having unstable jobs has carried through to modern times. Film actors in particular are notorious for being paid a lot of money for a performance in one film. Ancient Egyptian dancers and other performers worked part-time and worked only when work was available (Spencer, 2003: 120).

2.3.7 Prostitution

There is insufficient evidence to support that 'the oldest profession in the world' – prostitution – existed as a profession. There are references to *hnmwt* – professional singers or dancers – who where not against granting sexual favours for payment. In the erotic papyrus now in the Turin Museum there are depictions of erotic antics but that the women are prostitutes is not certain (Watterson, 1994: 38).

Toivari-Viitala (2001: 144) points out that the depictions of various sexual acts may have drawn with the idea of fertility and potency in mind, rather than a form of pornography. However the reverse could also be true. She also points out that what Western society would classify as porn and on the illicit side may not have been viewed as such by the ancient Egyptians. But compared to the Greco-Roman world such scenes are rare.

2.3.8 Mourners

Mourning was an exclusively female profession (figs. 1.22 – 1.23). Mourning was not an essential element of the funeral but it had a more profound impact on the family and friends as it heightened the status of the deceased. The more mourners that were employed to appear at the funeral the more important he seemed to be. The act of mourning offers us a picture quite opposite to the calm, dignified and orderly image that ancient Egyptian women aspired to. The performance was made up of "loud wailing, beating exposed breast, smearing the body with dirt and tearing at dishevelled hair" (Tyldesley, 1994: 132).

During the funeral ritual two women would play the roles of the *djeryt*, Isis and Nephthys, mourning their dead brother Osiris (Robins, 2001: 513). When Seth cut up Osiris' body and scattered the

parts over Egypt, Nephthys and Isis went in search of his body. When they found all his parts they embalmed it. Then, as kites, Isis and Nephthys mourned over the corpse. Nephthys mourned at the head, whilst Isis perched at the foot of the coffin (Ions, 1968: 67).

During the funerary ritual the two women imitating the *djeryt* (fig. 1.24) would walk alongside the body as it was being carried on a sledge towards the tomb. Their role was a passive one in the ritual (Tyldesley, 1994: 133).

Looking after the tombs of the deceased was usually a job for members of the family. However there were a few women who acted as official mortuary priests, looking after and maintaining the tombs in return for payment (Tyldesley, 1994: 133).

2.3.9 Temple services

Temple duties and service were usually undertaken by the men of society. Women had very little to do with the important tasks within the temple. In the Old and Middle Kingdom the upper class women could be priestesses of Hathor. The women could also be musicians of certain cult deities and the woman in charge of the group would often be the wife of a senior priest in the cult (Robins, 2001: 512).

It seems most likely, according to Tyldesley (1994: 122), that the women involved in temple duty were expected to make donations to the temple treasury. Their work was voluntary and their position in the temple was often honorary in accordance with the husband's high status within the community. The women served as priestesses within the temple usually when the cult was that of a female deity (Tyldesley, 1994: 122).

2.3.10 Supervisors

Although women were excluded from public office there is evidence that in the Middle Kingdom some women held positions such as treasurer and major-doma. There is documentation of women in supervisory positions such as superintendent of the dining-hall; overseer of the wig shop; overseer of singers; overseer of the house of weavers; overseer of amusements; and mistress of the royal harem (Watterson, 1994: 37).

2.4 Conclusion

From this brief overview of ancient Egyptian women and their roles within society and family, one can see how they played an integral part in the continuity of day-to-day living in ancient Egypt. Not only did they partake in domestic activities but they also were valuable to the economic status of ancient Egypt.

Although the women were not as involved in the public domain as men, and often never held positions of as much importance or power, they still were a valuable asset to society. They took on one of the most important roles in life, motherhood, and most women dedicated their lives to raising their children to adulthood.

The majority of women became wives and mothers, and alongside this full-time job quite a few women were employed outside the home. Contrary to popular belief, there were quite a few professions that a woman could aspire to. In most cases, it was necessary for the woman to take on a job outside of the home to help supplement the income, especially in lower class families.

It is important to note that whilst women played a vital role in ancient Egyptian society it was not necessarily recognized as such by the men. And this may account for the lack of documentation of women in diverse activities in contrast to the myriad of depictions of men, often idealised, in various activities and contexts.

2.5 Children

Although the ideal family in ancient Egypt was seen as a nuclear family with many children, this ideal was not always a reality. The average ancient Egyptian family did have many babies but unfortunately, not all survived past early infancy. Those that did survive, however, played various roles in society as they grew up.

2.5.1 Infancy

In the early years of a child's life it was well looked after by its parents and family. Apart from being cherished and loved by the family, the role a baby itself played was rather small.

The baby was usually close to the mother at all times. It was usually carried in a sling which was tightly wound around the mother's upper torso. The baby was usually positioned at its mother's breast and very rarely on the back. Older infants would be carried on the hips of the mother, elder sister, or servant (Feucht, 2001 (b): 262).

2.5.2 Growing Up: Childhood

In ancient Egypt children played with a variety of toys (cf. fig. 2.1) and made up several games to amuse themselves (cf. fig. 2.2), however, they were also given chores and responsibilities to carry out in the house and on the fields (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 44 – 49).

a) Family Helpers

From the age of three boys and girls were sent to run errands. The boys may even have fed the animals, whilst the girls would have helped with small tasks in the kitchen. When the children reached the age of seven their help became more valuable. At age twelve the responsibilities the children have acquired were vitally important to the running of the household (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 49).

The boys would often help their fathers in the tilling of the fields whilst the girls would help with various chores around the house (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 49). It was considered a very important learning experience for the child's future married life (Feucht, 2001 (b): 263).

Children shared the responsibility of looking after their younger siblings with their parents. The boys were not exempt from this duty although the girls were the ones who took on the role more often than the boys (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 50).

b) Servants

According to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 52 – 54), children may have worked as servants in upper class families. There are depictions of what appear to be two servant girls in the Eighteenth Dynasty Theban tomb of User[15] (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 52). One of the girls is organising the cushions on a chair whilst the other is smoothing down the bed sheets. In another scene from the Theban tomb of Amenemhat[16] and according to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 52), there is enough of the scene left to assume that the girl depicted is also making up a person's bed.
There were also young girls depicted as servants in banquet scenes. The girls were also depicted entertaining the people at the banquets. There is one scene where a boy is depicted dancing with an accompaniment of 'an all female orchestra' (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 52).

Janssen and Janssen (1990: 52) mention that it can not be conclusively determined whether the servants were free citizens or not.

c) Imitators

Children are fine imitators of adults and it is not surprising that this can be seen in children of ancient Egypt as well. Girls can be seen depicted mourning next to their mothers in funeral processions (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 50).

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[15] TT 260 (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 52).

[16] TT 82 (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 52).

On a New Kingdom stela a boy is holding his arms in mourning similar to that of one of his older sisters. According to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 50), the siblings are mourning the loss of their mother. Through this process of imitating the children learnt the behaviour that was acceptable within various social contexts[17] (Reber, 1985: 345 -346).

d) Scholars

Formal education was usually enjoyed only by the middle to upper class levels of society (Feucht, 2001 (b): 263). This was a result of the expense that the poorer families could not always afford. There seems to have been no prejudice towards girls having an education, however, it was probably more practical for the girls to attain their education of household management from their mothers at home. Household management was an important responsibility for a girl to learn in preparation for when she would be married (Tyldesley, 1994: 118).

e) Care-givers

Children were expected to take care of their ageing parents when they themselves had grown up. The parents needed their children to help them with tilling the fields and making the food when they were too old to do it themselves.

Children were also important in the mortuary cult. When the parents died the children were expected to visit the family tomb and leave food and offerings that would then feed the dead family members in the afterlife. If this was not carried out it was believed that the dead could take revenge and haunt the living as ghosts.

2.6 Conclusion

Children also symbolised fertility. As the aim of adult life was to ensure the succession of the family, having children was important to a family.

Children played a vital role within the family context as they were growing up. They were little helpers who helped lighten the workload of the parents as well as carried out the ever-important funerary cult.

Children brought much joy to their parents, and to the ancient Egyptians they were most likely to have been considered a blessing.

[17] It is believed by many academics that the process of copying the behaviour of others is the fundamental learning process in a child's life (Reber, 1985: 345, 447).

Chapter 3

Sources and Analysis

For the purpose of exploring the topic of the influence of magic on the health care of women and children in ancient Egypt, a selection of representative sources will be described and analysed. The sources are divided into two main sections; namely A) visual and B) textual sources. The visual sources are classed according to their form whilst the textual sources are classed according to their content. A few representative examples were selected from a much larger portion of similar sources that are known from ancient Egypt. The emphasis in this chapter is on description and analysis. In the next chapter the informative value of these sources for an understanding of the role of medicine and magic in the health of ancient Egyptian women and children in a broader context will be discussed together with other sources.

A) Visual Sources

The visual sources are categorized according to outward form. A representative selection of examples of each category will be discussed to determine each source's value with regard to ancient Egyptian medicine and magic in the health of women and children.

3.1 Depictions of Protective Deities

Specific deities that were invoked to serve as protectors guarded fertility, conception, pregnancy, childbirth and especially the early years of a child. These deities safeguarded the unborn baby and the expectant mother from any evil forces that may attempt to cause harm.

The physical characteristics of the deities usually had some kind of symbolism[18] or purpose that served the mothers or babies they protected. For example, the goddess of childbirth, Tawaret (figs. 3.1.4 – 3.1.5), was usually depicted leaning on the protective symbol '*sa*', whilst her ferocious hippopotamus features would scare away evil deities (Ions, 1968: 111-113).

In addition to the selection studied here, there are amulets (cf. figs. 3.5.1 – 3.5.10) representing such protective deities.

[18] See: 3.4 "Magic wands."

3.1.1 Painted Wooden Figurine of Dancing Bes

British Museum: **# EA 20865**

Source: Spencer, 2003: 112

Date: 18th Dynasty, c. 1300 BCE

Provenance: Thebes, Egypt

Size: 28 cm (height)

Description: The painted wooden figurine of the household god Bes is depicted dancing and playing the tambourine. Bes is a dwarf with a face resembling that of a lion's head, with a lion's mane and ears. He has short legs and a squat body and is wearing plumes on top of his head. The Egyptians believed his music would drive away evil spirits because of the noise, and his dancing was a form of trampling on the enemy (a standard gesture in magical rites) (Pinch, 1994: 85).

Bes served as a protector of mother and child during childbirth. A statuette of him would be placed above or on top of the mother's head during childbirth as protection (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 9).

3.1.2 Ebony vessel of Bes

Petrie Museum: **# UC 16678**

Source: Petrie Museum Website: www.petrie.ac.uk/

Date: New Kingdom, 1350 – 1550 BCE

Provenance: Amarna, Egypt

Size: 12.5 cm (height)

Description: The ebony vessel of Bes has distinct feline front paws, ears and tail. It has inlaid eyes, teeth and tongue, with partly damaged feet. The tail is also missing. The Petrie Museum has the statuette classified under cosmetic vessels. This is because of the four holes in the back and the hole in the head which may have been a place to store the kohl the Egyptians used for decorating their eyes.[19] Bes shaped cosmetic holders perhaps indicate how integrated the household god was into the everyday life of the Egyptian woman.

3.1.3 Heqet and Meskhenet

Deir el-Bahri, Hatshepsut's necropolis temple

Source: Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 13

Date: Eighteenth Dynasty, c. 1300 BCE

Provenance: Deir el-Bahri, Hatshepsut's necropolis temple

[19] Kohl was also used to lessen the reflected glare of the sun and it was believed to have certain healing powers (Tyldesley, 1994: 159 – 160).

Description: The depictions come from a limestone relief from Hatshepsut's necropolis temple. The goddesses have been taken out of their original context.[20] On the left is the goddess Heqet (cf. 3.1.6) holding two *ankhs* (the symbols of life). Heqet usually had a frog head as she was the frog goddess of childbirth and symbolised fertility.

On the right is the goddess Meskhenet (cf. 3.8.1 – 3.8.2) also holding an *ankh*. Meskhenet was the personification of one of the birth bricks (Ions, 1968: 113). On top of her head is her symbol of two loops on top of a vertical stroke. This, according to Nunn (1996: 102), "represented the two-horned uterus of a heifer."[21]

3.1.4 Bes and Tawaret

Where: Deir el-Bahri, Hatshepsut's necropolis temple
Source: Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 13
Date: Eighteenth Dynasty, c. 1300 BCE
Provenance: Deir el-Bahri, Hatshepsut's necropolis temple
Description: The depictions come from the same limestone relief as fig. 3.1.2 and they have also been taken out of their original context (cf. fig. 3.6.3). The one on the left is Bes, the household dwarf god. He is shown squatting with his lion-like face and tail. Bes was first the protector of the royal house which is why he was one of the attendant deities depicted at the birth of Hatshepsut, and later he was taken on by the common people (Ions, 1968: 111).

On the right is the goddess of pregnancy, Tawaret.[22] Her bulging, presumably pregnant, belly and sagging breasts hint at the role which she plays in Egyptian mythology as protector of pregnancy and childbirth. Her strange features include a head and body of a hippopotamus, tail of a crocodile, and legs of a lion (Pinch, 1994: 39).

3.1.5 Tawaret

British Museum: **# EA 35700**
Source: British Museum Website: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/
Date: Late Period, after 600 BCE
Provenance: Karnak temple, Egypt
Size: 108 cm
Description: The breccia statuette of Tawaret really emphasizes her bulging belly and drooping breasts. Her sagging breasts resemble that of a woman after she has given birth to several children. Tawaret has the head of a hippopotamus, the arms and legs of a lion and the tail of a

[20] See 3.6.3 for discussion of original context.

[21] See 3.8 "Magic bricks" for various interpretations of Meskhenet's headdress.

[22] Tawaret was also known as Taueret, Thoeris and Apet (Ions, 1968: 111).

crocodile. On either side of her is the symbol of protection (the *sa*) upon which she is resting her paws. She is wearing a female wig with a modius on her head. Her mouth is open with rows of teeth in a grimace; perhaps this was to emphasize her protective nature.

There were no large-scale temples dedicated to Tawaret; instead her statuettes were placed at the household altar. She seems to have been one of the most popular Egyptian household deities judging by the large amount of images that have been found of her (Wilkinson, 2003: 185 – 186).

Tawaret was occasionally known as the 'concubine of Seth' as a result of Seth being associated with the male hippopotamus. In some of the Late Period *cippi* Tawaret has been equated with Isis although, according to Wilkinson (2003: 185), the connection between the two deities is not always clear.

3.1.6 Heqet[23]

Mammisi of Nectanebo, Dendera, Egypt
Source: Wilkinson, 2003: 229
Date: 30th Dynasty
Provenance: Mammisi of Nectanebo, Dendera, Egypt
Description: The detail of a scene from the mammisi of Nectanebo depicts Heqet in semi-anthropomorphic form. Heket was a goddess in the form of a frog or a frog-headed woman. She symbolised fecundity and resurrection and, therefore supervised the births of kings and queens. She was often referred to as Khnum's wife and hence became a birth-deity of all Khnum's creatures. Heqet gave life in the womb to the bodies of rulers, including Hatshepsut (Ions, 1968: 109 & Wilkinson, 2003: 229). From the Middle Kingdom there are references to 'servant of Heqet' that may have been the term used to denote midwives (Wilkinson, 2003: 229).

3.1.7 Isis breastfeeding Horus

British Museum: **# EA 67186**
Source: British Museum Website: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/
Date: Late Period (after 600 BCE)
Provenance: North Saqqara, Egypt
Size: 22.8 cm (height), 14.8 cm (length)
Description: The bronze figurine depicts the goddess Isis suckling her son, Horus. Isis is wearing the sun-disc and cow's horns earlier associated with the goddess Hathor, who is also seen as a

[23] Heqet is also spelt Heket (Wilkinson, 2003: 229).

mother figure in ancient Egyptian myth. She is holding her left breast[24] whilst her left hand supports Horus' head.

Magic was at the centre of Isis' many roles that she played. She revived Osiris through magic as well as conceived and protected Horus using magic. Her ability to attain the gods' help when Horus was stung by a scorpion resulted in her association with the *cippi* of the child Horus (Wilkinson, 2003: 146). She would also assist the deceased in the afterlife. She was invoked in many protective spells (cf. 3.12.2.1 e & 3.12.2.4 e – g).

3.1.8 Isis suckling Horus

Vienna, Ägyptisch-Orientalische Sammlung: **#8564**
Source: Görg, 1998: 438
Date: Late Period, Twenty-sixth Dynasty, c. 600 BCE
Provenance: Egypt
Size: 28 cm (height)
Description: The bronze Isis statuette depicts Isis suckling Horus whilst sitting on a lion throne. Isis is crowned with cow's horns and a sun disk which is resting on a diadem base surrounded by cobras.

3.1.9 Seated statue of Hathor

Luxor Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art: **# J 835**
Source: Görg, 1998: 436
Date: New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty, c. 1370 BCE
Provenance: Luxor, Egypt
Size: 154 cm (height), 77 cm (length), 40,5 cm (width)
Description: The diorite statue of Hathor is depicted with an *ankh* in her left hand. On her throne is an inscription by Amenophis III whereby he declares himself beloved by Hathor.

Hathor has been included in the list of sources because she is closely linked to Isis. She was also a maternal deity much like Isis except Isis was the more stable "house-wife" whilst Hathor was more playful (Wilkinson, 2003: 143, 146 – 147). Hathor was seen as the perfect example of a mother. From the New Kingdom onwards, Isis started taking on more roles that used to be Hathor's. Eventually Isis became the "goddess of all goddesses" (Görg, 1998: 437-439).

[24] A form of encouraging milk to flow from the breast is to squeeze the milk out of the breast (de Villiers: interview), and this may be what Isis is doing her when she is holding her breast out for Horus to feed from.

Hathor's main cult centre was at Dendera and was made reference to in certain birth spells (cf. 3.12.2.1 b, d) (Wilkinson, 2003: 140).

Hathor was associated with love, female sexuality as well as motherhood. She was often described as the 'beautiful one[25] (Wilkinson, 2003: 141). It was believed by the ancient Egyptians that Hathor assisted women in conception, labour and childbirth. According to Wilkinson (2003: 141), one of Hathor's names was 'mistress of the vagina'.

3.1.10 Bastet

British Museum: **# EA 25565**
Source: Shaw & Nicholson, 1995: 50
Date: Late Period or Ptolemaic period, c.664-30 BCE
Provenance: Egypt
Size: 26cm (height), 8.26 cm (width), 10.8cm (depth)
Description: The cat-headed goddess is depicted here with a sistrum[26] and a small group of four kittens sitting at her feet. Her earliest depictions[27] show a woman with a head of a lioness, often holding both the *ankh* sign and a sceptre. Bastet's appearance changed to that of a cat-headed woman by the first millennium BCE, and often accompanied by her kittens (Shaw & Nicholson, 1995: 50).

Bastet was goddess of joy, music and dancing. Her kittens indicated that she had the power to grant fertility (Pinch, 194: 118 & Ions, 1968: 94, 103). She listened to women's prayers for fertility, and supported the safe delivery of children (Görg, 1998: 441).

Bastet was considered to be the daughter of the sun god and was therefore identified with the 'Eye of Ra,' but was also linked with the moon and so she was known as the 'Eye of the moon' as well (Wilkinson, 2003: 178).

3.1.11 Renenet Stela

Location unknown
Source: Tyldesley, 1994: 256
Date: Unknown
Provenance: The tomb of Ken-Amun, Thebes
Size: Unknown

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[25] The Greeks even associated Hathor with Aphrodite (Wilkinson, 2003: 141).

[26] A form of rattle (Shaw & Nicholson, 1995: 50).

[27] Her earliest known depiction is from Saqqara, carved on stone vessels of the 2nd Dynasty ruler Hetepsekhemwy (c.2890 BCE) (Shaw & Nicholson, 1995: 50).

Description: The cobra goddess, Renenet (also known as Renenutet) meaning 'snake who nourishes', was strongly linked to the household and family (Wilkinson, 2003: 225). She was the patron goddess of nursing, and she would also assist and protect the child at birth[28] (Ions, 1968: 113). She was, however, worshiped mainly as a fecundity deity (Wilkinson, 2003: 226).

In the illustration of a votive stela, Renenet is a snake sitting on a platform with the cow horns of Hathor, a sun disk and two plumes on her head. Her other form was as a snake-headed woman, often suckling the pharaoh (Ions, 1968: 113). She became identified with Isis as she was thought to be the mother of Horus by Atum in the Book of the Dead (Wilkinson, 2003: 225).

The snake had symbolic meaning; although snakes are usually seen as the enemy; they were regarded in some circumstances as being benign. Snakes were also associated with women, fertility and childbirth; they have even been depicted protecting Isis and the baby Horus (Tyldesley, 1994: 256 – 7).

Snakes are even depicted carrying a knife on magical 'wands' so that they may protect the owner of the 'wand' (cf. figs. 3.4.2 – 3.4.4).

3.2 "Fertility Dolls"

The so-called "dolls" have caused a lot of debate within academic circles. When first discovered these figurines were classified as children's toys, but more recently they have been classified as "fertility dolls." This new classification is mainly due to the emphasis that had been placed on the genital areas of the dolls (Manniche, 2001: 518).

The context within which the figurines were found also plays an important role in determining what their purpose was. Some figurines were found in a man's tomb (fig. 3.2.2) whilst others were found in household shrines and in the temples of deities associated with fertility (Pinch, 1994: 100). In the second millennium BCE fertility figurines were placed in temples of Hathor, and in the first millennium BCE to Isis. The purpose of this was so that the figurine would absorb *heka* to be used as a fertility charm.

[28] Renenet became linked with the notion of destiny (Ions, 1968: 113). In the Late Period Renenet gained the responsibilities of determining the length of a person's life as well as many of its experiences (Wilkinson, 2003: 225).

The shape of the figurines does not necessarily convey that they are fertility objects. The "paddle-doll" (fig. 3.2.3) could easily be a child's doll that was perhaps used as a rattle. The figurines (cf. figs. 3.2.1 – 3.2.2) could also have been made to be a child's toy.

It is not so certain that the objects in particular, would have been children's toys mainly because the emphasis on the genitals is a rather peculiar thing for a child to do (not that it is can be sure what was considered "normal" in ancient Egyptian society).

The main reason for doubting that the figurines were toys is the context within which they were found. Why would so many of these figurines be found in temples of Hathor and Isis, as well as in household shrines? The ones found in tombs could still be quite debated as to whether they served a purpose of sexual regeneration and rebirth in the afterlife[29]. However, some of the figurines found in tombs had *inscriptions* on them asking assistance from the dead relative to grant children to a specific member of the family (Pinch, 1994: 100, 126).

The figurines could have played an important role in the health of women if they are in fact fertility figurines. The figurines formed part of a petition to the deceased to grant fertility to the female petitioner, and seem to have been used in some sort of offering to various protective goddesses involved in fertility and childbirth (Manniche, 2001: 518).

3.2.1 "Fertility figurines"

Petrie Museum, London: #unknown
Source: Wildung, 1984: 207
Date: Middle to New Kingdom
Provenance: unknown
Size: 15 – 20cm (height)
Description: These are statuettes of nude women made in clay and faience, with one of the "dolls" (first on the right) made of reed and linen. All of the figures emphasize the genitals. The figures are depicted with very curvaceous forms. The third figure from the right, which is photographed from the back, is holding a child with an "Isis-knot" amulet hanging from around its neck. This amulet is associated with life and fertility.

3.2.2 Female figurines

British Museum: **# EA 59648**
Source: Freed, 1998: 334

[29] Figurines have been found in tombs that have been classified as "concubines". Some of these figurines are of women lying down on a bed or wooden plank, and have been interpreted as 'erotic' (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 7 – 8).

Date: Predynastic Period, c. 3800 BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: 10.6cm; 12 cm (height)

Description: The female figurines are made of bone. Holes have been stamped onto the genital area in an attempt to emphasize it. The lines and holes draw attention to the "dolls'" sexuality. According to Freed (1998: 334), the objects were probably placed in the tombs to guarantee the fertility of the owners in the afterlife.

3.2.3 A "Paddle-doll"

Cairo Museum: **# JE 56274**

Source: Manniche, 2001: 518

Date: Eleventh Dynasty, Middle Kingdom

Provenance: Thebes, Egypt

Size: unknown

Description: Wooden figurines such as this one were originally thought to be children's toys. However, the figurines that depict the female body were most likely connected with the sexual side of regeneration and rebirth. This particular wooden doll is like a rattle in the form of a puppet with its body serving as a handle while its wig of unbaked mud beads is the shaker. The female genital areas are clearly painted both beneath the robe of the tattooed figurine and on the naked breast. This illustrates the desire for a female presence in the man's tomb within which this doll was found, in order to help the deceased revive his reproductive abilities.

3.2.4 Headless wooden "paddle doll"

British Museum: **# EA 23071**

Source: Pinch, 1994: 127

Date: c. 2000-1800 BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: unknown

Description: This headless wooden "paddle doll" is classified as a fertility figurine because of the emphasise on the bulging hips and the fact that it resembles the other "paddle dolls." The protective goddess Tawaret is depicted where the genitals would normally be shown, perhaps to ward off any evil which might try to penetrate the woman in that area. Tawaret is also holding a knife ready to defend and attack.

3.2.5 Ivory Figure of a woman

British Museum: **# EA 59648**

Source: British Museum Website: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/

Date: c. 4000 BCE

Provenance: Badari, Egypt

Size: 14 cm (height)

Description: The ivory female figurine has incised features. The emphasis on the eyes, breasts and pubic region are stylistic and may have been linked with sexuality. The figurine is made of the lower canine of a hippopotamus. This type of figurine is found in the burials of both men and women of the Badarian culture (around 4000 BCE).

3.2.6 Limestone female figurine

Petrie Museum: **# UC 30093**

Source: Petrie Museum Website: www.petrie.ac.uk/

Date: 12th Dynasty, c. 1795 – 1985 BCE

Provenance: Unknown, Egypt

Size: 11.15 cm

Description: The figurine is made of limestone and has a heavy, black painted wig in two side masses with a plaited tail at the back. The nude figure has its hands to its sides, and it ends at the knees.

3.2.7 Pottery female figurine

Petrie Museum: **# UC 30096**

Source: Petrie Museum Website: www.petrie.ac.uk/

Date: 20th Dynasty, c. 1069 – 1186 BCE

Provenance: Unknown, Egypt

Size: 21.05 cm (height)

Description: The pottery figurine has its hair in three sections, two on the sides of the head and the other down the back. The breasts are small whilst the pubic area is very large and heavily marked. The figurine is believed to be of Babylonian origin.

3.3 *Cippi*

The *cippus* was a type of stela or standing stone which was popular from the sixth century BCE onwards, although cippi appear as early as the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BCE), when they were made of wood rather than stone (Ritner, 2001: 325, 329).

On these objects the god Horus, as a child (Harpokrates), is shown in almost three dimensions, standing on crocodiles and holding dangerous animals. Scorpions and snakes are often depicted as being held by Horus on the cippi. They represented the forces of chaos, which continually threatened the ordered world. In reality, scorpions and snakes were not a great

danger to the average adult Egyptian, however, their stings could prove fatal to a young child (Pinch, 1994: 100-101).

