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Iatromagical Obstetrics: Anubis, Bird Blood, and a Black Shrew

By: Andreas Winkler

1. Introduction

If not explained, magical writings can be obscure to a modern audience. Often, however, the reader of a grimoire is informed about the purpose of a specific incantation by an explanatory caption. This is a common feature in the Demotic magical papyri and numerous Coptic and Greek works of a similar kind.¹ Individual applications of spells, as can be found for example on amulets, usually do not share it, but there are exceptions. One such case is the Demotic O.Stras.Dem. 1338,² which is introduced by a heading clarifying the intent of the invocation of various deities mentioned in the text.³ Unfortunately, the ostrakon discussed here is not provided with a rubric. The reason for this ought to be that it is not a formulary but a text produced for a single occasion—the text appears to be written for a named individual. As such it can be labelled as an applied text, which in all probability was taken from a grimoire. To avoid vagueness, let this paper be “captioned” with the following purpose: to establish and discuss the content of a pottery ostrakon containing a Demotic iatromagical text.⁴

¹ *PDM*; *PGM*; *Suppl.Mag.* I–II. For the sake of convenience, *PDM* and *PGM* are quoted in accordance with Betz (ed.), *Greek Magical Papyri* (1992).

² Spiegelberg, “Aus der Straßburger Sammlung” (1911): 34–7. An improved reading is furnished by Ritner, “Egyptian Magical Practice” (1995), 3343–44, and more recently by Love and Zellmann-Rohrer, *Traditions in Transmission* (2022).

³ The spell aimed at inducing menstruation: $r(\ddot{s}) n d.i.t hy snfm h.t (n) s-ḥm.t$, “Spell for allowing the blood to flow from the body of a woman.”

⁴ Demotic magical texts on ostraca are rare (Dieleman, “Greco-Egyptian Magical Papyri” [2019], 283–321, esp. 286–89). In addition to the mentioned Strasbourg ostrakon, which is the only other proper spell on such a substrate, the following texts can be included in the category in the narrower sense: *O.Leid.Dem.* 331–32; ODK-LS 7 (Devauchelle, “Cinq ostraca démotiques” [1982–1985]: 139–40). The first and last are curses, while the second text appears to be a protective amulet. *ST* III 2104, a wooden tablet containing a curse, also deserves mention, as does *O.Saq.Dem.* 5, a spell against crocodiles. The latter, however, is not properly an ostrakon but a fragment of an inscribed bowl. A few other texts can be drawn into this group, but their classification as magical texts is uncertain. Greek texts of this kind are also rare: *PGM* O 1–2, 5; *Suppl.Mag.* II 58, 67–8, and 89 (see Martín Hernández & Torallas Tovar, “Ostrakon” [2014]: 780–800, esp. 795–97). There are a number of ostraca containing magical texts from earlier periods. Some of these are discussed by Dieleman, “Egypt” (2019), 87–114.

The piece is known to me only from a black-and-white photograph (11 × 7.2 cm)⁵ kept in the Gustavianum, Uppsala University Museum. The ostrakon once belonged to Sten V. Wångstedt and is labelled DOW 113. The acronym stands for Demotic Ostrakon Wångstedt.⁶ A note appended to the photograph indicates that he bought the text in Cairo in 1966. The Swedish scholar is known to have procured smaller ancient Egyptian artefacts, such as Coptic and Demotic ostraca and ushebti figurines, from the Cairo Museum Shop, which at the time sold such objects, or from one of the state-authorized antiquities dealers. Regrettably, no information is available regarding the venue from which the piece was acquired. After Wångstedt's death in 1986, his remaining antiquities were sold, including this ostrakon, whose current whereabouts are unknown. His personal papers of which the photograph was part reached the Museum shortly thereafter.

Wångstedt did not register the color of the pottery, and the black-and-white image does not allow it to be determined. He did however provide the measurements cited below. The text is written with a brush of medium thickness, suggesting that it dates to the Ptolemaic period. The ductus places the writing in the third or second centuries BC rather than the first. Since the reverse side of the ostrakon was not photographed, it is assumed that it was uninscribed.

The text is generally well preserved, but the writing is faded at the left corner of the first line. The second and last lines also suffer from faded and smeared out ink, particularly in the middle. This obstructs an entirely satisfactory reading of the final passage. Besides salt covering signs, it is occasionally difficult to decide what is ink, smeared out writing, or darkened spots on the surface.