According to myth, Horus and his mother, Isis, were attacked while hiding in the marshes of the Delta. Isis had been out looking for food leaving the baby Horus hidden in the reeds. The god Set, disguised as a poisonous snake, slithered up to Horus and bit him. When Isis returned she discovered Horus nearing death. She petitioned to all the gods to help her. Then Thoth, the god of medicine, on behalf of Re cured Horus and granted him power over dangerous creatures (Ions, 1968: 61).

Cippi were intended to prevent as well as cure snakebites and scorpion stings. *Cippi* were used both to ward off and to cure the sting of venomous animals. Most *cippi* have a head of the protective god Bes and their entire surface is covered with scenes of the gods and with magical spells that call upon Isis, the mother of Horus, to cure and save the petitioner just as she rejuvenated her husband Osiris. Some *cippi* were equipped with basin-like bases. The spells on the *cippi* were never meant to be read out loud, it was intended that water be poured over the magical spells incised on the statue. The water would then be collected from the base, charged with the magical power, and drunk as a cure (Ritner, 2001: 329).

3.3.1 The Metternich Stela[30]

Metropolitan Museum of Art: **# MMA 50.85**
Source: Nunn, 1996: 108
Date: end of the 30th Dynasty, 360-343 BCE
Provenance: Unknown
Size: 85 cm (height)
Description: The basalt stela is engraved with a number of magical texts for protection from bites of venomous animals (cf. 3.10.2.4 f.). The front has, among other things, a representation of the child Horus.

The top half of this stela was carved in a hard dark stone. On the part below the central figure panel, rows of hieroglyphs record thirteen magic spells to protect against poisonous bites and wounds and to cure the illnesses caused by them. The stela was commissioned by the priest Nes-Atum to be set up in the public part of a temple (Nunn, 1996: 108).

A victim could recite or drink water that had been poured over the magic words and images on the stela (Ritner, 1993: 103 – 104, 106). As a mythic precedent, the hieroglyphic inscription

[30] Cf. figs. 3.3.1 a – c.

around the base describes the magic cure that was worked upon the infant Horus by Thoth, the god of wisdom and writing.

On the stela, Isis speaks and recounts that while she and Horus were still hiding in the marshes, the child became ill. In her despair, she cried for help to the "Boat of Eternity" (the sun boat in which the god travels over the sky), "and the sun disk stopped opposite her and did not move from his place." Thoth was sent from the sun boat to help Isis and cured Horus by reciting a catalogue of spells (Pinch, 1994: 144). The spells always ended with the phrase "and the protection of the afflicted as well," indicating that by using these spells, any type of affliction in human beings would be healed.

In the detail of the stela, Horus emerges from the background in such high relief that he is posed as an actual three-dimensional statue, with his left leg striding forward and his head directly facing the viewer. He is portrayed in the conventional Egyptian form for youth; that is, he is nude and wearing his hair in a side lock. The soft, rounded forms of the bodies of Horus and the other deities are typical of the style of the period.

To symbolize his magic powers, Horus holds snakes and scorpions as well as an antelope (by its horns) and a lion (by its tail) in his closed fists. His feet rest on two crocodiles. Above him is the head of Bes, the dwarf deity with leonine features who had traditionally protected households but by this time had become a more general protective deity. Horus is flanked by three deities who stand upon coiled snakes. On the right is Thoth, identified by his ibis head, and on the left is Isis. Both protectively hold the walls of a curved reed hut, a primeval chapel, in which the Horus child stands together with a figure of Re-Harakhty, god of the rising sun, and two standards in the form of papyrus and lotus columns. The lotus standard supports the two feathers of Osiris' headdress.

The images incised into the stone at the top of the stela portray the perilous nighttime journey of the sun as it passes through the netherworld under the earth. Its rebirth each morning is shown at the uppermost point of the stela, where Thoth, four baboons, and the kneeling King Nectanebo II lift their arms in the gesture of adoration and prayer. Nectanebo II (r. 360–343 B.C.) was the last indigenous pharaoh of ancient Egypt.

3.3.2 A Black steatite cippus

British Museum: **# EA 36250**

Source: British Museum Website: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/

Date: Late Period, 6th to 3rd centuries BCE

Provenance: Egypt

Size: 19.5 cm (height), 13 cm (width), 6.1 cm (depth)

Description: Horus is depicted trampling the crocodiles underneath his feet whilst holding snakes, scorpions and lions in his hands. On the *cippus*, the symbol for Isis in the marshes can be seen to the right of Horus' head. She kneels on a mat surrounded by vegetation, with a canopy formed by two protective cobras resting on scorpions. Other gods are also shown, such as Bes above Horus' head and Selkis, the scorpion goddess, on the left side towards the bottom. Magical inscriptions around Horus decorate the *cippus.*

3.3.3 A Painted wooden cippus

British Museum: **# EA 60958**

Source: British Museum Website: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/

Date: Late Period, after 600 BCE

Provenance: Possibly from Memphis, Egypt

Size: 42.5 cm (height), 23.3 cm (width), 10.5 cm (base depth)

Description: The head of the household god Bes, who protected the family from malign forces, surmounts the *cippus*. Horus is under Bes' head standing on two crocodiles. In his hands he is holding a scorpion, snakes and other dangerous animals. On the left is a standard with what appear to be the cow horns of Hathor. Sitting on top of the standard is a falcon with a headdress that seems to consist of the horns of Hathor and a sun disk. The falcon most probably represents the god Horus, but it could also represent the sun god Re because of the sun disk on top of the falcon's head (Wilkinson, 1992: 83).

3.3.4 Cippus with its basin

Location unknown

Source: Lexa, 1925: 70

Date: Unknown

Provenance: Unknown

Size: Unknown

Description: In this illustration the *cippus* is shown in context. The *cippus* is part of a larger basin which would be where the water would be collected after having been poured over the magical inscriptions on the cippus. Again, Horus is depicted with his side-lock of youth and his hands are clutching snakes, scorpions, an antelope and a lion.

3.3.5 Cippus mounted on statue and basin

Location unknown

Source: Lexa, 1925: 70

Date: Unknown

Provenance: Unknown

Size: Unknown

Description: The *cippus* is mounted on the front of a statue of a man with a basin in front of it. The cippus depicts Horus trampling on crocodiles whilst holding various dangerous animals in his hand. According to Pinch (1994: 102), statues mounted with a *cippus* formed part of private owned temple statues that were offered as a protective service to the common man.

Temple statues of the first millennium BCE offered magical cures. The statue would depict the statue owner standing, squatting or kneeling and holding a Horus *cippus* and there is often a basin in front of the statue base (Pinch, 1994: 102).

3.3.6 Miniature statue-stela

British Museum: **# WAA 113909**
Source: Pinch, 1994: 101
Date: 1st Millennium BCE
Provenance: unknown
Size: unknown
Description: The stela depicts, on the right, the goddess Isis holding the infant Horus, whilst on the left is Horus trampling over dangerous animals and reptiles with the protective deity Bes above him. In his hands he is holding various dangerous animals.

3.4 Magical Wands

Magic "knives", also known as apotropaic[31] "wands", were one of the devices used by ancient Egyptians to protect a pregnant woman and her unborn baby during the gestation period, childbirth as well as early infancy[32] (Tyldesley, 1994: 259 – 260).

The wands are usually made of hippopotamus ivory, thus enlisting the support of the formidable, ferocious animal against evil (Tyldesley, 1994: 259). The hippopotamus was also the goddess of pregnancy, Tawaret (fig. 3.1.3 – 4), and so it added extra protection for the women (Andrews, 1994: 10).

The term "knife" is perhaps not very fitting, as it does not have a knife shape. The shape resembles more the throwstick (similar to the boomerang), and this is a result of the wands being made from hippopotamus tusks (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 9). Throwsticks were used in ancient Egypt to hunt birds; flocks of birds were seen as a symbol of chaos, hence the appropriateness of the wand's shape (Pinch, 1994: 40 & McDermott, 2001: 36).

[31] Apotropaic means "acting to ward off evil"

[32] See chapter 4 for the ways in which magical 'wands' were used.

About a hundred and fifty surviving examples of wands are known, all dating from the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period.

The wands have a flat and a convex face and both have carved rows of demons and deities. In several examples the flat side also depicts an inscription, for example the phrase: "protection by night and day" or a more detailed formula: "words spoken by these protective figures: we have come to spread protection over this child". Then follows the name of the young child, always a boy, or that of a woman, evidently the mother (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 9).

The words "we have come to spread protection over this child" are very important. These words help to clarify the purpose of the wands and the functions of the deities depicted on them.

To understand the iconography on the wands selected as examples for this essay, a brief explanation of the various animals and demons that appear on the wands is in order.

The creatures that have been depicted on wands include lions (figs. 3.4.2 – 5), panthers (figs. 3.4.1, 3.4.4 – 6), cats (fig. 3.4.1), turtles (fig.3.4.5), snakes (figs. 3.4.2 – 4, 3.4.6), baboons (fig. 3.4.1), bulls (fig. 3.4.6), scarab-beetles (fig. 3.4.2), frogs (fig.3.4.2, 3.4.6) and crocodiles (figs. 3.4.2 – 3). Imaginary monsters also featured on wands such as the Seth animal (figs. 3.4.2, 3.4.5 – 6), the griffin (figs. 3.4.3, 3.4.6), the composite form of Tawaret (figs. 3.4.1 – 6), and the dwarf named Bes (figs. 3.4.1 – 3, 3.4.5[33]) (Pinch, 1994: 40).

The so-called 'fighters,' also known by the name Aha[34], which are depicted on the wands (fig. 3.4.2), can be recognised by the knives (figs. 3.4.1 – 3.4.6), torches (figs. 3.4.3) or lamps they often carry. Some are even depicted holding onto or stabbing snakes and other dangerous animals (Pinch, 1994: 40-41).

Most creatures on the wands can be linked with specific deities. The griffin, for example, could be a manifestation of Seth. His role as defender of the Sun Boat against Apep, made Seth an ideal 'fighter' for the magician to invoke and therefore, he is seen depicted on wands (Pinch, 1994: 42).

The crowned ram's head represents the creator god Heryshaf. The frog symbolises the birth goddess, Heqet, who is also linked to fertility (Pinch, 1994: 41).

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[33] In fig. 3.4.5 the feminine form of Bes, Beset, is depicted on the wand.

[34] Whilst the name Aha did incorporate in general all the fighting demons, sometimes it specifically referred to Bes, the dwarf god (Pinch, 1994: 41, 122).

Bes was represented by the dwarf with the lion mane and ears (cf. 3.1.1). He was a protector of children and pregnant women. His depiction on the wands would scare off the evil elements trying to harm the mother and child (Robins, 1993: 80).

The hippopotamus with the crocodile tail and lion legs and arms was Tawaret (cf. 3.1.3 – 4), the goddess of pregnancy. Her frightening features were also a deterrent to demons, much like Bes.

The seated cat and the double lion both refer to the sun-god Re (figs. 3.4.1 – 4). The cat was often depicted with a knife (figs. 3.4.1 – 2), as is known from the funerary texts where the cat slays the serpent of chaos Apophis (Faulkner, 1994: plate 10). The function of Re on the wand was to identify him with the baby. Re was threatened by such monsters as are depicted on the wands, and therefore as he survived then so by inference the new-born child should be safe (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 9).

Thoth's journey into a desert to repossess the power of the solar eye is sometimes illustrated on wands in the form of a baboon place next to a *wedjat* eye (Pinch, 1994: 41).

The turtles were considered scavengers and therefore unclean (Pinch, 1994: 42). They were, however, invoked in magic and depicted on wands (fig 3.4.5).

It has been theorized that the depiction of the hand[35] may have been a symbol of creation and rebirth (Wilkinson, 1992: 55). Parkinson (1991: 130), believes the hand, when depicted on wands and other magical implements, represents the magician's gestures of power.

The crocodile represents the protective crocodile demon, Sobek (Wilkinson, 1991: 130).

The snake, within the context of the wands, was predominantly a protective force (cf. 3.1.9). The snake represented the cobra goddess of nursing, Renenet, who had close ties with the household and family (Tyldesley, 1994: 256 – 7). Snakes were associated with women, fertility and childbirth, thereby making them a valuable ally.

Scarab-beetles were often equated with the creator god Atum. The Egyptians gave the scarab-beetle the name Khepri for when they would worship it. Khepri was believed to roll the solar disk across the sky in the same manner the scarab rolled a ball of dung (Wilkinson, 1991: 113). The depiction of the scarab on the wand could be a way ensuring that the pregnant woman, unborn or newborn baby would be alive to see the sun rise up again.

[35] The hieroglyph D46 (Gardiner, 1950: 455).

Another animal that features on one of the wands (fig. 3.4.1), is a vulture.[36] There are a number of female deities associated with the vulture including Isis and Hathor from the beginning of the Late Period (Wilkinson, 1991: 85).

3.4.1 12th Dynasty Ivory Wand

Metropolitan Museum of Art: **# 30.8.218**

Source: Ritner, 2001: 323

Date: 12th Dynasty, c. 1985 – 1795 BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: unknown

Description: This magic wand is made of ivory and has magical symbols that served to ward of snakes, poisonous insects, and other hidden dangers. Tawaret is depicted holding a knife, and Bes is on the left of Tawaret. On the left end of the wand is a panther's face and near the right end there appears to be a baboon wielding a sceptre (a symbol of power).

3.4.2. Wand for the "Lady of the house of Seneb"

British Museum: **# EA 18175**

Source: Pinch, 1994: 40

Date: Late Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, c.1750 BCE

Provenance: Thebes, Egypt

Size: 36 cm (length)

Description: The depictions on this wand encompass a range of protective images. There is the grotesque dwarf known as Aha at this date, his more famous name being Bes. Then there is Tawaret, the pregnant hippopotamus carrying a knife. There are lions, the scarab of rebirth, the frog that represents the goddess of pregnancy and childbirth, Heket. There are also serpents which represent the evil forces the protective deities have to overcome.

3.4.3. The reverse side of the wand for the "Lady of the house of Seneb"

British Museum: **# EA 18175**

Source: Pinch, 1994: 41

Date: Late Middle Kingdom, 12th dynasty, c. 1750 BCE

Provenance: Thebes, Egypt

Size: 36 cm (length)

Description: Hippopotamus ivory apotropaic wand that is inscribed with a formula promising protection to the "Lady of the House of Seneb." It features two Tawarets. The one on the right is not only wielding a knife but she is also leaning on the *sa*, the sign for 'protection.' The wand

[36] Hieroglyph G14 (Gardiner, 1950: 469).

also features a double winged griffin, Bes, snakes, a lion and other animals. There is even an *ankh*, symbol of 'life' as well as a *wedjat* eye.

3.4.4. Apotropaic wand

British Museum: **# EA 65439**

Source: Pinch, 1994: 41

Date: 19th-17th centuries BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: unknown

Description: This wand is made of ivory and has a jackal head at the pointed end (left side) and a panther head at the rounded end (right side). Depicted next to the jackal head is the *wedjat* eye.[37] Near the middle of the wand Tawaret is depicted holding a knife. There are also a couple of snakes.

3.4.5. Partly broken wand

British Museum: **# EA 58794**

Source: Pinch, 1994: 79

Date: c.19th-18th centuries BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: unknown

Description: This ivory apotropaic wand was broken in antiquity and then lashed together with cords. The figures depicted include a turtle (1st left), Seth (3rd left), Beset (4th left), Tawaret (2nd right) holding a knife, and a panther head (1st right).

3.4.6 Protective wand

British Museum: **# EA 24426**

Source: Pinch, 1994: 131

Date: c.1900-1700 BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: unknown

Description: This wand was broken and mended in ancient times. On the wand there is a double bull on the left-hand side as well as a panther's head on the left end. In the middle is a winged griffin. On the right end of the wand there is a jackal's head. The head of the Seth animal and the frog goddess, Heqet also appear on the wand. Tawaret is depicted with a protective knife.

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[37] The *wedjat* eye was the lunar eye (left eye) of Horus after Seth had damaged it, and Thoth had restored it. Horus' left eye was the moon in his cosmic form. His *wedjat* eye came in general use as a protective amulet (Pinch, 1994: 27-29).

3.5 Amulets

Amulets played an important role in ancient Egyptian culture and religion, but also in medicine and magic, and they also had a function in protecting a mother and child. An amulet is a 'personal ornament which, because of its shape, the material from which it is made, or even just its colour, is believed to endow its wearer by magical means with certain powers or capabilities' (Andrews, 1994: 6).

The ancient Egyptians loved using amulets, they wore them when living and placed them on the bodies of the dead, they put them in their houses and in their tombs, and even set them up in temples (Budge, 1978: 160).

Women and children wore amulets the most because the ancient Egyptians believed they were most at risk from malign forces. Females who wanted to become pregnant would probably wear fertility amulets (fig. 3.5.1) and women who were already pregnant might wear Bes or Tawaret (fig. 3.5.4) amulets.

A couple of examples have been selected to show how amulets were worn around the neck (fig. 3.5.8) and even worn as a tattoo (fig. 3.5.9).

3.5.1 Bastet amulet

British Museum: **# EA 26239**
Source: Andrews, 1994: 33
Date: Third Intermediate Period, c. 1000 – 700 BCE
Provenance: unknown
Size: 4.5 cm (height)
Description: A turquoise-blue glazed-composition cat with black spotting is seated with eight kittens plus one on her back and one on her head. This cat is known as Bastet, the goddess of fertility. Her kittens are a symbol of her fertility (cf. 3.1.8). Women possibly wore amulets like this one in hope that it might make them fertile for their husband, in order to bear children.

3.5.2 Diorite squatting frog

British Museum: **# EA 14758**
Source: Andrews, 1994: 32
Date: New Kingdom to Third Intermediate Period, c. 1500 – 700 BCE
Provenance: unknown

Size: unknown

Description: The little diorite squatting frog is a symbol of Heqet (cf. 3.1.3, 3.1.6, 3.6.3). The amulet would have been worn by women wanting to fall pregnant as the frog offered fertility.

3.5.3 A *'sa'* amulet

British Museum: **# EA 65332**

Source: Andrews, 1994: 45

Date: Middle Kingdom

Provenance: unknown

Description: This electrum wire *'sa'* amulet was probably worn by anyone who wanted protection from evil deities. It is a symbol of protection and because the hippopotamus deity Tawaret is often accompanied by a *'sa'* (fig. 3.5.5) it is possible that women wore the *'sa'* on its own for protection.

3.5.4 Tawaret amulet

British Museum: **# EA 64593**

Source: Andrews, 1994: 40

Date: New Kingdom, c. 1500 – 1200 BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: unknown

Description: The glazed composition of Tawaret is a protective amulet for pregnant women. Tawaret is wearing a low modius, horns and a disk – this could possibly symbolise the revered mother deities, Isis and Hathor. Wearing the amulet would not only offer protection by scaring away demons but it would also remind the wearer of the caring, nurturing side of a mother.

3.5.5 Protective Tawaret amulet

British Museum: **# EA 11836**

Source: Andrews, 1994: 40

Date: New Kingdom

Provenance: unknown

Size: 7.8 cm (height)

Description: This Tawaret amulet is a glazed composition with a flat back. Tawaret is wearing a low modius and is resting her hand on a symbol of protection (the *'sa'*). She is also holding a knife, ready to defend the wearer from any evil attacks, as known from the wands (cf. figs. 3.4.1 – 6).

3.5.6 Isis knot

British Mueseum: **# EA 20639**

Source: Andrews, 1994: front cover

Date: New Kingdom

Provenance: unknown

Size: 6.5 cm

Description: The red jasper *tyet* amulet was sacred to Isis. The *tyet* amulet is also referred to as the Isis knot. According to Pinch (1994: 116), the shape and colouring of the amulet had significant meaning. The shape has been interpreted as a sanitary towel or a girdle tie. The amulet was usually made in a red stone such as carnelian or jasper and this could have been indicative of its link to menstrual blood (Pinch, 1994: 116), however not all *tyet* amulets were made from a red coloured stone (Andrews, 1994: 64 fig. 64q.).

3.5.7 *Tyet* amulet

British Museum: **# EA 20646**

Source: Andrews, 1994: 45 (fig 49 e.)

Date: New Kingdom, c. 1500 – 1200 BCE

Provenance: unknown

Size: 7 cm (height)

Description: The red jasper *tyet* knot (Isis knot) amulet has inscriptions in the middle on a flattened part of the amulet. The inscriptions are for the priest of Ptah and Thoth Iryiry (Andrews, 1994: 45).

3.5.8 Bes amulet in context

Oriental Museum in Durham: **# unknown**

Source: Wilson, 1997: 120 (colour picture insert)

Date: New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, c. 1300 BCE

Provenance: From a tomb in Thebes

Size: Unknown

Description: The boxwood statuette of a servant girl with a Bes amulet hanging on her neck is an example of how the amulets were used as protection for the children against evil forces. The girl's side-lock of hair indicates her youth.

3.5.9 Bes tattoo

AKG/Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (leiden)

Source: McDermott, 2001: 95

Date: New Kingdom, c. 1300 BCE

Provenance: Unknown

Size: Unknown

Description: The blue faience bowl has illustrated on it a female musician with an image of Bes tattoed on her upper right thigh. The tattoo demonstrates the lengths women would go to, to protect themselves against malign forces. The tattoo serves not only as a decoration but as magical protection too.

3.5.10 A combination of deities

Petrie Museum: **# UC 10682**

Source: Petrie Museum Website: www.petrie.ucl.ac.uk/

Date: Late Period, c. 343 – 664 BCE

Provenance: Unknown, Egypt

Size: unknown

Description: The green glaze composition amulet is a combination of several gods that play important protective roles in women and children's health. The figure has a body of Horus – important for the children to identify with, the head of Bes – a popular household deity, and the tail of Tawaret – a vital source of protection for women giving birth. There are also two animal heads on either side of Bes' head.

3.5.11 Hollow Cylinder Amulet Case

British Museum: **# EA 24774**

Source: Andrews, 1994: 40

Date: 12th Dynasty

Provenance:

Size: 7.3 cm (height)

Description: The hollow gold cylinder with removable cap and granulation on the shaft was worn mainly by women and children. This kind of amulet would often have a small piece of papyrus with a spell of protection written on it for the woman or child; it would then be rolled up and placed into the hollow shaft[38]. The amulet was then worn around the neck for round-the-clock protection.

[38] In 1979 two silver scrolls with inscriptions etched on were found in Ketef Hinnom (near Jerusalem). The metal amulet cases contained spells written on papyrus, one of the pieces of silver from Israel contained a protective spell reminiscent of the Biblical blessing found in Numbers 6: 24 – 26 (Barkay, *et al*, 2003: 162 – 171). It seems the ancient Egyptians were not the only culture to make use of amulet cases to hold protective spells.

3.5.12 Cylinder Amulet Case

Location unknown

Source: Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 94

Date: 12th Dynasty, c. 1985 – 1795 BCE

Place: Tomb 211 at Haraga, Egypt

Description: This is a gold over copper core cylindrical amulet case. It is hollow and when one of the caps was scientifically removed it revealed three balls of copper wire and decayed organic material, perhaps papyrus. It is quite possible that on that papyrus there was written a protective spell for a woman or a child (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 94).

3.6 Iconography of birth and nursing

There is not much available visual evidence for childbirth and nursing as such, as it was never really given much attention to in reliefs and paintings. The male artists' lack of involvement in the actual childbearing process could account for this deficiency, or it could be that giving birth was not seen as an appropriate event to depict in paintings.[39]

A few depictions have been selected which show how ancient Egyptian women gave birth and what kind of nursing practices they had.

3.6.1 Cleopatra giving birth

Lost: recorded by the Napoleonic expedition (1798 – 1801 CE)

Source: Nunn, 1996: 193

Date: Ptolemaic period, c. 50 – 30 BCE

Provenance: Armant, in a birth house that is now destroyed.

Description: This is a mythical representation of Cleopatra giving birth. On either side of her are various goddesses in attendance. Above Cleopatra is the rebirth scarab.

3.6.2 Dendera scene

Cairo Museum: **# 40627**

Source: Nunn, 1996: 193

Date: Ptolemaic period, c. 300 – 30 BCE

Provenance: Dendera

[39] For childbirth as a dangerous and inappropriate event to depict, see: 3.9.4 & 3.9.10.

Description: This is a Ptolemaic birthing scene with two cow-headed Hathors in attendance. The lady in the middle is Red-djedet. She is squatting on a birthing stool, ready to give birth. The structure that is depicted around her is most probably the birthing pavilion.

3.6.3 Birth of Hatshepsut

Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri
Source: Keel, 1978: 251
Date: 1501 – 1480 BCE
Provenance: Temple of Hatshepsut
Description: The depiction of Hatshepsut's birth is filled with many deities. On the top register the queen (mother to Hatshepsut), has just received her new-born baby. A female helper is kneeling in front of the queen and she has either waiting to receive the baby or has just handed it over to the mother (Keel, 1978: 250).

According to Keel (1978: 250), the kneeling goddess immediately behind the queen 'embodies the mountains of the horizon from which the newborn sun has just arisen.' Nephthys and Isis are standing directly behind the kneeling goddess. Underneath the queen, in the second register, is the god Heh who, according to Keel (1978: 151), 'lifts up "length of days" and "life" to the newborn child.'

All the deities on the second register are depicted holding *ankhs* in their hands. On the bottom register the god Bes and Tawaret are depicted at the outer right. Meskhenet, the goddess of birth, is presiding over the whole process whilst sitting on a throne. She is wearing the headdress that has had varying translations.[40] Meskhenet is also holding an *ankh* in her left hand.

3.6.4 Painted limestone ostracon[41]

Location unknown
Source: Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 5 (fig. 4)
Date: New Kingdom, 1500 – 1000 BCE
Place: Deir el-Medina
Description: The depiction shows a pavilion with papyrus stalks forming the columns which are decorated with tendrils of a grapevine. In this confinement pavilion a servant girl and a mother with a new born baby are depicted. The servant girl is offering a mirror and a kohl tube to the mother suckling her child. The mother is practically naked wearing only a collar and a girdle and she is sitting on a stool. Her hair is sticking out on both sides of her head with a cone bound by a

[40] See 3.8 for the various interpretations.

[41] An ostracon is a broken pottery sherd or flake of limestone.

piece of cord on her crown. The servant girl is also naked except for a collar and girdle. Her hairstyle reflects that of the mother's hair.

Women who are depicted in the pavilions usually have their hair tied up on top of her head with bunches of hair cascading down the sides of her head (Robins, 1993: 83). The hair may have had a cone of scented fat on top which would melt slowly releasing a scent (Pinch, 1994:121). The cone was tied on with a piece of cord. According to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 7), it has been theorized that the 'hair of a woman in labour was initially tightly bound and later loosened in order, by sympathetic magic, to accelerate birth.'

3.6.5 Limestone ostracon

British Museum: **# EA 8506**

Source: Pinch, 1994: 127

Date: c.1300-1100 BCE

Provenance: Deir el-Medina

Description: On this limestone ostracon a woman is depicted suckling a child inside a birth pavilion. Below her is a Nubian servant bringing her a mirror and cosmetics to prepare the mother for a celebration of the successful birth.

3.6.6 Motif of a suckling mother

Location unknown

Source: Siebert, 1998: 283

Date: Eighteenth Dynasty, c. 1395 BCE

Provenance: West Thebes, Egypt

Size: Unknown

Description: The motif of a mother sitting under a tree and suckling her child is plastered and painted limestone. The child is held in place against the mother's body by a piece of broad cloth wrapped around her upper torso. The mother is helping herself to some fruit from the basket placed in front of her.

3.6.7 A mother breastfeeding her baby

Location unknown

Source: Siebert, 1998: 283

Date: Eighteenth Dynasty, c. 1395 BCE

Provenance: West Thebes, Egypt

Description: The painting is of a mother suckling her child whilst sitting under a tree. The child is wrapped tightly against the mother by a piece of cloth. The mother is also helping herself to fruit placed in a basket before her.

3.6.8 Woman with a child

Berlin, SMPK, Ägyptisches Museum: **# 17600**

Source: Wenzel, 1998:409

Date: Predynastic, c. 3000 BCE

Provenance: Unknown

Size: 6.5 cm (height)

Description: The ivory statuette of a woman holding a child is one of many examples found from Egypt. They were primarily found in temples. According to Wenzel (1998: 409), the statuettes were probably intended as an offering of gratitude to a god who had given an easy birth or to express the longing for a child.

3.6.9 Seated figure of a woman nursing a child

Berlin, SMPK, Ägyptisches Museum: **# 14078**

Source: Wenzel, 1998: 409

Date: Middle Kingdom, Twelfth Dynasty, ca. 1900 BCE

Provenance: Unknown

Size: 13 cm (height)

Description: The copper statuette is of a woman nursing a child. The woman is using her left knee and left hand to support the baby's head as it sucks on her breast, which is support by her right hand. There appear to be inscriptions on the mat that the woman is sitting on.

According to Wenzel (1998: 409), women nursing their children were seldom found in a profane context.

3.6.10 Painted limestone group statuette with a nursing mother

Location unknown

Source: Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 16 (fig. 7)

Date: Twelfth Dynasty

Provenance: el-Lisht

Size: unknown

Description: This group statuette shows a mother nursing her baby whilst her maid is dressing her hair. The mother is supporting the child with her left knee and left arm much like in fig. 3.6.7, and is holding her breast in the child's mouth with her right hand.

Perhaps the group statuette is a depiction of when the mother is in the confinement pavilion (cf. figs. 3.6.3 – 4). When the mother was in the pavilion for two weeks she was often tended by maids and made ready for when she could rejoin the family and society (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 11). The statuette could be depicting this preparation and purification period.

3.7 Vessels and Feeders

After the baby was born, the baby had to be nurtured and fed. Was breastfeeding the only way or were there other methods available? Were there bottles that could store a mother's milk? According to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 19), the vessels, which have been found dating from the Eighteenth to Nineteenth Dynasties, have a volume roughly equal to the amount that one breast produces at one feed.

According to de Villiers (interview), the volume of milk expressed from the female breast during one feed varies quite a lot[42], so the volumes of the various bottles can not be the only determinative when attempting to classifying the bottles.

These feeders and bottles will be discussed in an attempt to determine whether they were used for feeding or storing a baby's milk.

3.7.1 Anthropomorphic Vessel

Location unknown
Source: Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 3 (fig. 3)
Date: 15th dynasty, c. 1650 – 1550 BCE
Provenance: Unknown
Size: 8.5 cm (height)
Description: The calcite oil vessel is in the shape of a standing pregnant woman with grotesque features. The oil stored in the vessel was used during pregnancy to help prevent stretch marks and to ease the actual birth. In the 15th dynasty, this liquid was sometimes stored in special anthropomorphic containers that took the form of a naked, childbearing figure, either standing or squatting. She is often rubbing her abdomen with both hands and exhibits a distinct lack of genitalia, occasionally with a prominent tampon to prevent either miscarriage or to check the escape of blood at birth.

3.7.2 Vessel as a lactating woman

Louvre Museum: **# AF 6**
Source: Robins, 1993: 81
Date: 18th Dynasty, c. 1500 – 1100 BCE
Provenance: Unknown, Egypt
Size: Unknown

[42] According to Picciano (1981: 48 – 49), the average milk yield is 850ml per day although it varies between 500 – 900 ml per day depending on factors such as how well the moher is fed.

Description: The pottery vessel is in the form of a kneeling, bare-breasted woman. She is holding her breast with one hand and holding a jar in the other, possibly to catch whatever milk is expressed. This jar of milk can then be stored for later use.

3.7.3 Vessel of a pregnant woman

Cairo Museum: **# JE 34403**
Source: Wildung, 1984: 25
Date: 18th Dynasty, about 1400 BCE
Provenance: Abydos
Size: 21cm (height)
Description: This vessel is in the shape of a woman rubbing her stomach. Her nipples are drawn on and there is a curved object drawn on her stomach that looks as if it is magical wand.

3.7.4 Feminoform vessel

Location Unknown
Source: Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 20 (fig. 8)
Date: Eighteenth Dynasty, 1500 1100 BCE
Provenance: Unknown
Size: 11 cm (height)
Description: The painted pottery vessel is in the shape of a woman sitting down. On her lap she is holding a child that is not breastfeeding but is instead sitting with its back to the chest area. According to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 20), it is possible that the woman is wearing a moon amulet – a symbol of Thoth (Wilkinson, 2003: 215 – 217).

On most of the vessels a woman is depicted holding a child, however, the woman is never represented breastfeeding. The child may reach for the breast whilst the woman may be holding and squeezing it, but that is as close to breastfeeding as the vessel depictions get (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 19).

3.7.5 Bes Vase

Iziko Museum of Cape Town: **# 2587**
Source: Boshoff & Cornelius, 2002:141
Date: unknown
Provenance: Presumably from Kefar Tarkhan
Size: 10.6 x 6.9 cm
Description: The slightly globular-shaped jar has a flared neck has two eyes, a nose or possibly a mouth and two ears on either side of the jar. It has been classified as a Bes jar (Boshoff & Cornelius, 2002: 136). As this jar is in the form of the protective deity Bes, it might have been

used to store milk. The fact that it is in the shape of Bes would have served as a form of protection and perhaps giving that protection on to the baby that drinks the milk.

3.8 Birth Bricks

One of the ways that a woman could give birth was to squat on bricks. These bricks, also known as birth bricks (cf. fig. 3.8.2), were believed to have certain magical powers that would protect the mother in labour, as well as the unborn baby (Tyldesley, 1994: 259).

The brick method incorporated two to four bricks which were used to raise a woman up off the ground so that the helpers or midwives could access the baby more easily (Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 129). The woman would place her feet on the bricks and squat whilst being supported by helpers (cf. fig. 3.6.2).

The bricks used during childbirth acquired certain magical powers, and they became personified with the goddess of birth Meskhenet (cf. fig. 3.1.2). The goddess was sometimes depicted in the form of a brick or a tile with a woman's head (fig. 3.8.1) although she was mostly depicted as a woman wearing a headdress with two loops on top of a vertical stroke (Nunn, 1996: 102 & Tyldesley, 1994: 259). Meskhenet was also illustrated as a falcon with a tall split object on her head[43] (Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 130).

Meskhenet's appearance also took on four other forms, each of which corresponded to one of the four bricks of birth. Each of these forms was related to another goddess. Meskhenet-the-Great was associated with Tefnut, Meskhenet-the-Excellent with Nephthys, Meskhenet-the-Grand with Nut, and Meskhenet-the-Beautiful with Isis (Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 131). According to Roth and Roehrig (2002: 131), these four goddesses represented the female component of the Heliopolitan ennead and therefore were not only related to childbirth, but also to the creation of the world.

Roth and Roehrig (2002: 129) suggest that the mortuary bricks found in a mortuary context have connections with birth bricks. As there are four birth bricks with prominent roles in the process of childbirth, it seems likely that the four magical bricks (fig. 3.8.3) found in mortuary

[43] The headdress has caused much debate as to what it represents. Gardener's sign list classifies the sign (F45) as a cow's uterus but according to Tyldesley (1994: 293), it has also been suggested that the stroke is a long palm shoot with curved tips. The *psš-kf* is suggested by Roth and Roehrig (2002: 135), to be what the headdress on Meskhenet represents. Roth (1992: 113-47) proposed the theory that the *psš-kf* was a special flint knife used to cut the umbilical cord.

contexts had possible metaphorical ties to birth, perhaps even playing a possible role in rebirth into the afterlife. Roth and Roehrig (2002: 129), hypothesize that "the magical bricks used in mortuary contexts represent the four bricks of birth".[44]

There is evidence from the 6th Dynasty of four bricks being used in childbirth from the north wall of room III of the tomb chapel of Watetkhethor in Saqqara. The scene depicts dancers dancing to a song that, according to Roth and Roehrig (2002: 131), clearly refers to childbirth. The phrase *jj (j)fd*, "O four,' determined by four rectangles forms part of the song. Roth and Roehrig (2002: 131) believe the phrase to be a reference to the four personified birth bricks.

In the Westcar Papyrus the story of Reddjedet's birth to her divine sons mentions that the body is placed 'in cloth [on a couch of] brick' (see 3.12.2.1 a.). The translation of the phrase *jfd m dbt* has caused much debate[45] in academic circles but the most plausible theory, according to Roth and Roehrig (2002: 132), is that *jfd* means four which makes the phrase "four bricks," thereby making the phrase a reference to the four birth bricks.

After the birth of the baby it was believed that the god Thoth would use the birth bricks as tablets to write down the future of the newborn baby (Tylsdesley, 1994: 259).

The examples of 'magical' bricks that follow include a hieroglyphic depiction of the goddess, Meskhenet, as well as Meskhenet in the form of a birth brick.

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[44] The birth bricks' magical, protective function during childbirth may have been the inspiration for the placement of 'magical bricks' in New Kingdom tombs (see: Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 133).

[45] The phrase has been translated as 'a cushion on bricks' (Simpson, 1973: 28), 'a pillow of cloth' (Lichtheim, 1973: 220), whilst, according to Roth and Roehrig (2002: 132), it has also been suggested that the phrase referred to a birth stool made of birth bricks and clothe. Another academic, on the other hand, argued that the bricks the mother used during birth could not have been the same bricks the baby was placed on in the Westcar account as Reddjedet had to give birth to two more babies before the bricks could be taken away (Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 132). It has been argued that the bricks were an inappropriate place to put a newborn baby. Roth and Roehrig (2002: 132), however, argue that the baby's first contact with the bricks made of mud from the Nile River may have had symbolic meaning that was far more important to the ancient Egyptians than the immediate comfort of the baby.
According to Roth and Roehrig (2002: 132), one academic has concluded that the phrase referred to a brick-shaped pillow whilst they (Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 132) have maintained that the phrase did not explicitly translate to that.

3.8.1 Meskhenet as a personified brick in hieroglyphics

Egyptian Museum: **#unknown**

Source: Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 130 (fig. 4 a.)

Date: c. 1250 BCE

Provenance: unknown

Description: The hieroglyphic depiction of Meskhenet as a personified brick comes from the Book of the Dead Chapter 125, from a late Book of the Dead in the Egyptian Museum, Turin. The brick part of Meskhenet's body is rectangular in shape. The head of a woman is on the right side of the brick.

3.8.2 "Magical" birth brick with image

University of Pennsylvania Museum

Source: University of Pennsylvania Website

http://www.museum.upenn.edu/new/research/Exp_Rese_Disc/AfricaEgypt/birthbrick/home.shtml

Date: c. 2302 BCE

Provenance: Abydos, Egypt

Size: 35.56 cm x 17.78 cm

Description: The ancient brick still preserves colourful painted scenes and figures: clearly visible is a mother holding her newborn baby, as well as magical images of gods whose role was to protect and aid the mother and baby at the time of birth. The damage to the top of the brick is as a result of the woman's feet it supported in childbirth for a long period of time and during multiple deliveries.

The brick belonged to a noblewoman and princess named Renseneb. The birth brick was unearthed in an area clearly identified as a female residential section of the house. Numerous inscribed clay seal impressions found in this area have the name of the "noblewoman and king's daughter Renseneb."

3.8.3 Magical bricks for the afterlife

Location unknown

Source: Taylor, 2001: 208

Date: 19th Dynasty, ca. 1250 BCE

Provenance: Thebes, Egypt

Size (from left to right): 18 cm, 9.5 cm, 20.5 cm, 9.5 cm (height)

Description: The set of magic bricks are from the tomb of the chantress of Amun Henutmehyt. They are made of unbaked mud and each one forms the base for its own amuletic figure.

The amulets are, from left to right: a wooden mummiform figure, a blue-glazed faience *djed* pillar, a wooden reed, and mud figure of the jackal-god Anubis (Taylor, 2001: 208).

There are inscriptions on the bricks that state their purposes and positions within the tomb (Taylor, 2001: 208).

3.9 Deir el-Medina[46]

The front rooms of houses excavated at Deir el-Medina had whitewashed walls with female-orientated decorations. The paintings depicted scenes of nursing[47] or grooming[48], as well as deities concerned with various aspects of women's lives (Meskell, 2002: 114).

In the worker's village at Amarna two wall paintings were found in the front rooms of the houses. In Main Street house three there was a painting depicting dancing Bes figures with the goddess Tawaret holding a protective symbol at the right end of the painting (Meskell, 2002: 115 – 6). The other wall painting was found badly damaged in Long Wall Street house ten and depicts three women and two girls. According to Meskell (2002: 116), one of the women appears to be dancing.

3.10 Hieroglyphs related to women and children

Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs are packed full of information about how the ancient Egyptians viewed the world around them. Hieroglyphs are full of observations and emotions (McDermott, 2001: 6).

This invaluable source of information also provides a glimpse into the lives of Egyptian women and children. Their depictions as hieroglyphs can possibly even provide some insight into childbirth.

Of course, the translation of the hieroglyphs, as with most ancient languages, is subject to interpretation. How the translator interprets a hieroglyph may differ to another's opinion and can cause much confusion.[49]

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[46] There are no illustrations available for the discussion of the Deit el-Medina houses with front rooms.

[47] In SE1 there was a wall painting depicting a woman breast-feeding (Meskell, 2002: 114 – 5).

[48] In C7 there was a scene of a female grooming with her attendant (Meskell, 2002: 115).

[49] Cf. 3.8 The debate about the translation of the phrase *jfd m dbt.*

However, despite whatever disagreements that may exist surrounding various hieroglyphic translations, a brief overview of selected hieroglyphs will be done to establish the significance they had, if any, as a source of information on women and children.

The numbers are as in Gardiner (1950).

3.10.1 A17/17*


A17 depicts a child sitting on a person's lap, although that person is suggested at simply by the position of the child's legs. The child is sitting with its hand to its mouth. This image is reflected in many other iconographical depictions of children (cf. figs. 3.1.7 – 3.1.8).

A17* is an adaptation of A17 and was used as a replacement of A17. the hieroglyph depicts a child sitting with its arms hanging down at his sides.

3.10.2 A18

The glyph of a child with the crown of Lower Egypt on his head has been translated as 'child-king.' The child is also sucking his thumb (cf. 3.9.1) which was a sign of youth in ancient Egyptian art. The child is depicted sitting on someone's lap.

3.10.3 B2

The pregnant woman hieroglyph depicts a woman sitting on her legs, which are folded beneath her. She also has a small protrusion of the stomach indicating her pregnancy.

The bow that appears to be in her hair may be an indication of the different hairstyle a woman going into labour would wear (cf. fig. 3.6.3).

The hieroglyph is used in words such as 'conceive' and 'be pregnant.'

3.10.4 B3

The Hieroglyph depicts a woman giving birth. A little head and two arms are shown to be coming out from her under her folded legs. She is most probably squatting on the ground in the hieroglyph (cf. 3.8, fig. 3.6.2).

3.10.5 B4[50]

B4 is a combination of two other hieroglyphs, B3 and F31.[51] The woman is depicted squatting with part of the three foxes' tails coming out from underneath her.

3.10.6 A tile depicting birth scene[52]

British Museum: # EA 61062

Source: The British Museum Website: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/

Date: Graeco-Roman Period, 332 BCE - CE

Provenance: unknown, Egypt

Size: 18 cm (length), 13.6 cm (width), 4 cm (thickness)

Description: The piece of stone has a depiction of the hieroglyph B4 – a woman giving birth. These types of objects are usually sculptor's test pieces, although the British Museum mentions that many of these objects have been found in temples and therefore, may have a more significant meaning.

3.10.7 B5

B5 depicts a woman suckling her child. She is sitting on the ground with her arms supporting the child on her lap as it presumably breastfeeds.

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[50] B4 is often used as a substitute for A3 (sitting) (Gardiner, 1950: 448).

[51] F31 is three foxes' skins tied together (Gardiner, 1950: 465).

[52] Cf. fig. 3.10.5

3.10.8 B6

This hieroglyph is similar to B5 except, instead of the woman being on the ground, she is sitting on a chair breastfeeding her child. Her arms support the child as is breastfeeds.

3.10.9 D27/27*

The hieroglyph of a human female breast is often used in words such as suckle. D27* is a more common shape of the breast in depictions. Figure 3.9.9 depicts the human breast as a *situla.*

3.10.10 A *situla*

Greco-Roman Museum, Alexandria: # 25783

Source: Wilkinson, 1992: 47 (fig. 3)

Date: Greco-Roman Period

Provenance: Ras el-Soda

Description: The detail of a statue from Ras el-Soda is of a *situla* held by Isis. Iconographically the breast symbolised fertility (Wilkinson, 1992: 47). The goddess Tawaret was depicted with large, sagging human breasts (cf. fig. 3.1.3).

Near the end of the first millennium BCE, the *situla*[53] took on the form of the breast. It is interesting to note that the *situla* looks remarkably similar to a modern baby's dummy.

3.10.11 Z5

The diagonal stroke[54] was sometimes used as a substitute for human figures considered magically dangerous (Gardiner, 1950: 537). According to Brunner (1979: 11), 'give birth to' was considered to dangerous a hieroglyphic phrase to depict using B3 and so B3 was substituted with an oblique stroke.

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[53] An Egyptian vessel used in specific religious contexts. The *situla* was used to hold water or milk to be used in offerings (Wilkinson, 1992: 47).

[54] As is made in hieratic (Gardiner, 1950: 537).

The hieroglyph Z5 could be used as an indication as to why there were so few visual sources of women giving birth. If it were considered dangerous to illustrate the process of childbirth, then it would explain the lack of iconography. But the question is why was it considered a dangerous event to depict?

Perhaps the mother and unborn baby's vulnerability at this particular stage, the physical danger of childbirth and the unknown outcome not always being a positive one may have led to depictions being dangerous.

According to Tyldesley (1994: 257), the delivery process 'seemed to bring the participants, indeed, the whole household, into contact with forces of creation far outside human control.' Women in labour would often turn to magic ritual to ward off any evil deities that might interfere with the lives of either the mother or the baby (Tyldesley, 1994: 257).

With this in mind, perhaps depicting the birth of a child would have been considered to be tempting 'fate', enticing malign forces to meddle in the process. Either that or the depictions were considered dangerous because it illustrated a perilous procedure that was outside of the control of the ancient Egyptian.

B) Textual Sources

Textual sources provide invaluable information about the medical and magical practices of the ancient Egyptians. Texts are a means to gaining insight as to how the Egyptians put their beliefs and theories into practice.

For the purpose of the present chapter, the textual sources will be divided into two main categories; 1) Medical Texts and 2) Magical spells. Under each category will follow a brief introduction and then a selection of texts will be discussed with regards to its importance to the health of ancient Egyptian women and children.

3.11 Medical Texts

The medical texts are important to consider because they give insight as to how the ancient Egyptians treated their medical ailments. The treatments were sometimes used together with magical spell to ensure that the patient would be cured, whether by medicine or by the gods.

The medical texts that will be analysed further on in the chapter are all attained from the medical papyri.

3.11.1 Medical Papyri

One of the most important sources of information regarding women and children's health in ancient Egypt is the medical papyri (see Table 3.1). Although most of the papyri list treatments for general ailments, there are two which focus more on gynaecology (Kahun and Carlsberg VIII papyri). A collection known as the "Ramesseum papyri" focuses on paediatrics as well as gynaecology (Nunn, 1996: 25).

The majority of the papyri were sold to various people with little documented information as to the context within which they were found in excavations. For this reason, it is not possible to link any of the papyri with a known doctor or centre of medicine (Nunn, 1996: 24).

Table 1: The most important medical papyri (Nunn, 1996: 25).

TITLE	LOCATION	APPROXIMATE DATE OF COPY	CONTENTS
Edwin Smith	New York	1550 BCE	Surgical, mainly trauma
Ebers	Leipzig	1500 BCE	General, mainly medical
Kahun (gynaecology)	British Museum	1820 BCE	gynaecological
Hearst	California	1450 BCE	general medical
Chester Beatty VI	British Museum	1200 BCE	rectal diseases
Berlin	Berlin	1200 BCE	general medical
London	British Museum	1300 BCE	mainly magical
Carslberg VIII	Copenhagen	1300 BCE	gynaecological
Ramesseum III, IV, V	Oxford	1700 BCE	gynaecological, opthalmic and paediatric
London & Leiden	British Museum and Leiden	250 CE	general medical and magical
Crocodilopolis	Vienna	150 CE	general
Brooklyn snake	Brooklyn	300 BCE	snake bite

3.11.1.1 The Kahun gynaecological papyrus

The gynaecological treatise of the Kahun papyri consists of three pages with respectively twenty-nine, thirty and twenty-eight lines. It is severely fragmented and has many lacunae (Nunn, 1996: 34).

The gynaecological text can be divided into thirty-four paragraphs, of which the first seventeen have a similar format. They start with the words 'Instructions for a woman suffering from' and are followed by a short account of the symptoms. Often the symptoms are related to the reproductive organs. There are no suggestions following on how to examine the patient, although paragraph two suggests that certain questions should be asked. Afterwards, the diagnosis is declared, starting with the words 'You shall then say concerning her' (Nunn, 1996: 34).

After diagnosis, the phrase 'You shall then make for her', leads into the treatment for the particular ailment (Nunn, 1996: 34).

The Kahun papyrus contains treatments for gynaecological ailments ranging from preventing conception to pregnancy testing, from toothache during pregnancy to bladder problems (Nunn, 1996: 35).

3.11.1.2 Carlsberg VIII Papyrus

The Carlsberg VIII papyrus has been dated to around the Nineteenth or Twentieth Dynasty but according to Nunn (1996: 39), the style indicates an original copy from the Twelfth Dynasty.

The surviving parts of the papyrus is concerned mainly with pregnancy testing, determining the sex of the unborn child and fertility testing (Nunn, 1996: 39).

3.11.1.3 Ramesseum Papyri III, IV and V

The seventeen papyri were found in a tomb of an unknown owner, although it has been suggested by Gardiner (1955) that the other goods found in the tomb indicate that possibly a magician and medical practitioner was the owner (Nunn, 1996: 39).

Ramesseum III consists of thirty-one paragraphs in section A and thirty-four paragraphs in section B. They cover a wide variety of medicine and include sections on gynaecology and diseases of children (Nunn, 1996: 39).

Ramesseum IV has a total of forty-five paragraphs that are divided into five sections. Diseases of women and children are included in this papyrus but there is no indication of obstetric practice as the papyrus is mainly magical (Nunn, 1996: 40).

Ramesseum V contains more medical treatments than magical and the content is mainly about the Egyptian concept of the *metu* (cf. note 40) (Nunn, 1996: 40).

3.11.2 Medical Treatments related to gynaecology, obstetrics and paediatrics

3.11.2.1 Menstruation

There is little surviving documentation mentioning menstruation. There are possible references made to sanitary towels in New Kingdom laundry lists (Hall, 1986: 55), as well as a recently disputed interpretation of a passage in the Satire of Trades where a laundryman 'cleans the clothes of a woman in menstruation.'

Menstruation was sometimes referred to in passages a 'purification.' In the Demotic story of Setne Khaemwaset, the princess Ahwere says: 'when my time of purification came I made no more purification' (Lichtheim, 1980: 128). According to Robins (1993: 78), later on in the text it becomes clear that Ahwere is pregnant and therefore the ceasing of her 'purification' most probably meant the ceasing of her period[55] – a sign of conception.

According to Pinch (1994: 76), women's menstruating blood was considered impure and unclean. This is why when a woman speaks of her cleansing or 'time of purification' it is referring to her menstruation.

The following treatment is for a woman suffering from amenorrhoea, a medical condition where the woman's menstruation ceases for various reasons (Worthington-Roberts, 1993: 39-41):

> **Ebers 833: A case of amenorrhoea**
> "If you examine a woman who has spent many years without her menstruation (*hesmen*) coming. She spits out something like *hebeb*. Her belly is like that which is on fire. It

[55] Robins (1993: 78) maintains that a woman's menstruation in ancient Egypt was a purificatory process.

ceases when she has vomited. Then you shall say concerning it/her: It is a raising up (*akhet*) of blood in her uterus."
(as quoted by Nunn, 1996: 196).

Some of the symptoms of amenorrhoea are abdominal pains, nausea, headaches, and general body pains (Worthington-Roberts, 1993: 39-41). In Ebers 833, the woman seems to be suffering from abdominal pain ('...belly is like that which is on fire'), and nausea ('...she has vomited'), which are symptoms of amenorrhoea.

3.11.2.2 Fertility

To the ancient Egyptians the issue of fertility was an important one. Considering one of the main reasons for marrying was for procreation, ensuring that a woman was able to conceive would have resulted in tests to determine this very fact (Watterson, 1991: 66). What follows is an example of such a test, and even though at first glance it does not seem to have any 'real' medical basis, the test was perhaps based partially on the ancient Egyptians' belief in the theory of *metu* 'vessels'.[56]

Hippocratic aphorism v, 59: The onion test

"[To determine] who will [bear children] and who will not [bear children], you should then cause the bulb of an onion to spend the night in her flesh (*iuf*)[57] until dawn. If the odour appears in her mouth, she will bear [children]. If [it does not], she will never [bear children]."
(Nunn, 1996: 192)[58].

Whilst the test can be classified as a pregnancy test as well (Nunn, 1996: 34, 192), it has been used here as an example of fertility testing because of the declaration at the end of the passage which says that if the onion odour is not apparent on her breath then 'she will never bear children.' The 'never' indicates a finality, the woman who fails this test shall not bear children for her husband – an indication of her fertility.

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[56] *Metu* has no direct English equivalent. It has many meanings including blood vessels, various ducts as well as tendons and muscles. According to Nunn (1996: 44), it may also have meant nerves but it is not known whether ancient Egytians had any real concept of or idea formulated for the nervous system. *Metu* could carry air, mucus, urine, semen, disease-bearing entities as well as benign and malign spirits (see: Nunn, 1996: 44-49). Perhaps the onion smell being transported by the *metu* up into the mouth was a sign of fertility or pregnancy.

[57] The word *iuf* literally means flesh but it is often used to mean vagina.

[58] The reconstructions are partly taken from Kahun 28.