2. Edition

Provenance: Egypt

Measurements: 18 × 10.5 cm

Material: Pottery

Date: 3rd/2nd cent. BC

Inscribed surface: Obverse

There is a more substantial number of such texts in Coptic (Bélanger-Sarrazin, “Catalogue des textes magiques coptes” [2017]: 367–408 and “Malédiction copte” [2017]: 119–22; Blumell & Dosoo, “Dark-Eyed Beauty” [2018]: 207–8, nn. 41–2).

⁵ The photograph has been cut from an original size to the current one; traces of scissor trimming can be observed on the bottom half of the photograph. It presents roughly a half-size reproduction of the ostrakon.

⁶ The figure signifies the item number of the antiquities that he owned. It is not the 113th ostrakon, but the 113th artefact to enter his possession. Wångstedt also left behind a preliminary transcription and translation of the text, but some readings differ from those presented here.




Transcription


1. *ink pꜣy bꜣh (n) mdꜣ r gꜣ bꜣ*
2. *bn-*i*w ꜣ tꜣyꜣfꜣ mw.t (n) ꜣt.t ms.tꜣꜣfꜣ*
3. *mn-mtwꜣy tꜣyꜣy mw.t ink ꜣnpw*
4. *pꜣ hꜣry-s[ꜣ]tꜣ(n) n Wsꜣr twꜣy thꜣ(.w)*
5. *n snfn hb twꜣy thꜣ(.w) (n) snfn*
6. *by twꜣy grꜣ n pꜣ thꜣ n wꜣ mꜣm*
7. *kmy twꜣy wꜣb n pꜣ thꜣ n (wꜣ.t) b/hꜣs(.t)*
8. *ꜣtwꜣyꜣ swꜣh n pꜣ thꜣ n wꜣ.t ih.t km.t twꜣy*
9. *snꜣ (n) ꜣ tꜣ mꜣ hw.t (?) n Ta-hꜣrd.t (?) /ntyꜣ hn sꜣ*

Translation


| I am this phallus-glans against weakness. | His/its womb-mother will not give birth to him/it.
| I do not have a mother. I am Anubis, | the Chief of Secrets of Osiris. I am anointed | with the
blood of (an) ibis. I am anointed with the blood of | (a) “night raven.” I avert the affliction of a
black | shrew. I turn around the affliction of (a) calf. | I curse the affliction of a black cow. I |
restrain the ... of Tachrates (?), which is inside (her) back.

Textual Notes

1. . The interpretation of the group is not without complications. The first sign has been understood as the masculine demonstrative pronoun *pꜣy*, partially being overwritten by what follows. The reading is uncertain, however. The first sign of the noun can be taken as either *b* or *d*, elsewhere written as  (*hb* on l. 5) and  (*mdꜣ* on l. 1) respectively. The vertical stroke in both signs is straighter, not slanting upwards, as it appears to be in the present case. Contrary to the present example, the horizontal bar also extends below the intersection of the two strokes. But in the last word on this line (see below), *b* lacks this feature. The two following signs can be read as *ꜣ*, one full writing, which seems to have an extra stroke running across (cf. *ꜣt.t* on l. 2), and a truncated end or middle form, which can also be read as *h* (*thꜣ* on l. 5; *snꜣ* on l. 9). There are no attested words in Demotic that fit either spelling. If *b* is accepted, given the use of the phallus determinative, it is possible to read *bꜣh*, “penis” or “glans.” The term appears to be otherwise unattested in Demotic but is present in Coptic as ⲃⲁⲗ (Crum, *CoptDict.*, 47b). In

light of the possibilities and the context of the spell, *bꜣḥ* is a palatable solution, but doubts remain. The collocation *bꜣḥ (n) mḏꜥ* is attested in the medical text of P.Louvre E 32847, vso xii 5 (Bardinet, *Médecins et magiciens* [2018]) from the New Kingdom. The practitioner’s self-identification with a phallus may not be a unique instance. *PDM* xiv 322 is a fragmentary sequence of an incantation designed to win favor (*r(ꜥ) n dꜣ.t ḥs.t*) for the magician performing the spell (*PDM* xiv 309–34). In the cited and the surrounding lines, the conjuror identifies himself with various potent beings, among others a shrew (see n. 46 below), but also with something that is written with both the phallus and the flesh determinatives: . The rest of the word is unfortunately lost in a lacuna. Although not recognized in the Chicago translation of the text, the *ed.pr.* restores the passage as “phallus.” No transliteration of the word is suggested, however (see n. 7 below). That is, the practitioner would utter: “I am the phallus.” The phallus on this reading is described as having divine powers of protection.