3.11.2.3 Contraception

Whilst the focus of a married couple may have been to have children, this did not mean that they did not employ techniques to prevent a mass amount of children being born to them (Watterson, 1991: 88-89). The following prescription consists of a somewhat bizarre concoction of ingredients but is it possible that there within lies a medical truth?

a) Ebers 783: To cease conceiving

> "Beginning of the prescription prepared for women/wives (*hemut*)[59] to allow a woman (*set*) to cease conceiving (*iur*) for one year, two years or three years: *qaa* part of acacia, carob, dates; grind with one henu of honey, lint is moistened with it and placed in her flesh (*iuf*)."
> (Nunn, 1996: 196).

The acacia used in the prescription contains gum arabic that, according to Robins (1993: 80) has a chemical effect on sperm thereby retarding conception. According to Watterson (1991: 89), lactic acid is present in the Ebers 783 formula. What is interesting about lactic acid is that it is the main constituent in jellies that are still presently used as spermicides in the United Kingdom and the United States (Watterson, 1991: 89 & Feucht, 2001:192). The lactic acid retards the sperm.

The honey in the prescription may also have been spermicidal because of its thick consistency (Nunn, 1996: 196). This is similar to modern spermicides that provide a mechanical barrier which is almost impenatrable, and the sperm that manage to swim through the barrier are immobilised or killed on contact by a chemical[60] in the spermicide (Mishell, 1991: 794).

One of the natural ways in preventing pregnancy was by breastfeeding the baby for a few years (Robins, 1993: 88-89). From the *Instruction of Anii* it can be read that a mother suckled her baby for up to three years:

b) *Instruction of Anii:*

> "Double the food your mother gave you, support her as she supported you; she had a heavy load in you, but she did not abandon you. When you were born after your months, she was yet yoked [to you], her breast in your mouth for three years. As you grew and your excrement disgusted, she was not disgusted, saying 'What shall I do?'

---

[59] *Hemet*, singular of *hemut*, is a homophone meaning both woman and uterus; however, the determinitives are different, and the meaning is seldom in doubt (Nunn, 1996: 196).

[60] The chemical is a surfactant, usually nonoxynol 9 (Sauer, 1991: 794).

> When she sent you to school and you were taught to write, she kept watch over you daily, with bread and beer in her house."
> (Robins, 1993: 106).

According to Robins (1993: 80), this would decrease a woman's chances of becoming pregnant. This may have been what the ancient Egyptians believe but it was and still is not the most reliable form of contraceptive (Worthington-Roberts, 1993: 43).

In the Kahun, Ebers, Berlin, Carlsberg and Ramesseum Papyri are prescriptions for contraceptive measures. One of the most interesting ones comes from the Kahun Papyrus, which describes how crocodile or camel dung was cut up in sour milk (Watterson, 1991: 88 – 89 & Feucht, 1990: 327 –328). This method is similar to a sponge soaked in vinegar, a contraceptive device that has been used until recently in the Western world; and, according to Watterson (1991: 88-89), is still used by many *fellahin* today.

In the Berlin Papyrus a recipe is given that hints at being a type of 'morning after' pill. It prescribes fumigation of the vagina with a substance called *mimi.* A mixture of fat, *m33tt*-herb and sweet ale boiled together had to be swallowed by the woman on four consecutive mornings in order 'to get rid of it' (Watterson, 1991: 89).

3.11.2.4 Cancer of the uterus

Cancer of the uterus would have played a major role in fertiility, or at least being able to have more children if children had already been born to the family. Evidence for cancer is very unclear and uncertain in medical papyri – it is all based on the translation and interpretation that is followed.

a) Ebers 813: Eating of the uterus

> "Another [remedy] for one in whom there is eating (*wenemet*) of the uterus (*hemet*), and ulcers appear in her vulva. Fresh dates, 1; *hekunu*, 1; stone from the shore, broken with water, left overnight in the dew and poured into her vagina."
> (Nunn, 1996: 81).

According to Nunn (1996: 81), one academic (Ebbel, 1937) believes that 'eating' here can mean cancer, but others such as Ghaliounghui (1987) are more reserved about equating the two meanings. Nunn (1996), however, is intrigued by the very 'graphic description' which does carry across the image of advanced malignancy. According to de Villiers (2005), the description fits that of an ulcer or cancer.

3.11.2.5 Pregnancy

Once fertility had been established, the next question that had to be answered was whether the woman was pregnant or not. It was important to determine from early on whether a woman was pregnant because then she could employ means of protecting and guarding herself and her unborn baby from miscarriage.

a) Berlin: Pregnancy test

> "To ascertain whether or not a woman will have a child: the herb *bededu-ka*, powdered and soaked in the milk of a woman who has borne a son. Let the patient eat it . . . if she vomits it, she will bear a child, if she has flatulence, she will not bear."
> (Watterson, 1991: 85).

Test (a) above was perhaps based on observation of pregnant women. Often a woman will throw up when she is in her early stages of pregnancy (de Villiers, 2005). A woman eating or drinking anything that might make her nauseous would result in vomiting. However, the milk was probably chosen as the determining substance because of the symbolism behind it. The milk of a mother had certain medical and magical properties (Ritner, 2001:328)

b) Berlin 199[61]: The emmer and barley test

> "Another [test] to see [if] a woman will bear a child or [if] she will not bear a child. Emmer (*bedet*) and barley (*it*), the lady should moisten with her urine every day, like dates and like sand in two bags. If they all grow, she will bear a child. If the barley grows, it means a male. If the emmer grows, it means a female. If they do not grow, she will not bear a child."
> (Nunn, 1996: 191-192).

In test (b), grain may have been used to test pregnancy because the ancient Egyptians associated grain with life, and they may have believed that a pregnant woman would have a certain connection with the grain. This pregnancy test has been analysed and tested by Ghaliounghui, Khalil and Ammar (1963). The test showed no growth of neither barley nor emmer seed when moistened with non-pregnant women and men's urine. However, 'with forty specimens from pregnant women there was growth of one or both species in twenty-eight cases' (Nunn, 1996: 192). Despite these positive results, there were twelve cases of pregnant women who failed the pregnancy test. Of the cases where only one seed

[61] A damaged parallel in Carlsberg III (1, 6-x+3).

germinated, predicting the sex of the baby through the ancient Egyptian method proved correct in seven cases and incorrect in sixteen (Nunn, 1996: 192).

c) Berlin 193: 'To recognise who will be pregnant and who will not be pregnant.'[62]

"She lies down [while] you smear her breast and two arms and her two shoulders with new oil. You rise early in the morning to examine her.

[If[you find her blood vessels (*metu*) fresh and good, none being collapsed, bearing children will be happy.

[If] you find them collapsed like the skin of her limbs, this means *bened*[63].

If you find them green and dark at the time of investigating them, she will bear children late."

(Nunn, 1996: 192).

An early sign of pregnancy is the appearance dilated or enlarged veins over the breasts (Nunn, 1996: 192). Test (c) most likely came about from keen observation, much like the test to see if a woman vomits up her drink in test (a).

3.11.2.6. Obstetrics

The medical papyri do not give any clues as to the normal conduct of labour. There are only a few depictions (cf. 3.6.1 – 3.6.3) and an account in the Westcar papyrus (cf. 3.10.2.1 a) (Nunn, 1996: 192).

According to Nunn (1996: 194), there are a few remedies in the Ebers papyrus (800 – 7) as well as an incantation in the Ramesseum IV (c, 28 – 30) that can be used to "release a child from the belly of a woman."

3.11.2.7. Post-natal complications

a) Ebers 823: Contracting the uterus

"Another [remedy] to contract (*saq*) the uterus (*hemet*): *kheper-wer*-plant[64], 1; honey, 1; water of carob (*djaret*), 1; milk, 1; strain and place in the vagina (*iuf*)."

(Nunn, 1996: 194).

The treatment prescribed in Ebers 823 is a remedy literally meaning 'to pull together' or contract the uterus. According to Nunn (1996: 194), it is not really clear whether the remedy was used to

[62] The title is missing in Berlin 193, so it is taken from the parallel passage Kahun 26 (Nunn, 1996: 192).

[63] The meaning of *bened* is still unknown (Nunn, 1996: 192).

[64] The *kheper-wer*-plant is still unidentified.

help speed up the birth, to push out the placenta or to help the uterus return to its pre-pregnancy size after delivering the baby.

b) Kahun 4: A birth injury

> "Instructions for a lady [suffering] in her pubic region, her vagina and the region (*djadjat*) of her vagina which is between her buttocks. You shall say concerning her/it: Very swollen due to giving birth. You should then prepare for her/it: new oil, 1 *henu* (450ml), to be soaked into her vagina."
> (Nunn, 1996: 194).

The medical condition the woman in Kahun 4 would have been suffering from seems to correlate with a birth injury to the perineum [65] (Nunn, 1996: 194).

c) Kahun 34: Urinary problems

> [Remedy for] a woman whose urine is in an irksome (*qesen*) place (*set*). If [her] urine comes ... she is aware of it, will be likewise forever.
> (Nunn, 1996: 197).

The problem with deciphering and diagnosing Kahun 34's urinary problem lies in its translation. According to Nunn (1996: 197), The word set most commonly means 'place' or location', however the *Grundiss* translates the phrase as ' ... a woman, the urine is in a bad condition'. Whilst that translation is acceptable and implies a diagnosis of cystitis, Nunn (1996) believes that set should be assigned its usual meaning of 'location' and therefore the diagnosis suggests more a fistula[66] between the bladder and vagina. There have been remains found with this very medical condition.[67] A fistula is often a result of an under-developed body.

3.11.2.8 Breastfeeding

According to Nunn (1996: 197), there are a few remedies in the Ebers Papyrus that are for various breast ailments. The one treatment recommends that the thighs, stomach and breasts be rubbed with blood from a woman who has started menstruating (Nunn, 1996: 197).

There are treatments for "the breast if it is diseased" that, according to Nunn (1996: 197), suggest possible breast cancer.

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[65] The perineum is a diamond shaped space which lies below the pelvic floor (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 9).

[66] "A fistula is an abnormal communication between two or more organs" (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 423).

[67] See: Harer, W B. 1993 & Derry, D E. 1935.

3.12 Magical Spells

The magical spells to be used as examples here come from various sources, including the medico-magical papyri mentioned in Table 3.1. As was previously mentioned the magical spells often ran alongside the medical treatments. For the ancient Egyptians there were no distinctions between magic and medicine, they believed both worked together to help and cure the sick (Pinch, 1994: 133-134).

3.12.1 The Metternich Stela

Standing 85 centimetres high, the Metternich Stela displays a surface completely covered with magical spells pertaining to the protection against dangerous animals (Borghouts, 2001: 1781). The danger ranges from the chaos demon Apophis to scorpions and snakes[68]. This *cippus* of Horus is the basis for protective spells to be discussed later.

3.12.2 Magical spells related to gynaecology, obstetrics and paediatrics

3.12.2.1 Obstetrics

Giving birth was a dangerous part of a young woman's life, especially as many women were still very young themselves when they gave birth, some as young as twelve or fourteen years old (Watterson, 1991: 84). Their young age often results in under-developed body parts, and their hips and such forth are not wide enough to give birth without severely damaging their bodies (cf. 3.11.2.7 c).

The ancient Egyptians would often equate the mother giving birth with Isis giving birth, in order to arouse some kind of protection from the gods for the mother-to-be and the infant (Pinch, 1994: 18, 80).

a) Westcar papyrus: The divine birth

"Then these deities set forth, having transformed themselves into female musicians. Khnum with them as their porter. [Ra-user said:] 'My ladies! Behold, it is the lady who is sick and her parturition is painful.' Then they said: 'Allow us to see her. Behold, we know how to bring her to birth.' Then he said to them: 'Proceed.' Then they set forth and entered into the presence of Red -djedet. Then they sealed the room[69] with her [and them] in it. Isis placed herself in front of her, Nephthys behind her and Heqet hastened the birth. Then said Isis: 'Be not strong (*user*) in her womb in this your name as a

[68] For a complete discription see 3.3.1

[69] A birthing pavilion or house.

> powerful man (*user)* indeed.' The child rushed forth into her arms, as a child of one cubit, his bones strong, his limbs covered in gold, his headdress of real lapis lazuli. Then they washed him and his umbilical cord (*khepa*) was cut (*shad*). He was placed in cloth on [a couch of] brick. Then Meskhenet presented [herself] to him . . . The Red-djedet purifies [herself] with a purification of fourteen days."
> (Nunn, 1996: 193-194).

The purpose of this account of the 'divine birth' was to establish the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty as rulers with divine and ordained authority. Ra-user and his wife, Red-djedet, were the biological parents, although Ra was credited with being the father for the sake of divinty (Nunn, 1996: 192).

In the account reference is made to the birthing or confinement pavilion which is either in a separate part of the house or is an outside house all together (cf. figs. 3.6.4 – 3.6.5) (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 4).

The process of washing the baby and cutting the umbilical cord resembles that of modern times, as well as wrapping the baby up in cloth and placing him on a bed (of bricks). There is no mention of whether the purification process of fourteen days had to be done before even touching the baby itself, but considering the baby had to be fed it is unlikely.

b) Leiden I 348: A spell for the vulva

> "I am Horus. I came down from the desert being thirsty, on a shout. I found somebody calling who stood weeping. His wife was nearing her time. I made the calling one stop his weeping. The wife of the man had cried for a statuette (*šsp*) of a dwarf of clay[70]: "come, let somebody betake himself to Hathor, the lady of Dendera. Let her amulet (*wḏ3*) of health[71] be fetched for you, that she may cause the one in childbirth to give birth!"
> This spell is to be said [...] times [...] over leaves of [...], placed on the head of the woman who is suffering from it."
> (Borghouts, 1978: 39).

The spell to speed up the birth process has many variations. It seems as if that was one of the main issues to be contended with when giving birth – making the process as fast and as painless as possible.

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[70] The god Bes, protector of children.

[71] Probably a hand-like amulet (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

c) Leiden [30] vs. 12, 2-6: Helping the birth process

"Oh good dwarf[72], come, on account of the one who sent for you – for that is Prē', the one who is standing while Thoth is sitting, his[73] feet on the ground, <in> the embrace of Nun,[74] <his> hand<s> on the ceiling (*s3w.t*)![75] Come down, placenta[76], come down, placenta, come down! I am Horus, the conjurer! And the one who is giving birth has (already) become better than she was, as if she were delivered. Oh *Spr.tw-n=s*, wife of Horus, Nekhbet the Nubian one (and) the Eastern one, *Wnw.t*, lady of *Wnw*! Come, please, act <for> the one who is <in> your power (?)! See, Hathor will place her hand on her <as> an amulet of health[77]. I am Horus who saves her!

Words to be said 4 times over a dwarf of clay, placed on the vertex of a woman who is giving birth."

(Borghouts, 1978: 39).

Hathor, the goddess of childbirth (who was seen as a perfect mother), as well as Bes ('dwarf of clay') the protector god of children, have been invoked in the spell. Even an 'amulet of health' was placed on the woman giving birth. Invoking these deities is a powerful way of scaring away evil.

Horus is in the role of the magician or conjurer who is saying these words out loud, this is so that the conjurer is given a certain authority when saying these words. The gods will listen to him if he petitions as Horus, this is because Horus was a sick child himself.

d) Leiden [28] rt. 13, 9-11: Speeding up (*sh3h*) birth

"Open for me! I am one whose offering is large, the builder who built the pylon for Hathor, lady of Dendera, who lifts up in order that she may give birth.[78] Hathor, the lady of Dendera is <the> one who is giving birth!

This spell is to be said for a woman."

(Borghouts, 1978: 39-40).

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[72] The god Bes, protector of children (Borghouts, 1978: 105).

[73] The sun god (Borghouts, 1978:101).

[74] The ancient Egyptians believed that in the beginning the universe was filled with a primeval ocean called Nun (Ions, 1968: 24).

[75] The cosmic ceiling: heaven (Borghouts, 1978: 102).

[76] The Egyptian term is 'mother-of-men' (Borghouts, 1978: 105).

[77] Perhaps a hand-like amulet (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

[78] Possibly the god Khnum is speaking, lifting Hathor (= the mortal woman) on the birth-bed (Borghouts, 1978: 105).

The woman giving birth is associated with Hathor od Dendera in this petition to the gods. The spell is assimilating power through Hathor in the hope that the birth will be hastened by the gods.

e) Leiden [34] vs. 11, 2-8: Speeding up the childbirth of Isis

> Oh Re and Aton! Gods who are in [heaven], gods who are in the land of the West[79] and council [of gods who] judge this entire land, council [of gods who are in the palace] of Heliopolis, and those who are in Letopolis – see! Now Isis is suffering from her behind, as a pregnant woman – her months have been completed according to the (right) number – in pregnancy with her son Horus, the avenger of his father! If she spends her time without giving birth, you will be dumbfounded, oh Ennead. For then there will be no heaven, for then there will be no earth, for then there will be no five additional days to the year, for then there will be no offerings for any of the gods in the Heliopolis. Then a weariness will occur in the southern sky, and a disturbance will break out in the northern sky, a lamenting in the shrine. The sun light will not appear, the Inundation will not flow when he should flow forth at his time!
>
> It is not I who have said it, it is not I who have repeated it – it is Isis that has said it, it is she that has repeated it to you. For she has (already) spent a time without her son Horus being born, the avenger of his father. Take care of the child-bearing of NN born of NN in the same manner!
>
> (Borghouts, 1971: 40).

The threatening nature of this spell is evident through the way it is phrased so that the sun-gods Re and Aton will believe if they do not help the woman giving birth - who they associate with Isis – then a serious of unfortunate events will occur. The result of these events will be that there will be no more creation, no more cosmos and no more offerings for any of the gods. Horus needs to be born soon to prevent these catastrophes from happening.

3.12.2.2 Post-natal complications

British Museum [41] 13, 14-14, 1. In: *ib*, 482: To ward off a haemorrhage

> "Anubis has come forth to keep the Inundation[80] from treading on what is pure – the land of Tait[81]. Beware of what is in [it]![82]

---

[79] The netherworld (Borghouts, 1978:104).

[80] A metaphor for the haemorrage (apparently of a woman) (Borghouts, 1978: 103).

[81] According to Borghouts (1978: 103), this refers to the bandage that will be used; Tait is a goddess of weaving.

[82] The protection personified in the bandage. The blood is being addressed (Borghouts, 1978: 103).

This spell is to be said over threads of the border of an *i33.t*-fabric with a knot in it. To be applied to the inside of her vagina."
(Borghouts, 1978: 24).

After birth, to prevent a large loss of blood, a wad of cloth would be placed up the vagina. The same would be done to prevent miscarriage, although it would be to prevent the loss of blood that would signify a possible miscarriage however, it could hardly medically prevent a miscarriage (Robins, 1993: 80). Perhaps it was a way of blocking the evil deities' access to the foetus.

3.12.2.3 Breastfeeding

Nourishing and nurturing the baby after it was born was necessary for its survival. Suckling an infant, however, was not without its problems. Medical conditions such as infections and inflammation of the breast (mastitis)[83] no doubt occurred, as well as other diseases that may have resulted in an inability to feed the baby (Nunn, 1996: 197).

a) Ebers 811: To protect the breasts from developing an infection

These here are the breast[s] which Isis suffered from in Khemmis when she bore Shu and Tefnut.[84] What she did for them: conjuring them with reeds, with the bud of a *snb*-plant, with nodes (?) of reed halms, with hair of the *ib.t*-part thereof, brought to dispel the influence of a male dead, a female dead, and so on. To be made into something twisted leftwise and to be applied to dispel the influence of a male dead or a female dead.
Do not produce secretion, do not produce itching, do not produce blood! Take care that no bleariness comes about against mankind!
Words to be said over reeds and the bud of a *snb*-plant, nodes (?) of reed-halms and the hair of the *ib.t*-part thereof. To be twisted leftwise and to be fitted with 7 knots. To be applied to them.
(Borghouts, 1978: 40).

The spell to keep infection away is made effective for the ancient Egyptian woman by the association with and invocation of Isis in the beginning.

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[83] Mastitis, herpes and candidiasis (thrush) are often a result of nipple trauma when a mother first starts to breastfeed her baby, ie. baby grips the nipple to hard. The symptoms of mastitis often resemble the flu (Jacobi & Levin, 1993: 438).

[84] According to Borghouts (1978: 105) this is an uncommon statement: the pair are generally the offspring of the primeval god, Atum or Amun-Rē'. But Isis often occurs as Rē''s consort and hence is credited here with their motherhood.

b) Ramesseum: B. 14-7: To produce breast milk

Your hunger is taken away [by ...], your thirst [is taken away] by the Great Abundance to heaven, oh *ph*-bird! Your thirst is in my grasp, your hunger is in my grip [... ...]; the Holy Cow [puts (?)] her teat in your mouth. Your mouth is <like> the mouth of the greedy birds over the efflux of Osiris.[85] You will not eat your hunger, [you] will not drink [your thirst ...], you throat will not become hoarse!

A man will say this spell over a clod of earth, placed on a strip of [...] provided with m[ucus (?) ... ...].

(Borghouts, 1978: 44).

The thirst of a baby, if the spell is recited, will always be quenched. The milk is associated with the great inundation ('Great Abundance') and so like the Nile river, the milk will overflow from the breast. Considering that sometimes a woman needed to use a wet-nurse because of lack of milk, this spell would have been an important one (Robins, 1993: 89).

A plugged up milk duct can result in mastitis (Jacobi & Levin, 1993: 438), and so a spell to ensure a unblocked flow of milk for the infant would be one of the ways to help solve the problem for the ancient Egyptians.

3.12.2.4 Paediatrics

To ensure the safety and protection of their infants and children, the ancient Egyptians had various spells to ward of any evil forces and demons that may try to snatch their babies away. The high infant mortality rate was probably what gave rise to these many varieties of spells. Spells were concocted for almost any situation that might put their babies at risk.

The ancient Egyptian spells would often work through the identification of the infant with the baby or child Horus (Robins, 1993: 86). This would hopefully invoke the deities to protect the child whilst scaring away the demons.

a) Berlin: [15] vs. 2, 2-7 : 'A spell for a knot for a child, a fledgling:'

Are you hot in the nest? Are you burning in the bush? Your mother is not with you? There is no sister there [to] fan [you]? There is no nurse to offer protection? Let there be brought to me a pellet of gold, 40 bread pellets, a cornelian seal-stone, [with] a crocodile and hand [on it], to fell, to drive off this Demon of Desire, to warm the limbs, to fell these male and female enemies from the West. You shall break out! This is a protection. One shall say this spell over the pellet of gold, the 40 bread pellets, and the cornelian seal-

[85] Osiris's corpse (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

stone, [with] the crocodile and the hand. To be strung on a strip of fine linen; made into an amulet; placed on the neck of the child.

Good.

(Parkinson, 1991: 129-130).

Many protective spells for children were written on a piece of papyrus, placed into a hollow case amulet[86], and then hung around their necks. This ensured day and night protection from demons.

b) Berlin 3027 [3] rt: A spell of protection for a young child

You will break out, you who have come in the darkness, who have entered stealthily – his nose turned backwards, his face averted – having failed in what he came for!

You will break out, you who have come in the darkness, who have entered stealthily – her nose turned backwards, her head turned off – having failed in what she came for!

Have you[87] come to kiss this child? I will not let you kiss it.

Have you come to hush (it)? I will not let you do your hushing with it.

Have you come to take it away? I will not let you take it away from me.

I have ensured its protection against you with clover – that means, use of force -, with garlic – which harms you -, with honey – sweet to people, but bitter to those-there[88] -, with the tail of an *abdu*-fish, with the jawbone of a black cow, with the dorsal part of a Nile-perch.

(Borghouts, 1978: 41-42).

The evil deity has turned her face in this spell in order not to be recognised. The spell vividly expresses the genuine fear parents had of losing their children. It expresses how just a whisper of a kiss from the demon can kill the child. The spell declares that the demon shall not succeed, in a hope that the child will not be taken away from its parents.

c) Berlin: [4] rt. 2, 6-10: Protection for the young

[...] turn off (? *[p]šn*), oh you ... (*titi*), the one who spends the day moulding bricks for her father Osiris, she who has said about her father Osiris: 'He should live on *d̲3is*-plants and honey!'

Break out, Asiatic woman there, who has come from the hill-country, Nubian woman who has come from the desert plateau! Are you a cave woman? Then come as <his> vomit. Are you a noblewoman? Then come as his piss. Come as the slime of his nose, come as

[86] See: nr. 3.5.6-7 for examples of cylinder amulet cases.

[87] A female demon is addressed (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

[88] Refers to inhabitants of the underworld (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

> the sweat of his limbs! My arms are over this child – the arms of Isis are over him, as she put her arms over her son Horus.
> (Borghouts, 1978: 42).

Isis has been assimilated with the mother, and Horus with the baby or child in an effort to scare the demons away. If it is Isis protecting the baby then, to the Egyptians, it probably would help secure the baby's survival as the young Horus survived his attacks from evil. According to Watterson (1991: 83 – 84), the ancient Egyptians used excrement such as urine and vomit in their magic spells to drive out the demons. In the above spell the demons are being exorcised by way of the expulsion of substances such as nose mucus, body sweat, urine and vomit.

d) Ramesseum III:[18] vs. 3, 8-4, 3: A protective spell of safeguarding the body, being recited over a child when the sunlight appears[89]

> You have appeared, Rē', you have appeared! Have you seen this male dead who has come for her, (for) NN born of NN[90] <to> lay a spell over her, while using means to take her son from her bosom? 'Save me, my lord Rē'!' says NN born of NN. 'I will not give you[91] away, I will not give this burden to a male or female robber of the West! My hand[92] is on you, my seal is your protection! It is Rē' who is going to appear – break out! This is a protection!'
> (Borghouts, 1978: 42).

The spell refers to a 'burden' that will not be given up to a 'male or female robber of the West.' According to Borghouts (1978: 106), the burden is referring to the mother's child and the '... robber of the West' is referring to the evil forces that come from the underworld to snatch the child away. Rē' defeated the evil forces every time he went into the underworld.

e) Ramesseum III: [... (A spell against the *b"*-demon) ...][93]

> 'It is I that had gone forth from the marshes [... ...]'[94] so said Isis the goddess. "I had beaten my locks, I had disordered my hair after I had found my son Horus with a weary heart, [his] lips livid, his legs weak when he had sucked in the *b"* that was in my bosom,

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[89] This spell is one of four nearly identical spells in Papyrus Berlin 3027 addressed to Rē' ([16]-[19]) differentiated according to whether (a) a girl or boy is to be protected and (b) the sun is setting or rising (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

[90] The child's mother (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

[91] The child (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

[92] Possibly a hand-like amulet (Borghouts, 1978: 106)

[93] *b"* seems to be a disease afflicting either the mother or the child (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

[94] In the Delta, where Isis had hidden her young son Horus from Seth (Borghouts, 1978: 106)

the bitterness (? *ḏh*'[*w.t*]) [...] of my breast. I sat down to [weep (?) ...' '... my mother] Isis! Said Horus. 'You will break out, evil *b"* – in that name *b"* of yours – you who draw out the heart, who make weak the knees of the one in whom he lingers about.' 'Come to the men with me, my mother', said Horus, 'and you, my aunt Nephthys, to the places where the nurses are and the maids of Nut, that they may tell us what they have done for their children. Then we can do something similar for the children of [...][95] Isis the goddess, with Nephthys. 'It is on behalf of my son Horus that I have come. His heart is weary, his legs are weak [... ... the *b"* that is in] <my> bosom, the bitterness (?*ḏh*'*w.t*) that is in my breast'. 'Its fortified places (?*ḏ3.w=f*) will be closed with seven flax (stalks), twisted and plaited with a spindle [by a woman] who has just (?) given birth. A nestling swallow will be brought and (its eyes) painted with [...] and black eye-paint [... ...] this child and its mother. And its *b"*(-demon) is for the swallow!'

This spell is to be said over seven flax (stalks), twisted and plaited with a spindle by someone who has just (?) given birth. Seven knots are to be made in it, and it is to be applied to the child's throat. A [...] swallow will be brought [... ...] ... in its mouth [... ...]. (Borghouts, 1978: 43-44).[96]

It has been suggested by Borghouts (1978: 106), that the spell pertains to a disease or infection that both the mother and child have contracted. It seems as if the mother passed on whatever illness she may have had to her child. The spell was an attempt at trying to draw out the disease.

f) Metternich Stela[97] [14] 168-251: How Isis rescued her son Horus from a scorpion's bite

I am Isis, who had been pregnant with her fledgeling (*ṯ3*), who had been expecting the divine Horus. I gave birth to Horus, the son of Osiris in the nest of Khemmis. I very much rejoiced at that because I saw the avenger of his father.

I concealed him, I hid him for fear of That One (*pfy*)[98] – I wandered <to> 'I<a>mu[99] begging (?), for fear of the evildoer. I spent the day gathering (? Hh) <for> the child, and taking care of his needs. Having returned to embrace Horus, I found him – the beautiful Horus of gold, the innocent child, the fatherless one – while he had moistened the banks with the water of his eyes, with the saliva of his lips, his body limp, his heart weak, while the vessels of his body did not beat.

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[95] A very long lacuna. In the meantime, Isis has reached inhabited places (Borghouts, 1978: 106).

[96] PRamesseum III, B. 23-34. In: J. Barns, *Five Ramesseum Papyri*, Oxford, 1956.

[97] cf. fig. 3.3.1

[98] Seth (Borghouts, 1978: 108).

[99] In the Delta (Borghouts, 1978: 108).

I uttered a cry, saying: '<it is> me!' – But the child was weak beyond answering. <My> breasts were full, but <his> belly was empty, (though) <his> mouth was eager for its food. The well was brimming over, (but) the child suffered thirst. My heart was gone adrift, the grief was strong. The innocent child refused the jar, <its> loneliness had been (too) long. <I> began to fear the lack of somebody who would come at my voice, my father being in the Underworld, my mother in the necropolis, my elder brother in the sarcophagus, the other one in enmity and persisting in the malice of his heart towards me, the one who is younger than me being in the house.[100]

To whom among men shall I call that their hearts may turn to me? I will, then, call to the dwellers of the marsh region. They will turn to me immediately.

The marsh-inhabitants came to me from their homes. They jumped up for me at my voice. They all lamented, saying: 'how great is your sorrow!' – but there was nobody there who could conjure him with his spell, while all among them were wailing. But there was no one there able to restore (somebody) to life.

Now there came to me a woman, known in the town, a lady of distinction in her district. She came to me bearing life (-power) – all their hearts were full of (confidence) in her capacity – saying: 'do not be afraid, child Horus, be not dismayed, mother of the god! The child is safe from the evil intentions of his brother, the bush is hidden and death will not enter it. The magic of Atum, the father of the gods who is in heaven is what made my life (-power). Seth will not enter this district; he cannot go about in Khemmis. Horus is safe from the evil intentions of his brother, and the latter's followers will not harm him. (Now) seek for the cause why this happened, that Horus may live for his mother. For perhaps a scorpion has been stinging him, or a greedy snake has been biting him!'

And Isis put her nose into his mouth, to know the smell of it from the inside of his body. She examined the suffering of the divine heir, and she found <him> to be poisened. She embraced her son quickly while jumping about (? *prpr*) with him, like fishes do when thrown on a coal-fire.

'Horus has been bitten! Oh Rē', your son has been bitten! Horus has been bitten, the heir of an heir, the lord who would set forth the kingship of Shu!

Horus has been bitten, the lad of Khemmis, the child in the house of the Magistrate!

Horus has been bitten, the beautiful child of gold, the innocent child, the fatherless one!

Horus has been bitten, the son of Onnophris born of the wailing woman!

Horus has been bitten, the guiltless one, the youthful boy among the gods!

Horus has been bitten, the one to whose needs I took due care because I recognise the avenger of his father!

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[100] Isis is referring to Geb and Nut (her parents), her brother Osiris (deceased), Seth and Nephthys (Borghouts, 1978: 108).

Horus has been bitten, the one who was anxiously cared for in the womb (*št3.t*), who was (already) feared in the belly of his mother!
Horus has been bitten, the one whom I eagerly awaited to see, and for whose benefit I loved life!'
The innocent one wailed in distress and those around the child were depressed. Then Nephthys came weeping, her cries ringing out into the marshes. And Selqis said: 'What is the matter? What is wrong with the boy Horus? Sister, Isis, do call to heaven! Then the crew of Rē' will come to a standstill and the boat of Rē' will not sail on as long as the boy Horus is lying on his side!'
And Isis sent her voice to heaven, her cries to the bark of millions. The sun-disk halted in front of her and did not move from its place. Thoth came, provided with his magic power (*hk3*) and with the high command of justification: 'What is the matter, Isis divine, resourceful woman who knows her spell? Nothing bad with your son Horus? His protection is the bark of Rē'! It is from the boat of the god that I have come today while the disk is in its place of yesterday and darkness has set, while the light has disappeared until Horus is healed for his mother Isis'. – And such is the case with every person who suffers.
The goddess Isis said: 'Thoth, how great are your wits, but how slow are your plans! Have you come, provided with your magic and with the high command of justification? Mishap on mishap, the number of which cannot be kept up! See, Horus is in distress on account of poison! The evil is a deed of his brother. Death is its final destruction. Would only <I> were the eldest (son) of his mother then I would not have seen this through after him. (But) my heart was reconciled to it from the beginning on, for I yearned to take revenge. Horus, remain on earth! Since the day I conceived him I longed to rehabilitate (? *nhb k3 n*) the father of him, the young boy who (now) suffers from something!'
'Do not be afraid, Isis divine! Nephthys, do not lament! That I have come from heaven with the breath of life is to revive the child for its mother. Horus, your heart is stable, it will not sink on account of the heat!
The protection of Horus is He-who-is-in-his-disk, who illuminates the Two Lands with his glorious eyes. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is the Eldest One in heaven, who gives orders about the government of everything. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is that great dwarf who goes about in the Two Lands at twilight. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is the Lion of the night who travels in the Western Mountain. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is the great hidden Ram who travels about in his two eyes. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.

The protection of Horus is the great falcon who flies about in the sky, on the earth and in the Underworld. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is the noble beetle, the great winged one in heaven. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is the mysterious corpse in its mummy form in its sarcophagus. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is the Underworld, the lands where faces are reversed and things are mysterious. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is the divine heron who sits down in his Sound Eye. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is his own body. The magic of his mother Isis is his protection. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus are the names of his father in his manifestations in the districts. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus are the lamentations of his mother and the cries of his brothers. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
The protection of Horus is his own name. The gods serve him while protecting him. – And such is the case with the protection of the sufferer.
Wake up, Horus! Your protection is lasting! Comfort the heart of your mother Isis! – The words of Horus relieve the hearts. He reassures the one who is in distress. – Be glad, you who are in heaven! Horus will avenge his father. Recede, poison! See, you are conjured by the mouth of Rē', you are averted by the tongue of the great god. The boat of Rē' stands still, it does not travel on. The disk is in its place of yesterday, until Horus is healed for his mother Isis – until the sufferer is healed for his mother in the same manner. Come to the earth – then the boat will sail on and the crew of heaven will travel on. The provisions are held back, the sanctuaries are blocked until Horus is healed for his mother Isis – and until the sufferer is healed for his mother likewise. The misery there will (only) pass over, the confusion will return to its place of yesterday (only) until Horus is healed for his mother Isis – until the sufferer is healed for his mother likewise. The demon of darkness goes about; the seasons are not distinguished, the figures that refer to the shadow will not be seen (well) daily – until Horus is healed for his mother Isis - and until the sufferer is healed likewise. – The Two Caverns are blocked, the crops are withering, life is withheld from the living until Horus is healed for his mother Isis – and until the sufferer is healed likewise. Come to the earth, poison! Then hearts will be glad and the rays of the disc will spread.
I am Thoth, the eldest one, the son of Rē', whom Atum, the father of the gods has ordered to heal Horus for his mother Isis – and to heal the sufferer likewise.

Horus, your ka is your protection, your image ensures your safeguarding. The poison has died; its heat was kept from stinging the son of the distinguished lady. You go back now to your homes: Horus lives for his mother – and so does the sufferer.'
And Isis, the goddess, said: 'give, please, an order to the inhabitants of Khemis and the nurses who are in Pe, urge them strongly to safeguard the child for its mother – and to safeguard the sufferer likewise. Let them not recognise my identity in Khemmis as an independent woman who has fled from her (own) town!'
And Thoth said to these gods and spoke to the inhabitants of Khemmis: 'oh nurses who are in Pe, who have struck themselves with their hands, who have beaten themselves with their arms on account of that great one who has departed from them: be watchful over this child, look for his path among men, confuse the ways of those who rebel against him until he has taken for himself the throne of the Two Lands. Rē' in heaven defends him, his father watches over him, the magic power of his mother is his protection while she propagates the love for him and while the fear for him is spread among mankind.
One is waiting for me to push off the night-bark, to make the day-bark sail on. Horus is entrusted to you, being assigned to life. I will announce to his father that he lives. I will cause gladness to those on the night bark so that the crew may sail on. It means that Horus lives for his mother – and that the sufferer lives for his mother likewise. The poison is powerless. Then the skilled one will be praised on account of his task when delivering his report to the one who sent him out. Let your heart rejoice, Rē'horachte: your son Horus has been assigned life – and all men and all animals that are suffering from poison live likewise.'
(Bourghouts, 1978: 62-69).

The Metternich Stela consists of a long list of spells in which Isis tries to rescue her son, Horus from certain death. Through the help of varoius other deities, Horus is revived from his sickness caused by poison of a scorpion. In the spell Horus is identified with the child suffering from an illness, whilst Isis is identified with the mother of the ill child. Through these associations it is hoped that the magic will cure the sick child.

Water was poured over the stela in order it would absorb the *heka* of the spells. The ill child then drank the enchanted water. The *heka* would then enter the body and work its healing magic (Ritner, 1993: 103-105).

g) Metternich Stela [7] 71-83: Isis comes to the help of her son Horus

'Isis, come to your Horus! You who knows her spell, come to your son!' – so said the gods in her neighbourhood, since a scorpion had stabbed him, since a stinger had stung him, since a spider had lain in waiting for him.

Isis went forth with a *msḏ*-cloth on her breast, her arms spread out: 'here am I, my son Horus! Do not be afraid. Son of a glorious lady, nothing bad will happen to you. The seed embodied in you is of the one who created that which exists! You are my son in the heavenly region who has come forth from Nun. You will not die from the heat of the poison. You are the great heron who was born on the top of a willow in the house of the Great Magistrate in Heliopolis. You are the brother of the *abdu*-fish, who announces that which is going to happen.[101] A cat has nursed you in the house of Neith,[102] a sow (*rr.t*) and a dwarf *(ihty)* were the protection of your body.[103] Your head will not sink down on account of an opponent in you. Your body will not take in the heat of your poison, you will not pull back on the earth, you will not become limp on the water, no biting snake will have power over you, no powerful lion will stoop over you. You are the son of the august god who has come forth from Geb. The poison will have no power over your body. You are the son of the august god who has come forth from Geb – and such is also the case with the sufferer. The four lady-genii (*šps.t*) are the protection of your body!'

(Borghouts, 1978: 69-70).

In the spell it is commanded that the child 'will not die from the heat of the poison', and that no dangerous animal 'will have power over' the child. The ancient Egyptians were assigning power to their children through this spell. Again, the spell incorporates the child Horus as the equivalent to the sick child, and various other helpful deities are invoked to ensure absolute protection.

[101] An unknown, but existing species. In myths it would swim before the sun-boat and warn Rē' against the approach of his foe, the demon of chaos Apap (Borghouts, 1978: 104).

[102] The cat goddess Bastet (Borghouts, 1978: 108). She was adored as goddess of fertility (Andrews, 1994: 32).

[103] The hippopotamus goddess Tawaret and the dwarf god Bes were often depicted on amulets as protectors of women and children, especially infants (Borghouts, 1978: 109).

3.13 Miscellaneous

3.13.1 Breastfeeding years

"When you were born after your months, (your mother) was still yoked to you, her breast was in your mouth for three years."
(Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 15).

Ancient Egyptian women breastfed for a lot longer than what is the norm by modern Westernised standards, and was considered a form of contraceptive. It is perhaps possible that they also thought that breastfeeding for that long increased the chances of the baby surviving.

3.13.2 A fragile life

"Do not say: "I am too young to be taken away", for you do not know your death. When death comes he steals the infant from the arms of his mother, Just like him who has reached old age."
(Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 22).

It is always a sad day when a child dies before the parents have even reached old age but this was the case more often than not in ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptians learnt the hard way that they had to appreciate life, because they never knew when it would be taken away from them. They had come to realise that an infant's life was fragile.

3.13.3 Protection from demon and evil beings

a) A letter to the dead

"Please become a spirit for me [before] my eyes that I may see you fighting on my behalf in a dream"
(Ritner, 1993: 180)

b) A ritual against ghosts

"...recited over four uraei made of pure [...] clay, with flames in their mouths. One is placed in [each] corner [of any bedroom] in which there is a man or woman sleeping with a man [or woman]."
(Ritner, 2001: 332)

c) A ritual to save the sleeper

"...from anything bad and evil, any fear, any terror, any dead man or any dead woman" (Ritner, 2001: 332)

The ancient Egyptians believed that evil demons and deities would try to come at night and harm them and their children, which is why protective spells were created. The dead were considered a threat to personal safety, as they were jealous of the living. The ancient Egyptians would often beseech their dead relatives to fight for them on their behalf (cf. 3.11.3 a). If the dead relatives were kept happy then they might keep the living safe.

3.14 Conclusion

The wide array of magical and medical texts indicates a culture that was concerned about preserving life and made use of all the available resources to ensure a long life. The resources were not simply just a few remedies that they happened upon, the herbal treatments, for example, had some significance attached to most of the ingredients used. The spells also drew upon their rich 'mythology' and activated the powers of the various deities, either through supplication or by threatening the deities.

Chapter 4

The health of Egyptian women and children

In this chapter some conclusions will be made concerning the influence magic and medicine had on the health of the ancient Egyptian women and children.

Three types of sources are utilised:

- The specific corpus of visual and textual sources described and analysed in chapter 3
- Other ancient Egyptian sources and information of relevance to the subject.
- Modern medical information from the fields of gynaecology and paediatrics.

In addition to the corpus of sources already discussed in Chapter 3, other sources will be utilised. Where relevant and available reference will be made to the sources already discussed in chapter 3. The aim is to place the material in a broader context and determine how the health of ancient Egyptian and children was treated in a variety of experiences and phases of the lives of women and children.

4.1 Menstruation

Not much is known about how menstruation was perceived by the ancient Egyptians. From the scant surviving documentation a few deductions have been made, but not much is conclusive. There is even a passage in the Satire of Trades that was interpreted as a washerman that 'cleans the clothes of a woman in menstruation' has, according to Robins (1993: 78), been disputed recently.

In New Kingdom laundry lists there are possible references to sanitary towels and in the Demotic story of Setne Khaemwaset, the princess Ahwere talks about her time of 'purification' (Robins, 1993: 78).

The ancient Egyptians seem to have been aware that when menstruation stopped it was an indication of pregnancy (Robins, 1993: 78).

There were treatments listed in the medical papyri to remedy certain menstrual problems (Watterson, 1994: 81). The mention of a woman's menstruation is an indication that the Egyptian men did not simply ignore this biological process. They seem to have been aware that a

woman's menstruation could lead to other problems such as a woman suffering from amenorrhoea (cf. 3.9.2.1).

The ancient Egyptian men and women's perception of menstruation is hard to ascertain. According to Pinch (1994: 57), menstruating women were considered unclean and impure and therefore were generally not allowed to take part in temple service, especially during their time of 'purification'.

According to Buckley and Gottlieb (1988: 26 – 27), the symbolism of menstrual pollution in various cultures may have arisen from a cultural perception of order and chaos. Within the structure of society there is order and a pollutant is something that is considered to be 'out of place' (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988: 26).

When blood flows during menstruation it could have been considered to be "breaching the natural bounds of the body that normally contain it ... Menstrual blood does not issue randomly or accidentally, as does the blood of wounds, but from a single source and to some extent regularly and predictably – if, unlike other products of elimination, uncontrollably" (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988: 26).

According to Buckley and Gottlieb (1988: 27), if "menstrual blood is perceived as a dire pollutant" then the effects of which "must be contained through stringent taboos." It is therefore possible that women in ancient Egypt were treated differently when they were menstruating.

As of yet, there seems to be no evidence that indicates how the women handled their menstruation, and how they were treated by other people in society during their period. In terms of actual hygiene, it is not certain whether a woman had any form of a sanitary towel that she would have used for when it was her period. There has been some speculation surrounding the Isis knot that hints at a possible tampon[104].

The Isis knot[105] (cf. figs. 3.5.6 – 3.5.7), also known as a *tyet,* has been interpreted as a tampon of sorts used to stop heamorrhaging after a woman has given birth or to prevent a miscarriage (cf. 3.10.2.2) (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 3).

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[104] A tampon is a plug of cotton-wool, etc. used to absorb secretions or stop haemorrhage (Sykes, 1978: 930).

[105] The Isis knot was also known as the girdle of Isis and was the *ankh* sign with its lateral arms hanging down on either side (Bunson, 1991: 97).

According to Bunson (1991: 97), the girdle of Isis 'honoured the blood of Isis.' The girdle or knot of Isis was associated with the blood of the goddess herself which possessed magical power (Griffiths, 2001: 189 – 190).

In funerary context the *tyet* amulet was used with reference to "the blood of Isis" (Griffiths, 2001: 190). In the Book of the Going Forth by Day,[106] spell 156 there is a depiction of the *tyet* amulet with the words, "Thou hast thy blood, O Isis, thou hast thy magical power" (Griffiths, 2001:190).

One of the accounts of Isis trying to keep Horus safe from Seth has Isis tying her girdle, or knotted sash, around Horus, thereby surrounding him with her magical powers (Wilson, 1997: 61).

There is evidence that women used knotted pieces of linen that was inserted into their vagina to prevent a miscarriage, and it is often assumed that the *tyet* represents that piece of linen. There is even a bottle in the form of a woman with a tampon inserted into her vagina (Robins, 1993: 80).

Whether or not the *tyet* is a depiction of what women used to prevent miscarriage can not be certain, but it is known that they used a type of tampon as a preventative measure to help stop excessive haemorrhaging after childbirth as well as prevent miscarriage[107] (cf. 3.10.2.2) (Robins, 1993: 80).

The tampon's use as a way of preventing a miscarriage probably stems from the belief that demons could come and steal the baby whether in the womb or in the nursery (Ritner, 2001: 332). Perhaps the tampon was a way of blocking the demon's access to the baby.

According to Pinch (1994: 116), the shape of the Isis knot has been interpreted as a sanitary towel or girdle tie[108]. The *tyet* amulets were often made in a red stone and Pinch (1994: 116) suggests that it could be indicative of its link to menstrual blood. The assumption could then be made that perhaps the tyet was a tampon women used when they menstruated, but there is no evidence to support this assumption.

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[106] The Book of Going Forth by Day is also known as The Book of the Dead.

[107] Robins (1993: 80 – 81) mentions that it has been suggested that the Isis knot functioned as a tampon for the goddess Isis when she was pregnant with Horus, and Seth was trying to kill the baby in the womb.

[108] The *tyet* is also known as the 'girdle of Isis' (Bunson, 1991: 97).

What is an interesting point to ponder is if menstrual blood was considered impure (Robins, 1993: 78), why would women insert a tampon to block the only exit the impure blood could be expelled from? Perhaps a cloth was tied around their pubic region to catch the blood that flowed out, but inserting a tampon would surely, from their perspective, keep all the impurities inside their bodies.

4.2 Conception and Contraception

4.2.1 Fertility

As has been established, the main purpose of marriage was procreation (Hawass, 2000: 82). Children were highly valued in ancient Egyptian society and a woman's central role was as a child-bearer. Even in art women were often depicted at the childbearing age[109] thereby highlighting their fertility (cf. 1.1, 1.3) (Robins, 2001: 513).

The ancient Egyptian women had a slight preoccupation with fertility as is illustrated by the many figurines that have been classified as fertility dolls and 'paddle dolls' (cf. 3.2.1 – 3.2.8) (Pinch, 1994: 126). Unfortunately it has not been conclusively proven that the figurines in fact had a fertility purpose.

There were spells (cf. 3.11.2.2) available that could be used to help determine and promote fertility as well as fertility deities such as Heqet (cf. figs. 3.1.3, 3.1.6) and Bastet (cf. fig. 3.1.10) that were in amulet form (cf. 3.5.1 – 3.5.2) to grant fertility.

The women's apparent preoccupation with fertility may be no more than a modern woman when she has decided to have children. Modern society has fertility clinics, and scientific technology has brought more and more infertile people closer to being able to have their own child.

4.2.1.1 Deir el-Medina

Many of the excavated houses at Deir el-Medina have front rooms with white-washed walls with female-orientated decorations (cf. 3.9). One of the interpretations of the wall paintings was that they were meant not only to celebrate childbirth, but also as a reflection of "the cessation of a

[109] Childbearing age was considered to be soon after the girl's first menses, usually giving birth for the first time between the ages of twelve to fifteen, and continued to give birth until her early death (Watterson, 1991: 84).

dangerous, liminal time for women with its associated state of pollution, including taboos with serious effects on mature males in the household" (Meskell, 2002: 116).

Perhaps the front room of the house was also intended to bring on fertility and conception for the household. It may have even coincided with the household shrines filled with various deities (cf. figs. 3.1.1, 3.1.2, and 3.1.5) that Egyptians had in their homes.

In the houses of the ancient Egyptians there were household shrines that were meant as a way of protecting the family as well as promoting successful conception and childbirth for the family (Robins, 2001: 512).

The domestic shrines often had the protective god of children and women, Bes, as decoration (cf. figs. 3.1.1 – 3.1.2). (Robins, 2001: 512). Depictions of Bes would have scared off evil deities trying to steal away an infant.

4.2.1.2 Fertility Threats: Demons and Evil Beings

Simply because a couple wanted to have children did not mean that they were so blessed. According to Feucht (2001 (a): 192), the ancient Egyptians were aware of the fact that infertility could be as a result of the father as well as the mother.

According to Pinch (1994: 123), there were four types of threats to a woman's fertility that were mentioned in the magico-medical papyri. The first threat was natural causes; this meant anything that was not supernatural in origin. Failure to conceive and difficult labour are often mentioned without any cause being given (Pinch, 1994: 123).

The second threat was from evil deities and demons. The Egyptians saw the supernatural world as a threatening world. As the supernatural dealt with what was relatively unknown and unseen, there was a certain amount of fear and apprehension that was felt by the Egyptians. In the world of the supernatural there were good and bad deities. The malignant deities were the ones that stirred up trouble and caused turmoil among the ancient Egyptians. Among the deities which caused misfortune there was Seth who was associated with miscarriage and abortion which is not surprising considering he wanted to destroy Horus in the womb of Isis (Pinch, 1994: 123 & Wilkinson, 2003: 197 -199).

Many demons were held to be dangerous to a pregnant woman or a small child. This was partly because so many things could and did go wrong during pregnancy that were not able to be explained by their level of medical knowledge. It is also important to note that to the Egyptians

there were no distinctions between medicine (rational therapy) and magic (irrational therapy) (Ritner, 2001: 326). Therefore there are many spells which pertain to medical help and cures (cf. 3.12.2.2 and 3.12.2.3. a – b). One spell (cf. 3.12.2.4) is designed to prevent a female demon from creeping in at night and kissing a young child. The implication is that the demon's kiss would kill the child (Pinch, 1994: 123).

The third threat is from the dead. Ghosts and spirits from the afterlife were extremely feared by the ancient Egyptians and spells were used to ward off the dead (cf. 3.13.3 b – c) (Ritner, 2001: 332). Female ghosts were especially feared because they were seen as spirits seeking vengeance for having failed to give birth to a child when they were alive. Women who had died giving birth were also seen as being jealous of successful births (Pinch, 1994: 123). Many amulets as well as the Brooklyn Papyrus from the first millennium BCE cite female ghosts as being a recurrent source of danger (Pinch, 1994: 149).

It was believed that the dead had the power to bring evil dreams upon a sleeping person and of inflicting illness on them (Pinch, 1994: 149). Ancient Egyptians would often beseech their dead relatives to fight for them (cf. 3.13.3 a, the results of which were believed to have been revealed in dreams (Ritner, 2001: 332).

The dead were seen as a cause of disease or as a threat to the cure. Even the shadow of a dead person was seen as having enough power to harmfully affect medicines prepared by the doctor. There are many spells promising to dispel the influence of the dead. A theory seemed to have developed that the decaying bodies of the dead created a poisonous efflux that was a cause of disease in the living. Although this had some scientific basis, the theory may have been a rationalization of earlier beliefs about the ways in which the dead could interact with the living (Pinch, 1994: 149).

The fourth source of threat was from evil, malicious persons. Foreign sorcerers and sorceresses fell under this category although sometimes it was believed that they were evil spirits in disguise. There are spells that are meant to counter-act the threats of sorcerers (cf. 3.13.3 d).

A few spells mention protection against any noble or common women who might harm a newborn child. It is not certain whether this refers to female ghosts, to demons masquerading as humans or to ordinary women "who possessed the Evil Eye." In modern Egypt and Sudan, protection from the Evil Eye is one of the main reasons for keeping a mother and child in isolation for up to forty days after the birth (Pinch, 1994: 123).

The cause of an ailment usually determined the nature of the 'cure' therefore any threat considered to be natural would be countered with herbal medicines (Pinch, 1994: 123). A laceration, for example, was considered to have a natural cause and would be treated with fresh meat bandaged to the arm (Nunn, 1996: 171). However, threats from the supernatural required

magical protection and cures to be used (cf. 3.10.2.3 a) (Pinch, 1994: 123). The Egyptians believed in fighting fire with fire.

4.2.1.3 Fertility Tests

As there seemed to be a lot of importance placed on fertility[110] it only seems fitting that there were tests that could be taken to determine a woman's ability to have a child (Tyldesley, 1994: 66). Practices such as testing a woman's fertility by placing a cut onion in her vagina and then trying to smell it on her breath may sound bizarre (cf. 3.9.2.2), but were based on what the ancient Egyptians believed to be the facts of anatomy (Nunn, 1996: 192). They believed there to be a link between the mouth and the 'open womb' in a fertile woman (Pinch, 1994: 123).