—. *gbꜣ*, “weakness.” The end of the word is faded, but only the determinative is problematic. It is not clearly visible. The traces could be taken as a fallen enemy or the flesh determinatives (cf., e.g., *snf* l. 5). The determinative impacts how the word is to be interpreted. The first of these suggestions implies the reading given, while the second could point to *gdꜣ*, “hand.” The latter makes less sense in context.

2. : [tꜣyꜥf]. The word following the negation is almost entirely obliterated. Only smeared out traces of ink can still be seen. Nothing can be securely read, but an article or possessive pronoun would be the most logical option, and the remains of ink resemble the suggested reading more than a first-person suffix pronoun *ꜥy*, which would give nonsense: the magician would negate his own ritual existence by referring to himself.

—. *ꜣt.t*, “womb.” Due to abrasion the first determinative is not fully legible. It is presumably the flesh sign. There seems to be a second, perhaps the animal hide determinative, but this is unclear. Usually the word is spelled with the regular *t* instead of *ꜣ* (Erichsen, *Glossar*, 13). Considering the bovine imagery found in the text, the word could also be understood as a deliberate pun on *ꜣt.t*, “cow” (cf. Leitz & Löffler, *Chnum* [2019], 133). The collocation *mwt (n) ꜣt.t*, “womb-mother,” appears unattested elsewhere. Since *mwt* can also mean “placenta” (Quack, “Geburt eines Gottes?” [2015], 320–21), it is tempting to read the passage as: “... placenta and womb will not give birth,” but such an understanding fits poorly with bodily realities. The expression probably stresses biological motherhood (cf. P.Leid. I 384 ix 9; *Esna* III 187B).


—. *ms.t=f*, “give birth (to) [him/it].” Given that the verb is written in its pronominal form, a suffix pronoun is expected to follow. Although there seem to be traces of ink, it is difficult to discern what pronoun was attached, but a slanting stroke is faintly visible, which could fit the third person suffix pronoun *f*. It is assumed that the reconstructed *f* refers to either the weakness or a person being born.

4. *mn-mtwꜣy tꜣyꜣ mw.t*, lit. “I do not have my mother.”

—. *hꜣy-sšꜣ(ꜣ)*, “Chief of Secrets.” The title is often associated with Anubis, who in numerous instances in the religious and magical corpora is identified as such. The epithet designates the role of the god as being in charge of the mummification process of his father Osiris. It is also related to magic (DuQuesne, “Anubis Master of Secrets” [1998], 105–21; Ritner, *Mechanics* [1994], 231–32; Smith, *Papyrus Harkness* [2005], 138; Wångstedt, “„Leichenbegleitzettel”” [1956]: 15–16). That the secrets are qualified as belonging to Osiris enhances the first aspect. The determinatives point in the same direction. Instead of the commonly written divine determinative (Erichsen, *Glossar*, 465), *sšꜣ(ꜣ)* is rendered with a linen bag and a fallen enemy, which are otherwise commonly found in words such as *qs(ꜣ)*, “entomb” (*vel sim.*) (see Cannata, “Bodies and Soles” [2007], 30–1 and 34–5).

—. *ths*, “to anoint.” Being transitive, the verb as an infinitive takes a direct object. Since no such feature is present, it can only be understood as a stative. In a Present I construction, a direct object should be morphologically definite in order for it to be introduced with *n* (see the note below).

5. *n*. The preposition after the first *snf*, “blood,” resembles *r* rather than *n*, but given the parallel at the end of the line, the suggested reading is preferable.