There were herbal remedies that could be experimented with and even tests[111] could be taken in an attempt to ascertain her ability to conceive. According to Pinch (1994: 125), very few remedies or spells that were used to increase fertility promised to make a woman conceive. Pinch (1994: 125) suggests that perhaps the ancient Egyptians believed that only a god could create life and so, at the end of the day, only if the gods decided for it would a woman have children.

4.2.2 Conception

4.2.2.1 The Biology of Procreation

The ancient Egyptians' beliefs and thoughts on how the body worked resulted in some strange theories and medical 'cures'. For example, the Egyptians believed that the vessels, or *metw*, carried everything together – urine, blood, semen – which influenced their beliefs about pregnancy (Nunn, 1996: 44 – 45). An example of this influence would be that they believed a woman could get pregnant through the mouth as well, because everything was linked up (Nunn, 1996: 44 – 45).

Knowledge of sexual matters was rather limited. The Egyptians believed that sperm was secreted by the bones which was then stored in the testicles (Andreu, 1997: 78 & Feucht, 2001 (a): 192). Conception could occur through the mouth as well as the vagina by the father using his penis to place the child into the mother's stomach (Andreu, 1997: 78 & Feucht, 2001 (a): 192).

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[110] There existed the 'year of eating,' a trial marriage to determine a woman's fertility (Tyldesley, 1994: 66).

[111] Cf. 3.9.2.2 for an example of a fertility test.

The biological formation of the baby was believed to come from both the mother and father. The father's semen came from his bones into the baby to form its bones, whilst the flesh and skin of the baby came from the mother[112] (Feucht, 2001 (b): 261).

It was recognized by the Egyptians that part of the mother and part of the father formed the child. It was believed that the father's *ka* formed the child, and that he transferred part of his *ba*-soul and part of his *akh* power to the child. The mother, on the other hand, gave the child's heart, which was seen as the area where the personality, emotions, and intellect came from (Feucht, 2001 (b): 261 & 1990: 328).

According to Feucht (2001 (a): 192), the uterus (*hmt*) has been mentioned as the place where the baby grows and develops. The developing feutus was seen as a living being growing under the protection of the gods. The god Aten is described in the sun hymn of Amarna as he "who makes seed grow in women, who creates people from sperm, who feeds the son in his mother's womb, who soothes him to still his tears" (Feucht, 2001 (b): 261).

The Egyptians believed that the mother's menstrual blood provided the nourishment of the baby in the uterus (Andreu, 1997: 78).

4.2.2.2 Pregnancy Tests

Much like today, the ancient Egyptians had their ways of determining whether the women were able to have children and whether they were pregnant. Their tests went so far as to try and determine the baby's gender before it was born (cf. 3.11.2.5 b.).

The Kahun, Berlin and Carlsberg papyri contain an extensive array of tests for fertility, pregnancy and to determine the sex of the unborn child (Nunn, 1996: 25, 34 – 35, 39). These tests cover a wide range of procedures, including the induction of vomiting (cf. 3.11.2.5 a) and examination of the breasts (cf. 3.11.2.5 c).

One of the most famous tests was used to determine if a woman will or will not bear a child. A woman should moisten emmer and barley with her urine every day. "If they all grow, she will bear a child. If the barley grows it will be male, if the emmer grows it will be a female, if neither

[112] In the Jumilhac Papyrus (third century BCE) it can be read that semen created the bones, whilst the skin comes from the mother (Feucht, 2001 (b): 261).

she will not bear a child" (cf. 3.11.2.5 b) (Watterson, 1994: 86 -86 & Nunn, 1996: 192). This test was shown to be inaccurate by Ghaliounghui, Khalil and Ammar (1963: 241 – 6).[113]

Another pregnancy test involved a woman drinking milk from one who had already borne a male child. The milk was mixed with the herb *bededu-ka* (cf. 3.11.2.5 a). If this concoction made the woman sick, she was pregnant (Watterson, 1994: 85). Throwing up is quite a telltale sign of pregnancy even today, although it is certainly not a conclusive indication[114] (de Villiers: interview).

According to Robins (1993: 78), the Egyptians knew that when the woman's menstruation ceased to come it was one of the signs of pregnancy. However, they still practiced the other tests, perhaps to confirm the results.

Other pregnancy tests involved examination of the blood vessels over the breasts (cf. 3.9.2.5 c), and making mixtures to be drunk. In the former, the woman lay down, and her shoulders, arms, and breasts were smeared with new oil. Early in the morning she had to be examined. If her blood vessels looked good, none having collapsed, bearing children would occur. If the vessels were green and dark, she would bear children later in life (Nunn, 1996: 192).

4.2.3 Contraception

As there were ways of determining if a woman could bear children, so too were there ways believed to prevent pregnancy. Precautionary measures were taken to prevent unwanted pregnancies; some of the contraceptives seemed to have had some scientific basis behind them.

Breastfeeding an infant for three years was considered by the ancient Egyptians to be a method of preventing pregnancy (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 16). Breastfeeding is even considered as a form of contraceptive by some cultures today (Tone, 2002: 10).

Before the 1840's when rubber vulcanization technology was applied in the manufacturing of contraceptives, most women used, among other natural methods, prolonged lactation (Tone, 2002: 10). According to Foster-Rosales and Stewart (2002: 411), breastfeeding does cause hormonal changes that delay the return of ovulation. Breastfeeding, during the first six months

[113] Cf. 3.9.2.5 b. for the results of their experiments.

[114] Not all women throw up when they are pregnant. The hormonal changes during pregnancy affect each woman differently, therefore not everyone throws up (de Villiers: 2005).

after giving birth lessens the chances of pregnancy if the mother has not yet had her first postpartum menses. For lactational amenorrhea to work effectively as a contraceptive in the first six months the mother has to breastfeed the baby with no more than five hours in between feeds otherwise the chance of ovulation and therefore pregnancy increases (Foster-Rosales & Stewart, 2002: 411).

After six months, breastfeeding as a form of contraceptive is not recommended unless supplemented with another, more effective contraceptive (Foster-Rosales & Stewart, 2002: 411).

The ancient Egyptian women probably used breastfeeding along with other contraceptives such as the mixture that, according to Watterson (1994: 89) and Feucht (1990: 327), contained lactic acid (cf. 3.9.2.3). Lactic acid forms the base of contraceptive gels used today (Watterson, 1994: 89).

There were also contraceptives which made use of herbal concoctions. There was a contraceptive the ancient Egyptian women used that made use of honey which, because of its thick consistency, would have worked as a mechanical barrier for the sperm thereby preventing a possible conception (cf. 3.9.2.3 a).

Whilst the ancient Egyptians made use of the small selection of contraceptives they were quite possibly aware that the methods and potions were not a hundred percent reliable, much like modern contraceptives.

4.3 Labour of Love or Pain: Giving Birth

4.3.1 Pregnancy

Considering a girl in ancient Egypt usually married soon after she began to menstruate she could expect to give birth to her first child between the ages of twelve to fifteen (Watterson, 1991: 84).

According to Watterson (1991: 84), a woman's average life span was between eighteen to twenty years although many did live longer. The fact that such a young girl had to give birth from such a young age to one baby after another took its toll on her body. It eventually led to an early death (cf. 4.3.5) (Watterson, 1991: 85).

According to Feucht (1990: 328), the ancient Egyptians knew that the gestation period was about nine months as calculated by the Egyptian solar calendar.

During the pregnancy the ancient Egyptian women took a multitude of precautions to ensure safety of herself and her baby. Pregnant women would wear amulets in the form of deities such as Tawaret (cf. fig. 3.5.4 – 5) in order to prevent attacks from evil forces trying to steal away the baby.

Female dancers and musicians would often decorate their body with tattoos[115] and it is possible that pregnant women put tattoos of protective deities on themselves as protection.

Three young women were found buried[116] with tattoos on their bodies of the same kind that has been found on some fertility figurines (Pinch, 1994: 131).

Women would also pray to the goddess Hathor or Isis to invoke their divine protection as well as ensuring a safe delivery (Wilkinson, 2003: 140, 144 – 145).

Magical wands (cf. figs. 3.4.1 – 3.4.5) with depictions of protective deities related to childbirth (cf. figs. 3.1.3 – 3.1.6), women (cf. fig. 3.1.11) and children (cf. figs.3.1.1 – 3.1.2) were used to scare away evil demons trying to snatch the baby away.

According to Ritner (2001 c: 324), the visible signs of wear found on some of the wands indicate that they may have been used to draw circles on the floor around a child's bed to keep it safe from harm[117]. It is therefore plausible to suggest that perhaps pregnant women drew a circle around themselves when they went to bed at night to prevent harm coming to her and her baby. It may have even been used when a woman went into labour, one of the midwives could have used the wand to draw a protective circle around the mother-to-be.

According to Watterson (1991: 87), pregnant women were given selected foods in order that the child might be born healthy and strong. The ancient Egyptians seem to have believed that the diet the mother has would affect the baby's chances of survival after it had been born.

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[115] Cf. fig. 3.5.9.

[116] The women were found buried close to royal ladies in the funeral temple of King Nebhepetra Mentuhotep (c. 2055 – 2004 BCE). One of the women is described on her coffin as a Hathor priestess. Pinch (1994: 132) proposes that these women were probably involved in protective rites for royal mothers and babies.

[117] Magical wands were used to draw circles around a child's bed during the Middle and New Kingdom (Ritner, 2001 c: 331).

4.3.2 Birth House (Mammisi)

When the time came for the mother to give birth in ancient Egypt she would be isolated from the rest of the household. Only a few female relatives and the midwives were allowed to be present to assist in the birth (Pinch, 1994:127).

In the average Egyptian family the woman in labour would often be put in a room in the house (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 4). The room most probably had decorations such as paintings and statuettes of protective deities such as Bes and Tawaret. There would also have been a birth stool or a set of two to four bricks in the room for the mother to use when giving birth.

In the workman's village at Deir el-Medina, many houses have been found with an upper room decorated with paintings depicting Bes and Tawaret as well as naked women (Pinch, 1994: 127).

Another option for where the mother could give birth was on top of the roof of the house, which was perhaps an ideal location during the sweltering Egyptian summers. There would have been shade provided by a reed-covered pergola with a north wind[118] cooling the mother down (Pinch, 1994: 127).

A birth pavilion, or *mammisi*, was also an option for a mother to give birth in; however, it was for the slightly wealthier Egyptians. The birth pavilion was usually a specially constructed outdoor building that was built specifically for the birth therefore; it seems unlikely that the poorer Egyptians could have afforded it (Meskell, 2002: 113 & Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 4).

What can be deduced from the birth ostraca that have been found, the pavilion was a lovely, airy room bordered with climbing plants growing up the papyrus-shaped columns supporting the structure (Pinch, 1994: 126).

After a woman had given birth she would stay in the confinement area for about two weeks in order to purify the baby and herself as well as keep them under maximum magical protection (Pinch, 1994: 30). Servant girls would attend to the mother's every need (Pinch, 1994: 127).

The *mammisi,* or "birth houses", originated from first millennium BCE temples that were built as shrines to celebrate the birth of a god (Pinch, 1994: 127).

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[118] According to Pinch (1994: 126), one spell for speeding up birth asks for Hathor to bring the north wind to the pavilion where the mother is giving birth.

4.3.3 "Magicians of the nursery" (*hq3y n k3p*)

There were spells that were recited for childbirth as well as for protection over the newborn babies. Women did not recite these spells[119] but, according to Ritner (2001: 324), lector-priests recited the spells (*ḫri-ḥb*) or "magicians of the nursery" (*hq3y n k3p*).

4.3.4 Childbirth

The Egyptian word for birth was *mswt*[120] and could be paraphrased "come down to the ground" (*prj hr t3*) and "come forth from the womb" (*prj m ḫt* or *h3j m ḫt*) (Feucht, 2001 (a): 192). The hieroglyphic symbol B3 (cf. 3.10.4) depicts a woman giving birth, which was quite a rarely depicted event. The diagonal stroke as a hieroglyphic sign, Z5, was often used to replace dangerous events such as birth (cf. 3.10.10).

Childbirth took place at home and according to Andreu (1997: 78), was the affair of professional 'wise-women' or midwives[121] and of the other women of the family. Whether actual physicians were present during the birth is unknown. According to Feucht (2001 (a): 193), there is a source that mentions the training of midwives in the "house of life"[122] in the town of Sais, where physicians also received their training.

The mother-to-be delivered her baby kneeling, sitting on her heels (squatting) (cf. figs. 3.6.2 & 3.6.4), squatting on two or four 'birth' bricks[123], or sitting on a delivery seat (Feucht, 2001 (a): 192 & Andreu, 1997: 78).

The bricks were the personified form of Meskenet, the goddess of the birh bricks, and she offered protection and help for the woman in labour (cf. figs. 3.8.1 – 3.8.4). She was one of the goddesses present when Red-djedet gave birth, as told in the Westcar papyrus[124] (Tyldesley, 1994: 259 & Roth & Roehrig, 2002: 130).

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[119] As most women were illiterate they would either have to know the spell off by heart or a literate man or woman would have to read it.

[120] In Ptolemaic times the Egyptian word for birth was *p'p'* (Feucht, 2001 (a): 192).

[121] Little is known about who the midwives were. According to Pinch (1994: 128), they may have been local 'wise women'; women given the title of 'nurse'; or members of musical troupes of Hathor or one of the other goddesses associated with love, sex and birth (Pinch, 1994: 128).

[122] A temple was a place of learning (Shaw & Nicholson, 1995: 134)

[123] The bricks used were either two or four (cf. figs. 3.8.1 – 4).

[124] Cf. 3.12.2.1 a.

According to Watterson (1991: 90), the two birth bricks developed into a structure known as the *mshnt* which came into use before 2500 BCE.

The *mshnt* was a type of confinement chair that was probably replaced at an early stage with a wooden similarity and unfortunately none have been unearthed in archaeological excavations (Watterson, 1991: 90).

Women giving birth were probably naked except for the few amulets[125] that would be placed on her. Their hair may have been tied up tightly and then gradually loosened as the labour progressed as a way of speeding up birth. The hairstyle probably resembled the depictions on birth arbour ostraca[126] and fertility figures (Pinch, 1994: 128).

Many of the figurines have a cone of scented fat on top of the hair. The application of such a cone seems to be mentioned in a birth spell of around the sixteenth century BCE (Pinch, 1994: 128).

The ostraca depictions were probably used as a way of encouraging the desired outcome of the labour. Depicting a happy mother with her healthy baby would perhaps promote the same in reality (Pinch, 1994: 128).

Hot water was placed under the seat, so that the vapors would ease delivery. The midwife would try to ease the pain by giving the mother intoxicating drinks, or rinsing the genitals whilst natron was used as a laxative to start or speed up the birth (Feucht, 2001 (a): 192).

Magic spells were said over the woman in labour as well as amulets placed on her body to protect her against evil spirits that threaten the life of the expectant mother and baby (Feucht, 2001 (a): 192 & Pinch, 1994: 128).

Deities were identified with the person the spell was supposed to help. Therefore the woman in labour was often identified with Isis[127], whilst the baby would be identified with Horus[128]. According to Pinch (1994: 129), the person helping the mother would sometimes take on the role of Horus and this could be an indication that perhaps there was a male physician present.

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[125] Cf. figs. 3.5.3 – 3.5.5.

[126] Cf. figs. 3.6.4 – 5.

[127] As Isis gave birth after an exceptionally long and difficult labour, she was seen as the perfect deity for women in labour to identify with (Pinch, 1994: 129).

[128] The baby was identified with Horus as Horus overcame sickness when he was a child, and therefore he provides hope for the human baby when invoking the deities for help (cf. figs. 3.3.1 – 6).

However, she does counter this suggestion by adding that cross-sexual identification was quite common in funerary literature so it is possible that the same was true for magical spells (Pinch, 1994: 129).

By identifying with the gods the ancient Egyptians were able to appeal to the gods for extra help during childbirth. There is even a spell (cf. 3.10.2.1 e.) that threatens the gods with cosmic disaster if they do not help Horus and the human baby to be delivered safely (Pinch, 1994: 129).

In some magical spells (cf. 3.10.2.1 b – c.), reference is made to amulets of 'health' as well as a statue of a dwarf that is most likely to have been Bes, protective god of children and women. The amulets probably acted as psychological support making the mother feel more at ease (Pinch, 1994: 129).

Medical remedies that were used to speed up labour or to 'loosen a child in the womb' included swallowing a mixture of honey and fenugreek, or using a vaginal suppository with ingredients such as incense, beer and fly dung (Pinch, 1994: 123, 128).

After the baby had been expelled the midwives cleaned the new-born up before cutting the umbilical cord (Andreu, 1997: 78). According to Watterson (1991: 91), the Edwin Smith Papyrus lists a formula that was best used as a disinfectant.[129] The midwives were likely to have used this formula on any instruments used and on their hands before handling the baby but there is no evidence that shows that they knew the importance of antisepsis[130] during and after birth (Watterson, 1991: 91).

A midwife cut the umbilical cord with a special type of knife (Watterson, 1991: 91). Amulets were even made that resembled the shape of the knife (cf. fig. 3.5.10) (Pinch, 94: 130 & Roth, 1992: 137).

Roth (1992: 123 – 126) proposes an interesting theory about the *psš-kf* knife. She suggests that the *psš-kf* knife was used to cut the umbilical cord. Some Predynastic examples of the *psš-kf* have been found with red stains that appear to be blood and Roth (1992: 124) uses this to help support her theory.

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[129] The formula consisted of a decoction of willow, which is essentially salicylic acid (Watterson, 1991: 91). Salycylic acid is an antiseptic and analgesic substance (Sykes, 1978: 797).

[130] Antisepsis is to counteract sepsis (a septic condition) by destroying the bacteria present (Sykes, 1978: 30, 826).

Roth (1992: 124) hypothesizes that after the umbilical cord was cut the midwife would show it to the baby to get it to realize that the umbilical cord had been cut and it had to begin nursing from his mother's breast.

The umbilical cord has been equated with Apophis, the god of chaos in the form of a snake (Roth, 1992: 138). The cutting of the umbilical cord mimicked the creation of the world, which was completed daily by cutting the snake's body of Apophis in two (Roth, 1992: 139).

The placenta was linked in Egyptian thought with the concept of the *ka* or double. Both the cord and the placenta seem to have been kept. Dried human placenta is an ingredient in some fertility tests. Spells that claim to stop haemorrhage in a woman may have been used against heavy periods or for bleeding after childbirth. Two spells of this kind invoke the magic of Anubis and involve the insertion of a knotted cloth into the vagina. One of these spells attributes the haemorrhage to the malice of a god or a spirit (Pinch, 1994: 130).

The *sa* sign is prominent on the apotropaic wands (cf. fig. 3.4.3). A few tomb paintings show groups of women with the title of nurse holding wands of this shape while dancing. It has been suggested that such wands were aid on the stomach of a pregnant woman to protect the unborn child (Pinch, 1994: 130).

4.3.5 Medical complications during and after birth

It is apparent from the various sources that the Egyptians viewed childbirth as something that was dangerous. The spells that implore and even threaten the deities to protect the woman as she gives birth are many (cf. figs. 3.10.2.1 b – e), added to that the wands (cf. figs. 3.4.1 – 3.4.6), deity statuettes (cf. figs. 3.1.1 – 3.1.11) and amulets (cf. figs. 3.5.1 – 3.5.12), it is clear to see that the Egyptians used whatever methods available to ensure safe delivery and birth.

Medical complications that would have happened during birth could range from a breach baby[131] to one where the baby's placenta is in the incorrect position resulting in the baby's blood supply to be cut off (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 240).

A birth injury to the perineum would have been one of the many other complications experienced after birth (cf. 3.9.2.7 b). According to Oxorn and Foole (1975: 415), most women tear their perineum at birth of their first child.

[131] A breech presentation is a longitudinal lie with a variation in polarity, i.e. the baby is lying with its pelvis instead of its head at the birth canal (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 193).

A fistula (cf. 3.9.2.7 c) would have been one of the complaints of Egyptian woman who had given birth. A fistula is an "abnormal communication between two or more organs" (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 423). During a long labour the bladder becomes trapped between 'the foetal head and the maternal pubic symphysis" and this wears away the bladder at a certain point and creates a hole. This hole leads to urine passing through the vaginal hole uncontrollably (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 423).

Fetopelvic disproportion is likely to have been one of the causes of prolonged labour in ancient Egyptian women (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 516), as most of the women that gave birth had under-developed bodies as a result of their young age (Watterson, 1991: 84).

During prolonged labour if the woman was not properly hydrated then dehydration would set in and this could leave the woman's body unable to physically cope with the labour (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 523).

Abnormal blood loss would probably have been another one of the causes of maternal death (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 526). An injury experienced during childbirth or even the forced expulsion of the placenta, could have resulted in a large amount of blood being lost (de Villiers: interview). If the loss of blood did not kill the mother, then it surely would have weakened her so that she would have been unable to fight infections.

The ancient Egyptians would have not been medically equipped to deal with the variety of medical complications that could have arisen during childbirth. In prolonged labour alone, which was likely to have happened often, there were risks of "uterine atony[132], lacerations[133], haemorrhage, infections, maternal exhaustion, and shock" (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 526).

There are spells that help with the expulsion of the placenta (cf. 3.12.2.1 c), and it is possible that the ancient Egyptian midwives may have tried to externally hasten the process. Methods such as pulling on the placenta and placing pressure on the woman's stomach may have resulted in acute uterine inversion resulting in massive blood loss and shock (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 435 -436). The midwives would have been ill-equipped to handle the situation and it probably ended in the death of the mother.

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[132] Uterine atony is the failure of the myometrial fibers to contract and retract, which is how postpartum bleeding is controlled, and this is the main cause of postpartum haemorrhage (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 398).

[133] Lacerations to various sites such as the vulva, vagina, cervix or uterus can lead to postpartum haemorrhage (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 399).

4.3.6 Cleansing Period

After the mother gave birth she and her baby would stay in confinement for up to two weeks (Pinch, 1994: 130). The mother and baby were cleansed during this time. There would have been hygienic benefits from undergoing this isolation; the baby would have been exposed to fewer people and the germs that they would have been carrying, and the mother would have had time to recover from the ordeal of childbirth.

It could have been possible that the cleansing period was for the purpose of expelling all possible evil from the woman and her baby. The process of childbirth was considered dangerous and fraught with evil deities trying to tamper and disrupt the process.

4.4 Growing Pains: Children's Health

4.4.1 Survival of the Fittest: Infant Mortality

The depiction of large families in funerary contexts can be misleading in determining the average size of families in ancient Egypt. All the children ever born to the family were depicted in the paintings and so there was no way of telling how many of the children actually survived past their infancy. The children were all depicted with the same look so there was no way of even telling when a child had died (Wilson, 1997: 54).

The depictions of large families in any context were probably a reflection of the ideal family the ancient Egyptians strived for.

The vulnerability of the young infants during childbirth as well as during the first few years of life made them highly susceptible to various maladies. Infant mortality was relatively high in ancient Egypt despite the ancient Egyptians' best efforts to placate the gods and protect the infants (Robins, 2001: 512).

Death during childbirth was also high, and in many cases the mother would die along with the baby. Feucht (2001 (a): 193), writes that a woman's life expectancy was shorter than that of a man's by two to four years as a result of death in childbirth. According to Andreu (1997: 78), the large number of spells intended to protect pregnancy and birth indicated that infant mortality and the death of women in labour were quite frequent.

The ancient Egyptians used a certain test to determine whether a child would live or not. They would take a piece of the baby's placenta[134] and mash it with milk and feed it to the baby. If the baby swallowed it, the baby would live (Feucht, 2001 (a): 193).

Another test used the baby's cry to determine whether it would live. If it cried *ny* it would live, if it cried *mbi* it would die (Feucht, 2001 (a): 193 & Pinch, 1994: 138).

There were various diseases that children in ancient Egypt could have suffered from. Dysentery, a disease involving the inflammation of the lining of the large intestines, was one of the ailments little children suffered from. According to Watterson (1991: 84), in the first century CE dysentery was recorded by Celsus (1935-8: 30 – 31) as killing "mostly children up to the age of ten; other ages could bear it more easily. Also a pregnant woman can be swept away by such an event, and even if she recovers, yet she loses the child."

If a child died it would sometimes be buried under the floor of the parents' house, in a special cemetery for children or in their own tombs in an adult cemetery. An indication of the close bond between the parents and the children is that sometimes the children were buried together with one or both of the parents (Feucht, 2001 (b): 262).

The Egyptians believed that the gods already determined the fate of the baby long before it was even born. The seven Hathors decided the baby's fate along with Meskhenet goddess of the birthing bricks on which the baby's fate was written, and the goddess of nursing Renenet. There were several other gods and goddesses involved in the baby's fate as well (Feucht, 2001 (a): 193).

4.4.2 Infant Protection

For the first few days the mother and baby were at their most vulnerable. The pair would stay in the confinement area for two weeks in order for there to be maximum protection from malign forces, and in particular the Evil Eye (Pinch, 1994: 30).

In modern Egypt and Sudan it is customary for the mother and child to stay in isolation for a minimum of forty days as a form of protection from the Evil Eye (Pinch, 1994: 123, 131).

There are more amulets found in the burials of women and children than those of adult men. Children would have needed the protection of amulets the most as they were the most

[134] The placenta was called "the mother of the human being" (*mwt rmṯ*) (Feucht, 2001 (a): 193).

susceptible to disease. According to Pinch (1994: 106), the Egyptians believed the dead were often jealous of new life and so the spirits would try to jeopardize the pregnant woman's chances of giving birth to her baby. This could be why there were amulets found more often in their tombs than the men (Pinch, 1994: 106).

There were spells that were intended to be said over the child to protect them from harm coming to them whilst they slept at night. In one example of these spells, demons and ghosts were to be scared off by amuletic necklaces that a nurse or a female relative was making for the baby to wear. One of the duties a wet-nurse seem to have had was to provide *sau* (magical protection) for the baby as well as food (Pinch, 1994: 150).

Sometimes the family would try to pacify the ghosts and spirits of the dead in order to protect the baby from harm (Pinch, 1994: 132).

The ancient Egyptians drew on the help of deities to protect themselves and their children against evil forces. The deities often had physical features that would scare away evil deities (i.e. Bes' deformed animal-like features), or they would have character traits that were taken from certain animals (i.e. Tawaret's ferocious nature is derived from the hippopotamus).

There were a number of deities that protected the children from harm. One of them was Bes, a misshapen, grotesque dwarf god (cf. figs. 3.1.1 – 3.1.2, 3.1.4). He had lion-like features for a face with short legs and body of a dwarf (Robins, 1993: 83). He was often depicted in the *mammisi* or birth houses attached to temples because of his protective powers he wielded in pregnancy and childbirth. His face was usually depicted above 'Horus the Saviour' on cippi (Nunn, 1996: 101-102).

Bes images were often given to women in labour, and Bes amulets (cf. figs. 3.5.8 – 3.5.9) were worn by children in order to frighten the evil demons that would attack the child (Robins, 1993: 83-84).

The amulets worn by children to protect them from harm included the *wedjat* eye which was rather popular in ancient Egypt.

A mother was usually the one who named the baby at birth, as is supported by a New Kingdom hymn to the state-god Amun which states: '... his mother who made his name' (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 14).