6. *by*, “night raven.” The word is written with the bird and divine determinatives  (cf. *hb* on l. 5) and thus resembles the spelling of *bꜣ*-soul (Erichsen, *Glossar*, 111). Although the etymological connection between the *bꜣ*-soul and the *bꜣ*-bird is contested, a polyvalence between the two can be expected. *Wb.* I, 410.10, suggests that the latter term originally designates the bird upon which the hieroglyph was modelled, a type of stork (Janák, “Saddle-Billed Stork” [2014], 1–8). It is possible that the exact species connected with the bird was muddled in the course of time; the stork that served as a model for the sign seems to have disappeared from the fauna of Egypt towards the end of the Old Kingdom. In Sahidic Coptic, *ⲃⲁⲓ* renders the Greek *νυκτικόραξ* (Crum, *CoptDict.*, 28a), which signifies a bird active at night. It is not certain, however, that the names of the two birds are etymologically connected

(Vycichl, *Dictionnaire* [1983], 25–6), although this has been suggested (e.g., Černý, *Dictionary* [1976], 20; Ward, *Four Homographic Roots* [1978], 53). The Greek term usually denotes an owl of sorts but can also refer to a night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) (Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World* [2007], 152–53). The precise type of bird blood with which the practitioner was to anoint himself remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the Bohairic equivalent of βαί is ⲙⲟϥⲗⲁⲗ (Crum, *CoptDict.*, 166b), which is related to the Demotic *mwld* (Osing, *Nominalbildung* [1976], 730; Vycichl, *Dictionnaire* [1983], 112). The latter term is usually translated as owl. The blood of said bird appears as an ingredient in the Graeco-Demotic formularies (*PDM* xiv 304; 741; 813), where it can induce blindness on its own, or together with the blood of other birds and some other ingredients function as a catalyst for oracular visions. The owl (νοκτικόραξ) is also found alongside the ibis in *PGM* IV 26–51, but in a different context. Other instances of owls in the corpus of Graeco-Egyptian Magical Papyri include: *PGM* I 223 and XXXVI 265 (νοκτιβαῶ), the latter also making use of the bird’s blood; *PGM* IV 2808 (γλαύξ); *Suppl. Mag.* II 78.7 (see the note *ad loc.*). See Eitrem, *Magical Papyri* (1925), 99–100, for the usage of the bird for medical or magical purposes in Greek and Latin texts; Coyette, “Hiboux” (2015), 100–3; Newberry, “Owls” (1951): 72–4, for general overviews of owls in ancient Egypt. The fact that the term designates a nocturnal bird as opposite to the ibis (l. 5), which is active during the day, probably plays a role in this choice.






7. *w.t.* The augmentation of the indefinite article follows the pattern of the preceding and following sentences.

—. *bhs(t)*, “calf.” It is unclear whether the scribe forgot to add an adjective or not. Perhaps one should add *km.t* after *bhs(t)*, i.e. “black calf.”

8. [tw=y]. The pronoun is incompletely preserved, but enough remains to suggest the current reading, particularly in view of the parallel construction used throughout the text (ll. 4–8).

—. *swḥ*, “curse,” is a variant spelling of the more common rendering *shwr*. Since the final *ḥ* and *h* resemble each other, there is a possibility that we are instead dealing with the word *swz*, “amputate (limbs)” (Cruz-Uribe, *Cattle Documents* [1985], 29). The second term would make sense given the context but seems less attractive than the first suggestion. The latter word is commonly written with a knife determinative in addition to a fallen enemy. Only the latter is present here. Considering this fact, it is also inappropriate to understand *swḥ* as “collect.”

9. *snḥ*, “bind.” The reading of the word is hampered by discoloration. It looks as if the scribe partially erased an earlier word, traces of which make the *n* resemble *s*.