An ancient Egyptian's name often had a significant meaning relating to either the moment of birth, such as the cry, 'Thoth lives,' or to physical qualities the baby displayed such *sa* the name Wersu meaning, 'Big is he' (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 14).

The name could also indicate the baby's foreign origin such as Panehsy, 'The Nubian.' The names, however, were sometimes passed down through the family and so lost their original meaning (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 14).

A person's name was important in ancient Egypt because it could be used against him in magic. A method of defense an Egyptian had against magical attack from another person was by having a true name that no-one knew except presumably his mother. As Horus said, 'One is able to work magic for a person by means of their name" (Pinch, 1994: 31). By keeping secret his true name he could prevent attacks from evil sorcerers and enemies wishing to do him harm.

4.4.3 The Infant Years

4.4.3.1 Breastfeeding

A good supply of milk was crucial for the baby's survival. Some early second millennium BCE spells compare the breasts of the human mother with those of Isis, or with the udders of the Divine Cow. Magic knots were employed to protect the mother's breasts from any being that would make them sore or stop the flow of milk (Pinch, 1994: 150).

Sometimes the mother was unable to breastfeed the baby and therefore a wet-nurse[135] would be employed to feed the baby. The nurse would often stay at the home of the baby's parents, and considering the amount of feeds a baby requires it would have been more practical (Feucht, 2001 (b): 262).

When the mother needed some rest they could make use of a milk remedy that would make the baby sleep for a while. It consisted of the milk of a woman who had just given birth to a boy that was mixed with ground up tips of the papyrus plant and tubes. The mixture had to be given daily to the baby in order for it to work (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 18 – 19).

Magical spells provided protection from anything that may cause the breasts to develop an infection that will prevent breastfeeding (cf. 3.10.2.3 a).

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[135] The word for a wet nurse in ancient Egypt was also used to mean male nurses or tutors (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 18).

Although breastfeeding for three years after birth was considered a form of contraceptive the women used in ancient Egypt, Feucht (1990: 329) suggests that perhaps the ancient Egyptians observed that children who were breastfed for longer had a higher chance of survival.

Breast milk was sometimes stored in feminoform jars (cf. figs. 3.7.1 – 4), and what is interesting about the vessels found is that their cubic capacity is just over a tenth of a litre which is, according to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 19), roughly the amount one breast produces at one feed.

4.4.5 Childhood

The ancient Egyptians had two terms for child or children: *ms/ms.w* and *ḫrd/ḫrd.w* (Feucht, 2001 (b): 261).

The young infants were carried in slings wrapped around the mother's torso. The baby would be positioned near the mother's breast. Older infants would be carried on the hip of the mother, elder sister, or servant (Feucht, 2001 (b): 262).

Children were often depicted with the side-lock of youth. Their hair resembled that of Horus when he was depicted as a child (Feucht, 2001 (b): 262). Perhaps this was a way of enlisting the god's protection.

While the father was responsible for the nurturing and protection of the child, the mother looked after them when they were young and while they were going to school (Feucht, 2001 (b): 263).

Children wore amulets around their necks to protect them against evil deities and to keep away diseases. One of the popular amulets worn by children was the Horus Eye amulet which guarded the bearer from attacks of the Evil Eye (Janssen & Janssen, 1990: 22).

Amulet cases worn by children would contain a piece of papyrus rolled up with a protective spell written on it. According to Janssen and Janssen (1990: 22), from the amulet cases that have been found it has been deduced that it was most unlikely that the bearers ever read the texts on the papyrus themselves.

4.5 Final Conclusions

The ancient Egyptians were very much influenced by their religion and their lives were moulded by their beliefs. Their lives revolved around their deities and it is only natural that something as important as childbirth and the young, tender years of infancy were also attached to the gods. The Egyptians relied on the powers of the supernatural to guide and aid pregnant women during the trials of childbirth. Even fertility was left partly in the hands of the gods.

Many assumptions have been deduced about the process of childbirth from the scant sources available; however, no firm conclusions can be derived at. However, it does seem clear that magic played an important part of the process.

Magic permeated many aspects of ancient Egyptian society. Even in medical treatments there was often magic present. Whether the magic is a spell recited over the potion or a magical property that was believed to be present in certain ingredients, it was ever present in medical prescriptions.

The ancient Egyptians entrusted fertility to the deities of protection (cf. figs. 3.1.6), making use of various means such as amulets (cf. figs. 3.5.1 – 3.5.2) and possibly even "fertility dolls" (cf. figs. 3.2.1 – 3.2.7), to ensure a fertile womb. There were even prescriptions to test for fertility (cf. 3.11.2.2).

When pregnancy had been confirmed through the various tests (cf. 3.11.2.5 a – c), the necessary precautions were undertaken by the pregnant woman to ensure a safe pregnancy. Amulets (cf. figs. 3.5.3 – 3.5.12) and wands (cf. figs. 3.4.1 – 3.4.6) would have provided some protection from evil demons. The amulets could have been worn around the neck (cf. fig. 3.5.8) whilst the wands were likely to have been placed on the mother's womb or used to draw a protective circle around her as she slept (Ritner, 2001 b: 324).

It is possible the women made votive offerings to the various temples dedicated to Hathor, asking for her protection over the unborn baby, as well as soliciting help for the actual childbirth (Wilkinson, 2003: 144).

Childbirth was full of dangers; death was always a possibility and sometimes a reality, whether it is the death of the mother or the baby; for this reason, the powers of the protective deities (cf. figs. 3.1.1 – 3.1.9) were called upon to help. Various forms of magic were employed during

childbirth, including sympathetic magic (cf. 3.10.2.1 b – c) to transfer the pain of labour (Watterson, 1991: 90).

Spells were recited to hasten labour (cf. 3.10.2.1 d – e), which was important for the mother's survival – the longer childbirth took,[136] the greater the chance of medical complications arising (cf. 4.3.5).

The magical wands (cf. figs.3.4.1 – 3.4.6) may have been used to draw a protective circle around the mother as she gave birth.

After birth, magic was used to ward off demons that might try stealing the baby while it sleeps (cf. 3.12.2.4 d – e).

As children grew up they made use of amulets (cf. figs. 3.5.1 – 3.5.12) some of which had spells written on papyri rolled up inside the amulet case (cf. figs. 3.5.11 – 3.5.12). The written word had a lot of power in ancient Egypt.

In amulets, wands and statuettes, the children were shrouded with protection. Women would pour a liquid offering over the *cippi* that were available also provided some protection for the children from dangerous animals.

From the various sources that have been analysed, it can be safely concluded that magic had a large influence on women and children's health. Medicine was made use of in various treatments, however, magical elements seemed to have permeated a lot of them. Where there was a potion to be taken there was often a spell to be said; and when it came to something as dangerous as childbirth, the deities were heavily relied on for a source of protection and psychological comfort.

[136] It is medically termed a long or prolonged labour if it lasts longer than twenty-four hours (Oxorn & Foole, 1975: 516).

Figures

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.3

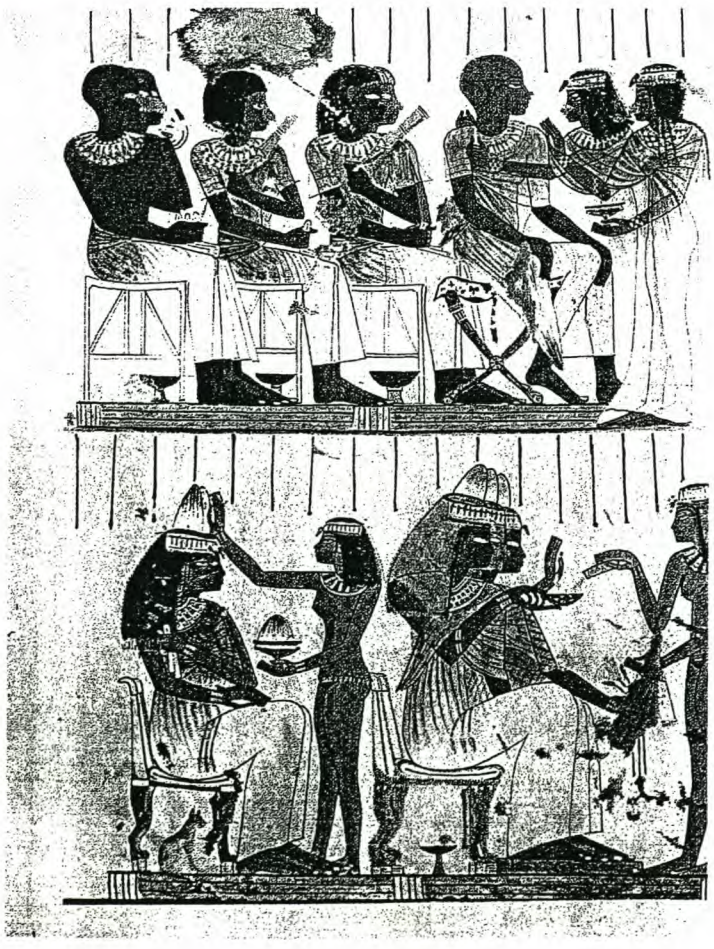

Figure 1.4

Figure 1.5

Figure 1.6

Figure 1.7

Figure 1.5

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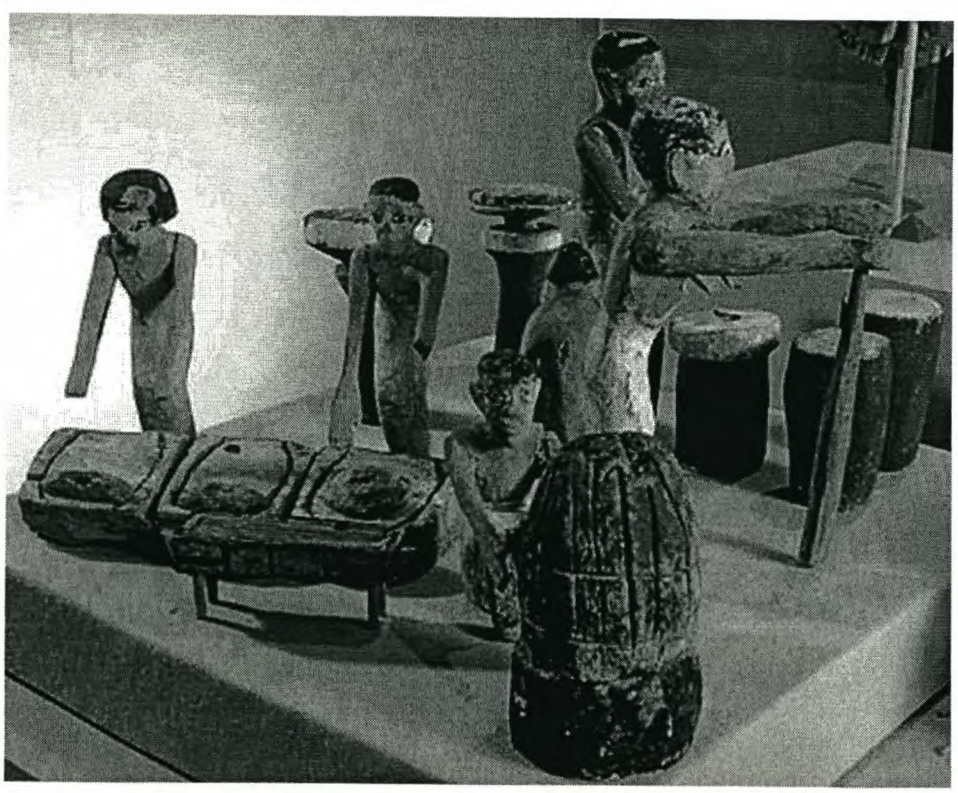
Figure 1.8



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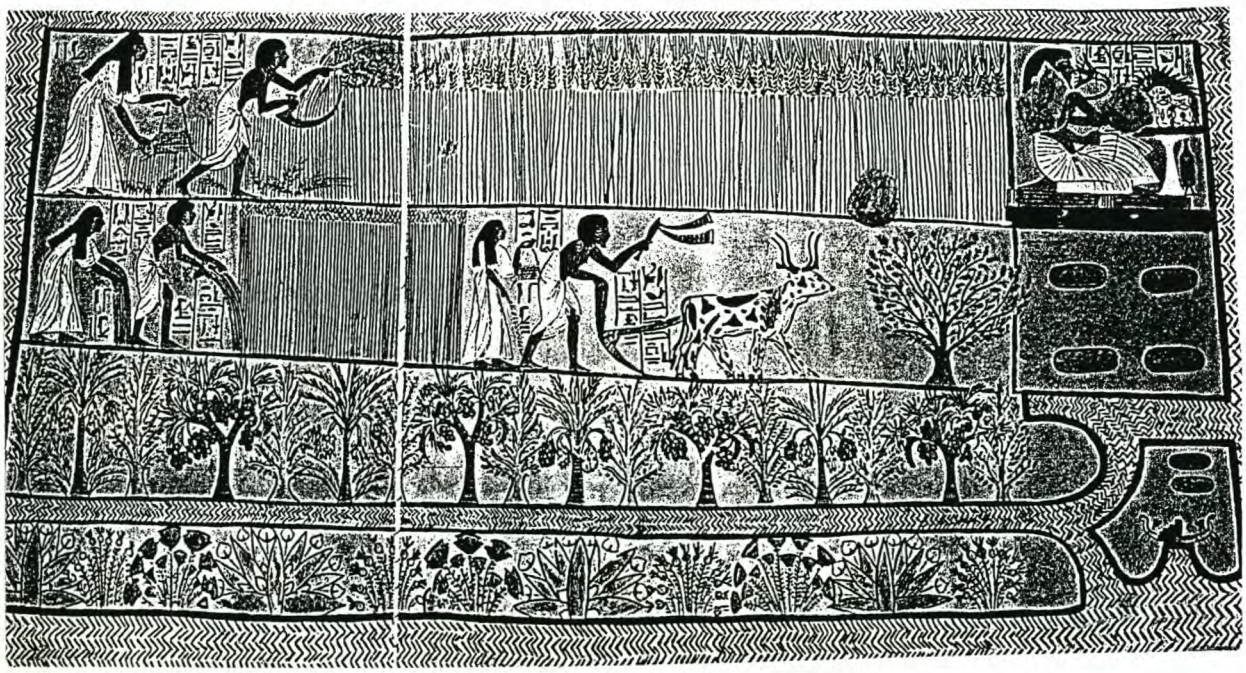

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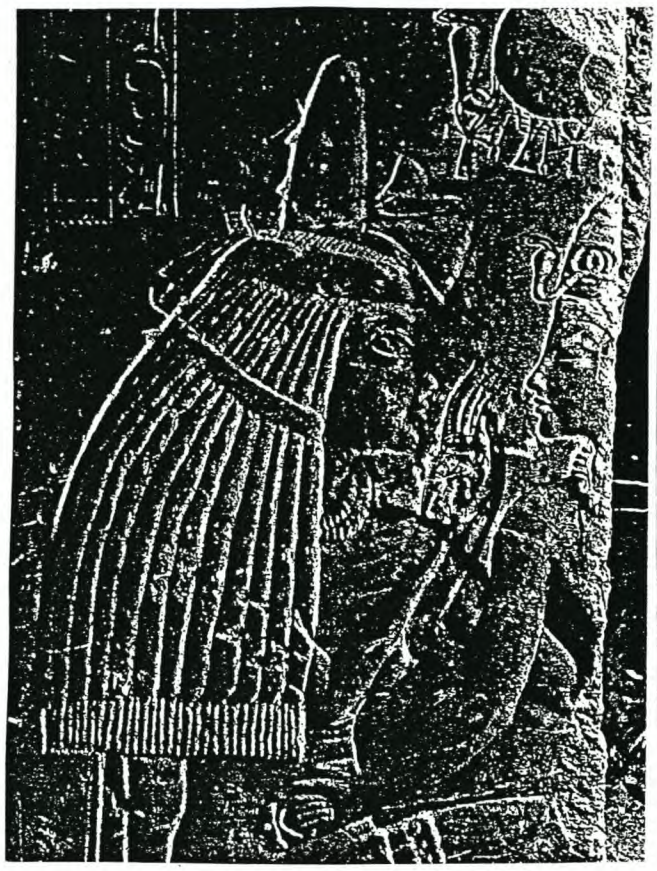

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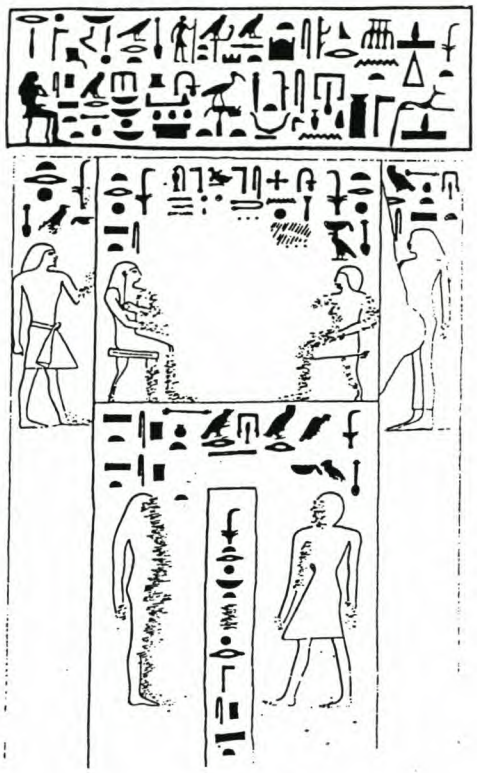

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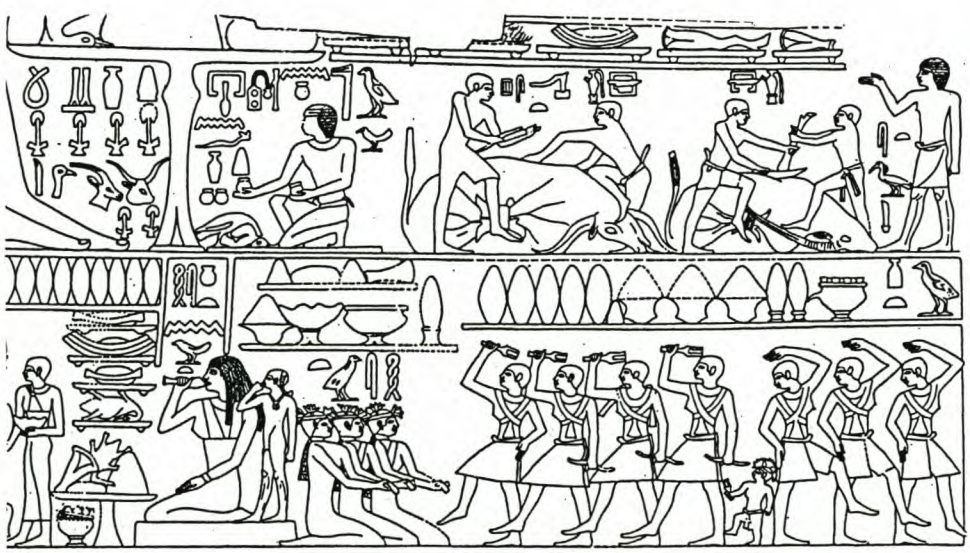

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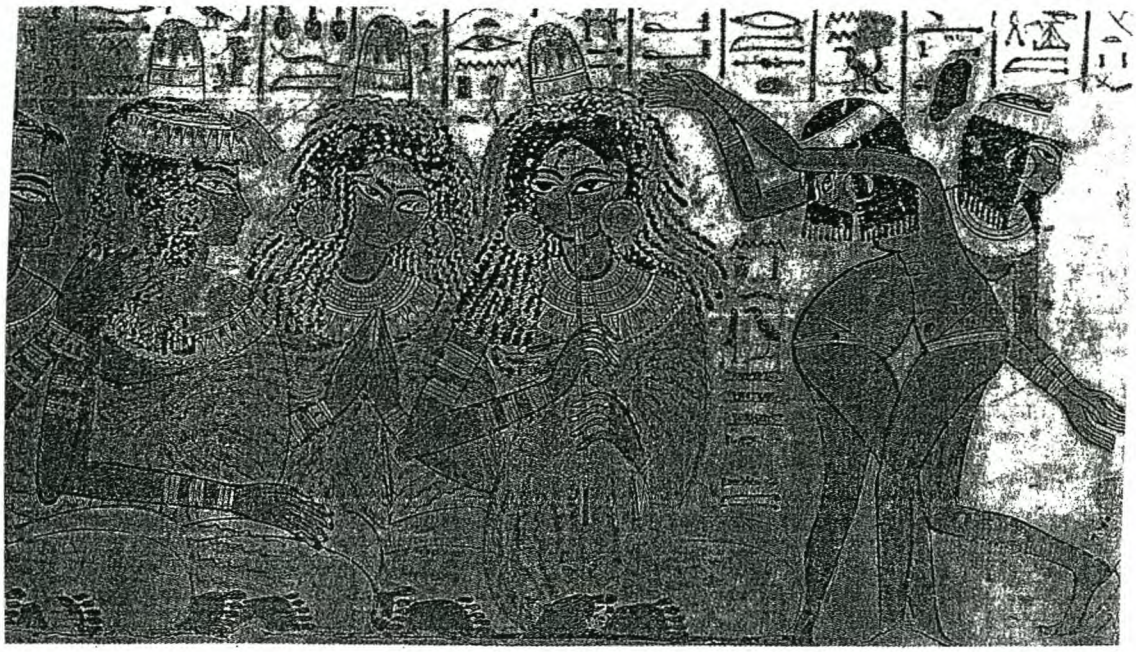

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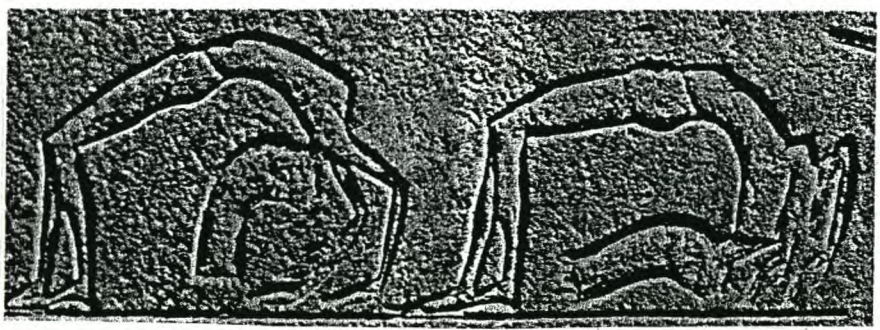

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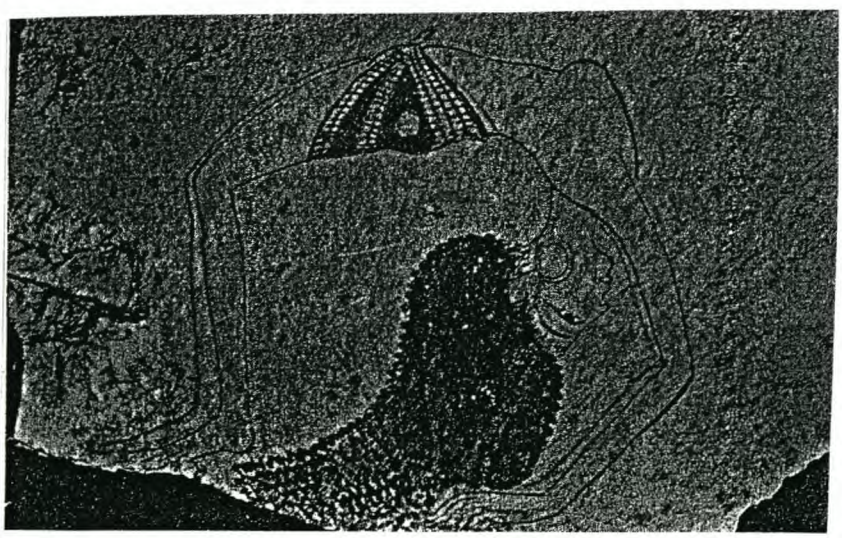

Figure 1.18

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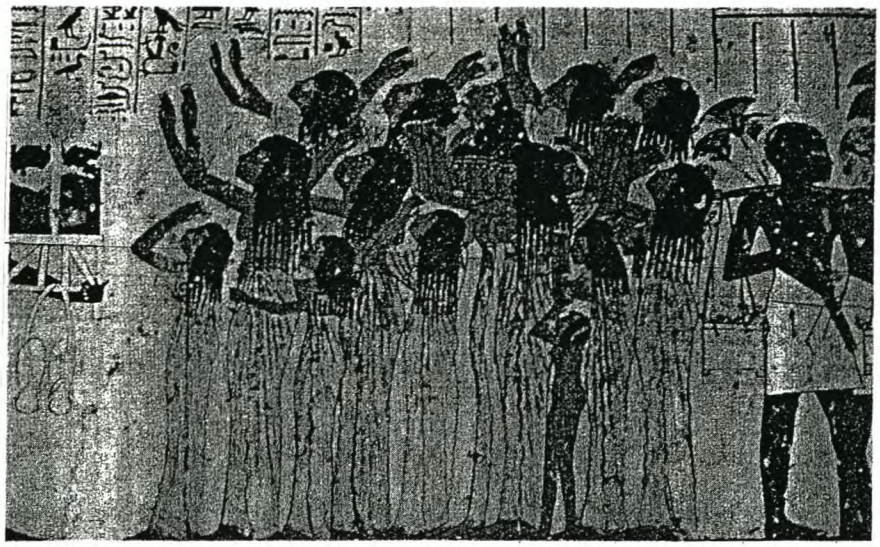

Figure 1.23

Figure 1.24

3.1 Protective Deities

Figure 3.1.1

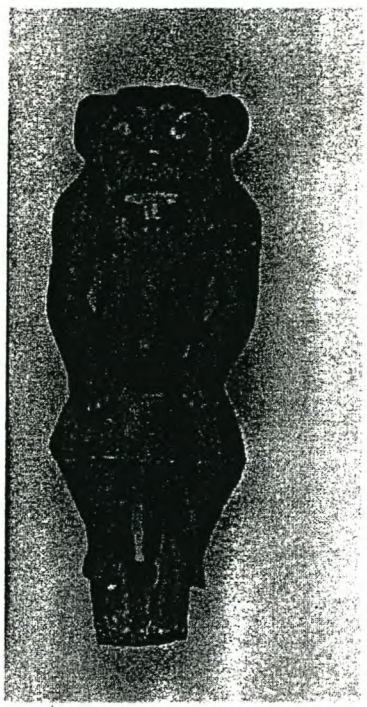

Figure 3.1.2

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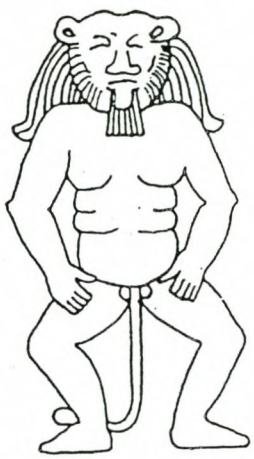

Figure 3.1.4

Figure 3.1.5

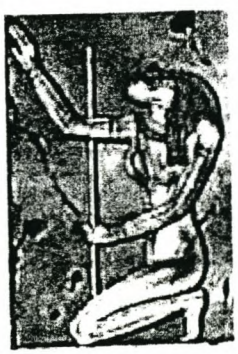

Figure 3.1.6

Figure 3.1.7

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Figure 3.1.10

Figure 3.1.11

3.2 "Fertility dolls"

Figure 3.2.1

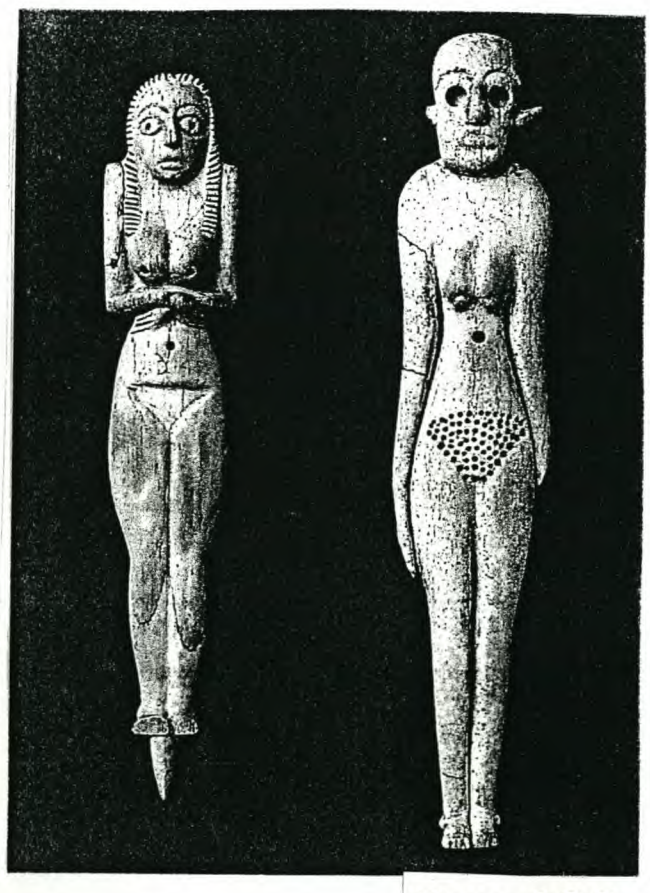

Figure 3.2.2

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Figure 3.2.6

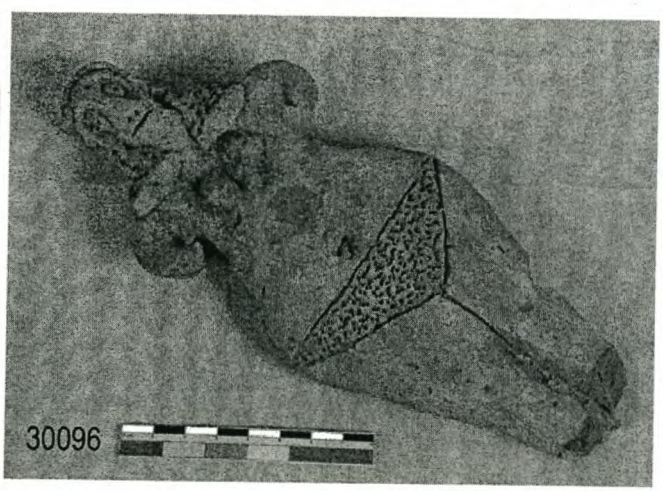

Figure 3.2.7

3.3 *Cippi*

Figure 3.3.1a

Figure 3.3.1 b

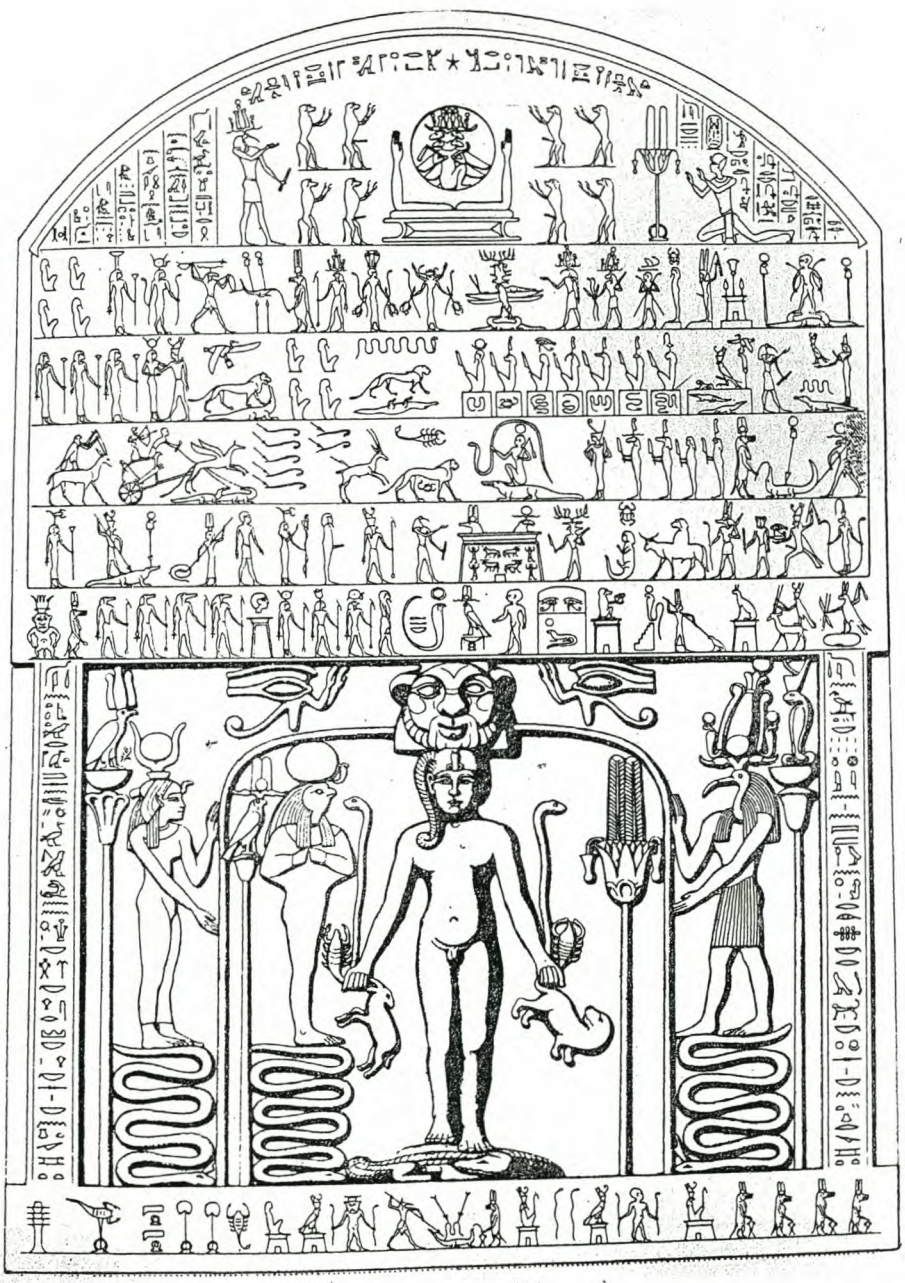

Figure 3.3.1 c

Figure 3.3.2

Figure 3.3.3

Figure 3.3.4

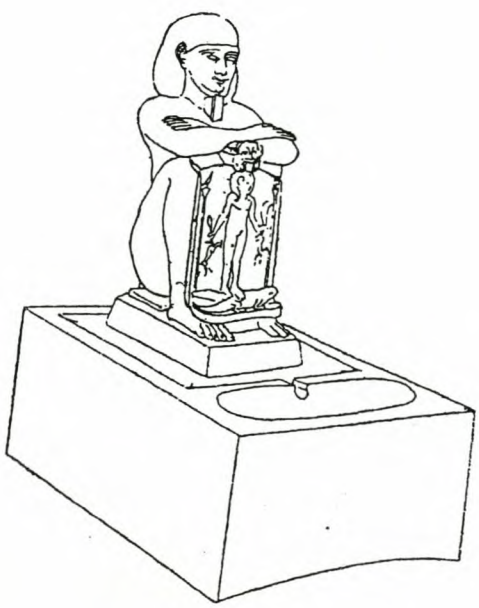

Figure 3.3.5

Figure 3.3.6

3.4 Magical Wands

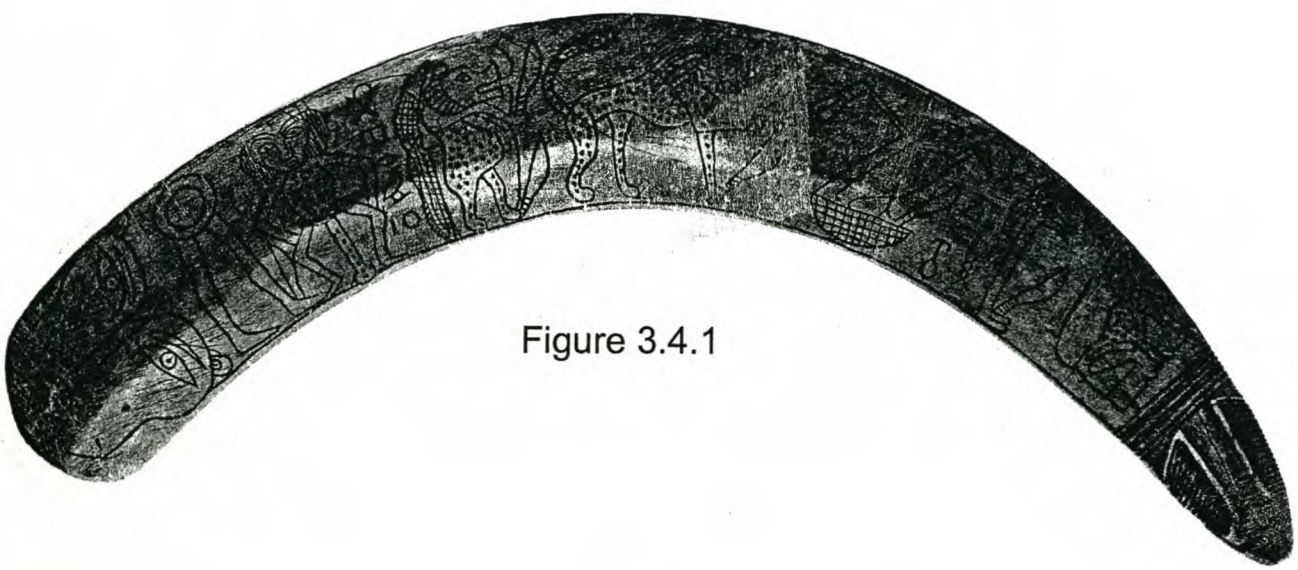

Figure 3.4.1

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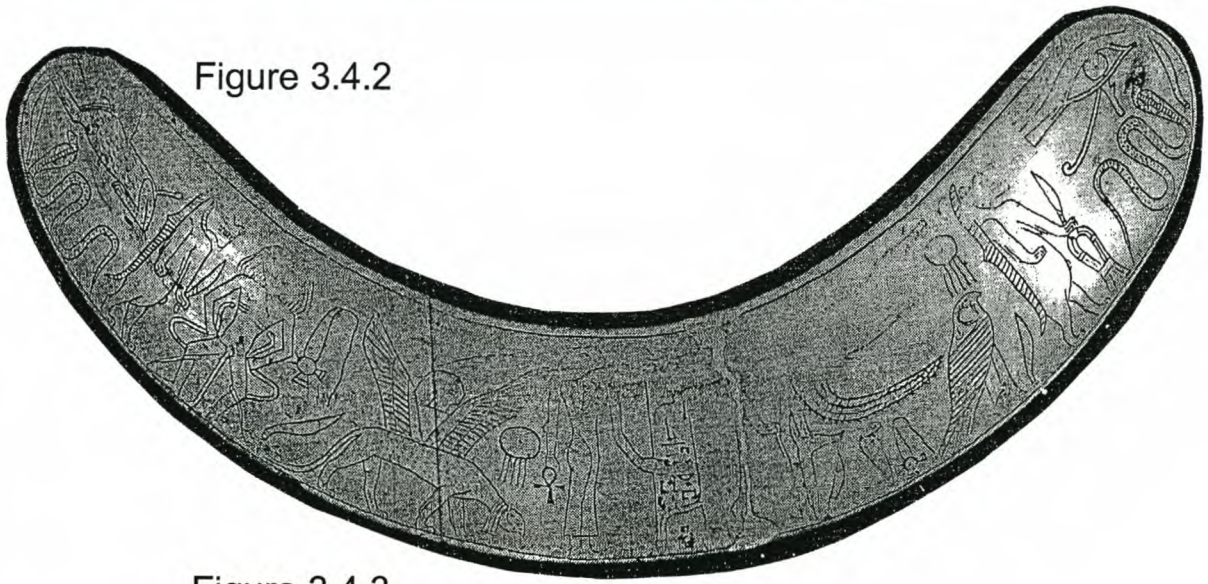


Figure 3.4.3

Figure 3.4.4

Figure 3.4.5

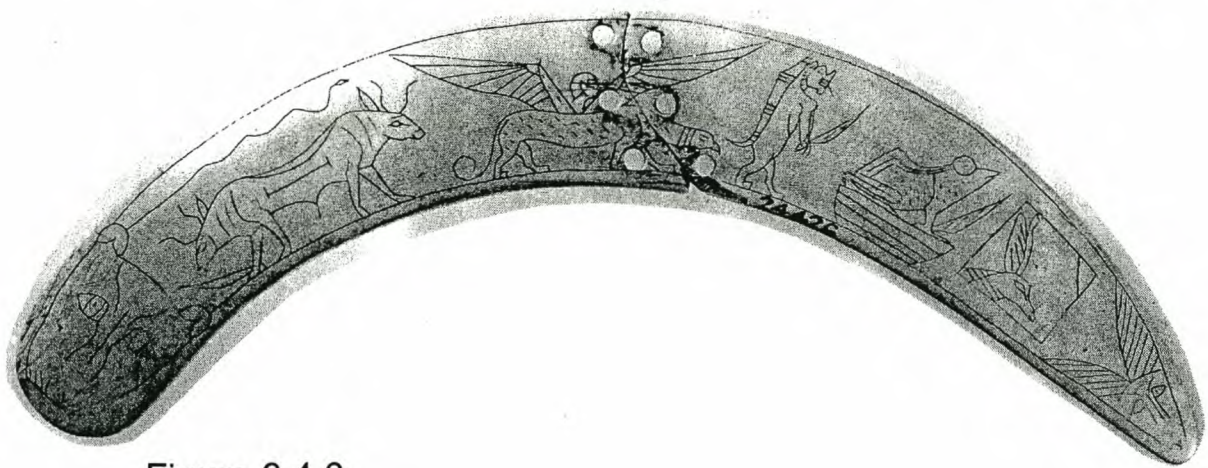
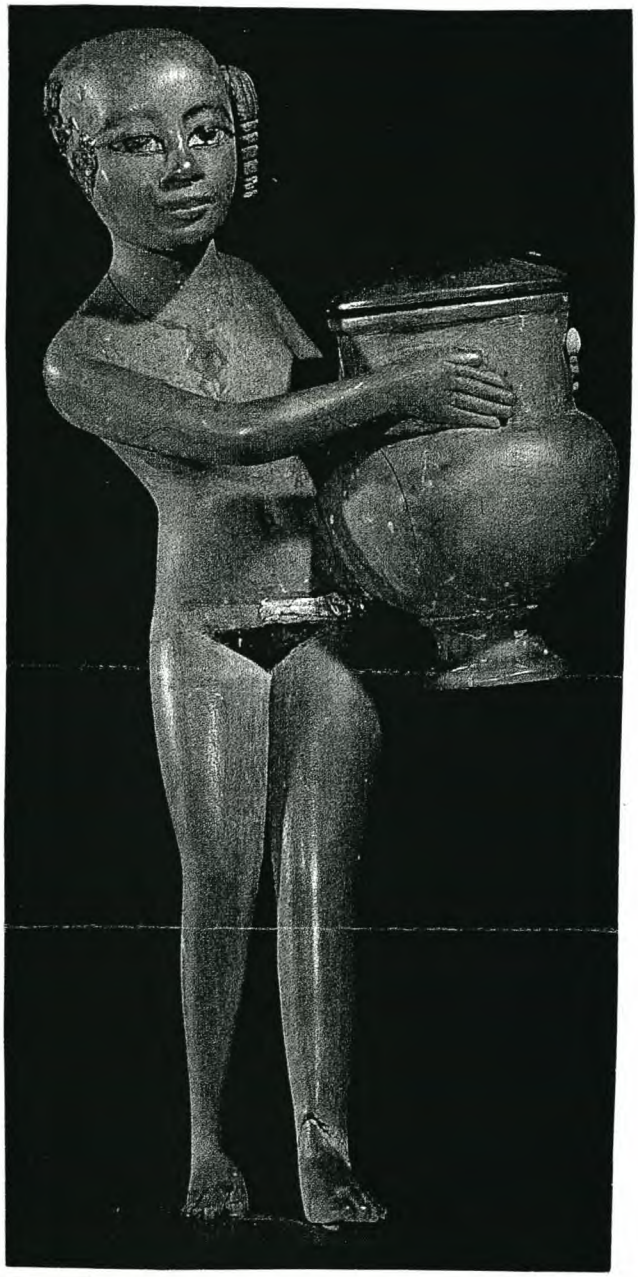


Figure 3.4.6

3.5 Amulets

Figure 3.5.1

Figure 3.5.2



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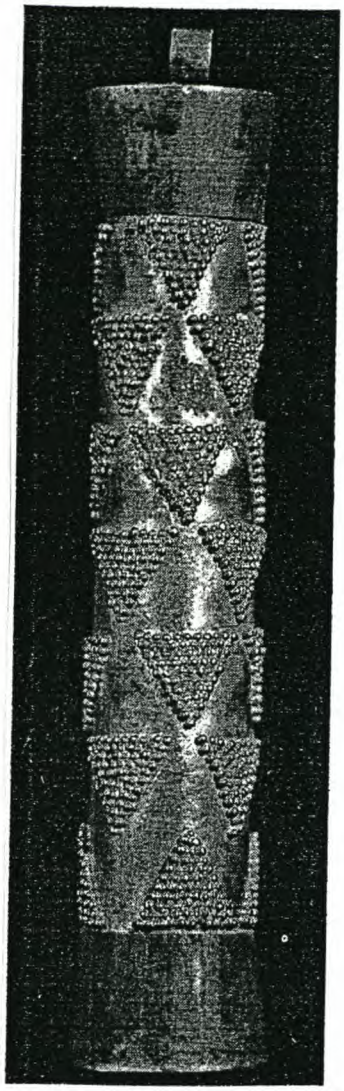

Figure 3.5.12

3.6 Iconography of birth and nursing

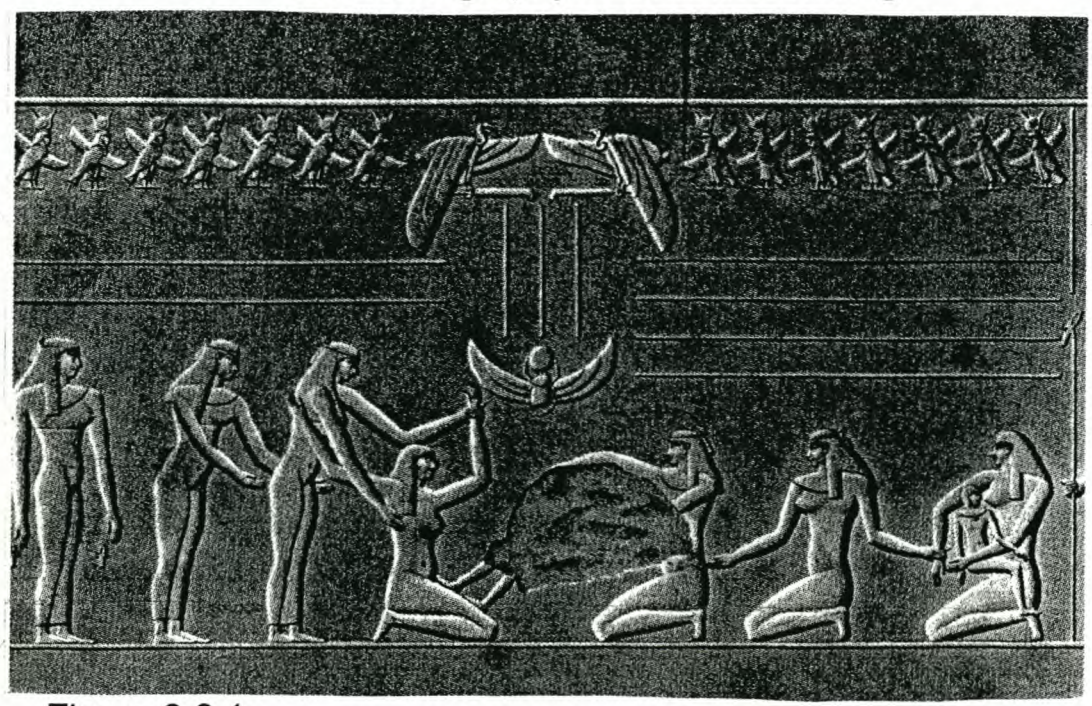

Figure 3.6.1

Figure 3.6.2

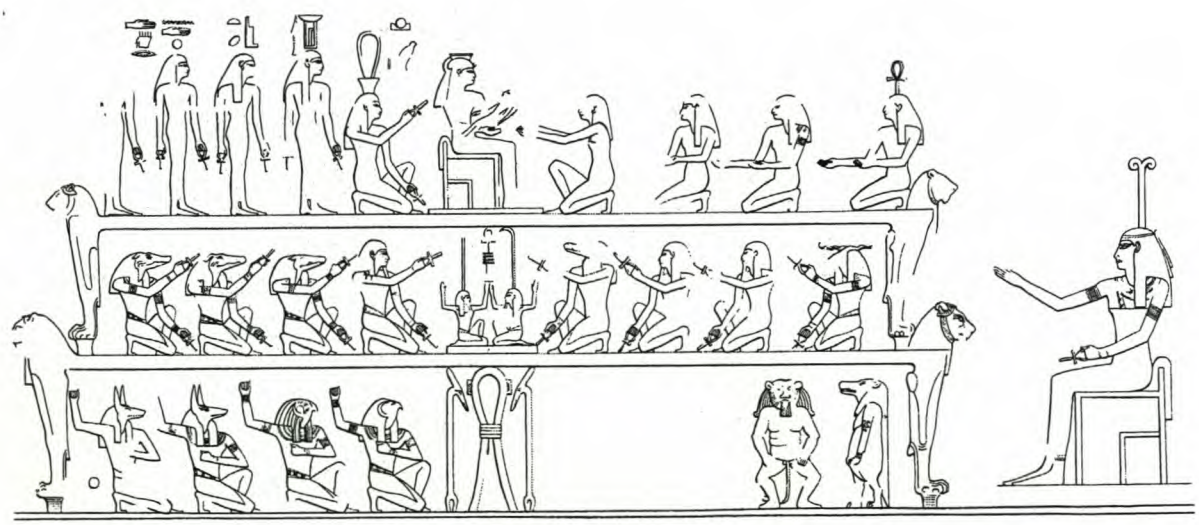

Figure 3.6.3

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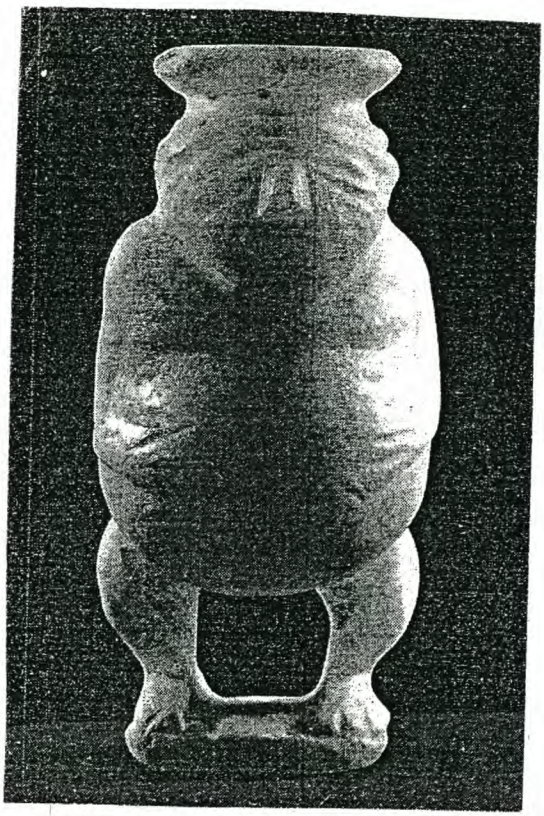

Figure 3.7.1

Figure 3.7.2

Figure 3.7 .3

Figure 3.7.4

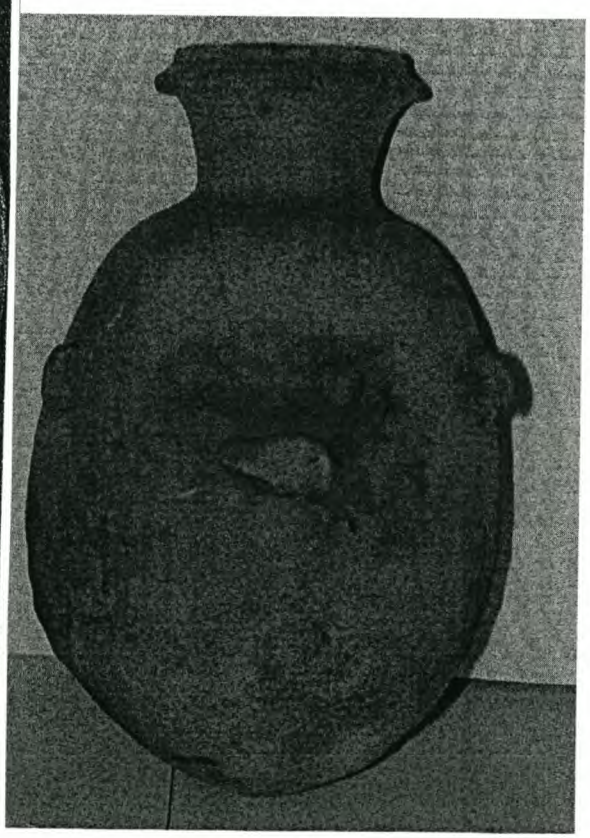

Figure 3.7.5

3.8 Magical Bricks

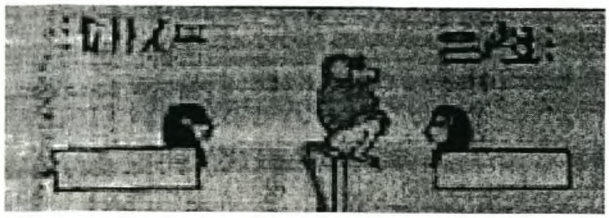

Figure 3.8.1

Figure 3.8.2

Figure 3.8.3

3.10 Hieroglyphics related to women and children

Figure 3.10.9

Figure 3.10.10

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Interviews:

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