- . *n*. Following the practice of writing out the direct object marker, *n* has been inserted.
- . [ʔ]. What is understood to be the definite article, probably the truncated form, is partially covered with salt stains and squeezed in between the end of the fallen enemy determinative of *snḥ* and the first sign of the following word. The reconstruction depends on the fact that the next word (see below) is feminine.
- . . Although the first letter is unclear, the word resembles *mḥw.t*, “family” or “clan” with some excess ink above the feminine *.t*-ending. Alternatively, it is tempting to relate the term to *μηζε*, “abscess” (Crum, *CoptDict.*, 211a), but the proposed etymology of the word is unsuitable for the current spelling: *mḥ*, “fill” (Chassinat, *Papyrus médical* [1921], 126). A graphical fluctuation between *h* and *ḥ* is possible, and the present spelling could thus be an unetymological writing. If so, a related translation will have to be sought. Wångstedt understood the word as a variant of *myh(.t)*, “wonder” (Erichsen, *Glossar*, 153). The validity of any reading is contingent on what follows.
- .  is problematic due to the uncertainty about what is ink, smeared out writing, or a darker surface. It is tempting to read the first half of the group as a version of  (*vel sim.*), the onomastic element *ta-* (Erichsen, *Glossar*, 598; Vleeming, *Demotic and Greek-Demotic Mummy Labels* [2011], 874–76). What would represent the left upper slanting stroke appears to be connected to the lower one, however, making it look semi-circular. The second part could be read as *ḥrd.t*, “child” (Erichsen, *Glossar*, 392–93), although the sign representing the seated child appears compressed. See *NB Dem.*, 1209, for *Ta-ḥrd.t*, “Tachrates.” I am grateful to Friedhelm Hoffmann for having suggested this reading of the last element of the name.
- . . The relative converter *nty* is attached to *hn* below the line. It appears to be written with slightly less ink on the brush, which suggests that it was added after the preposition had been written out.
- .  resembles *ḳ*, “rations” (Erichsen, *Glossar*, 73), but such a reading makes little sense in the given context. Another, and perhaps superior, reading is to take it as *s₃* (cf. Erichsen, *Glossar*, 404–5), equivalent to Coptic *coi*, “back (of man or beast)” (Crum, *CoptDict.*, 317b), the older *s₃* (*Wb.* IV, 8.14–15). As such, the word is rarely attested in Demotic but figures in, for instance, P.Bibl.Nat. 149 iii 14 (Stadler, *Pamonthes* [2003], 99), where it resembles the preposition *m-s₃*. This reading could be accepted, if the middle stroke has merged into the bottom of the first semi-circular sign.

3. Magical Imagery

3.1 Bloody phalluses

The spell begins with the practitioner identifying himself as a phallus-glans against weaknesses. By this utterance, the magician situates the ritual in a sexual imagery alluding to fecundity and male potency. The term used for phallus, *mdꜥ*, is relatively rare. In *PDM* xiv, the more common term is *hn(n)*. It appears mainly in contexts where the conjuror is supposed to anoint (*thꜥs*) it with different materials and have intercourse with a woman to make her desire him.⁷ The present word is found in slightly different contexts. In *PDM* xiv 144, it is part of a ritual for an oracular vision (*ph-ntr*), at 831 the ritual concerns vessel divination (*šn-hn*), and that at 975 aims to halt menstruation (*ꜥlq mw hr s-hm.t*).⁸ The two first instances are nearly identical. A bean plant is supposed to be set in a sealed vessel. After having germinated, the sprout is described as a phallus with testicles. The magician is instructed to hide it and wait for forty days until it gets “bloody.” The blood is later to be applied to his eyes in order to reach the desired outcome. In the last instance, the phallus is mentioned in a simile. The practitioner is told to take out a “tampon” soaked in a potion from a woman in the manner of a man’s member.

The connection with blood is also found in the present spell. In lines 4 to 6, the ritualist states that he is anointed (*thꜥs*) with the blood of an ibis and an owl.⁹ Considering some of the

⁷ *PDM* xiv 931; 1044; 1046; 1048; [1140]; 1158; 1161; 1193. The only exception is *PDM* xiv 682 where it emerges in a spell purposed to cause “evil sleep” (*in-qdy.k bin*), which could also lead to death. *PGM* VII 191–92 is an “eternal love-binding spell,” where the glans of the penis is to be rubbed with three ingredients before intercourse in order to insure a woman’s fidelity. *PGM* XXXVI 283–94 relates to a similar topic with the addition that the womb of the woman will be opened and receive the seed of the person casting the spell. See also *PDM* lxi 62; *Suppl.Mag.* II 76.5–6. It is unknown which of the two terms would have been used in *PDM* xiv 322 if the original restoration is correct (see the note to l. 1). *Hn(n)* is regularly written with both the phallus and the flesh determinatives in the text, while *mdꜥ* has only the latter. The phallus determinative is usually the demotic rather than the hieratic version, as it is in the instance under discussion. This potential reference to a phallus also appears in a slightly different context than the other attestations. The magician identifies himself with it as a means of gaining divine powers.

⁸ See also *PDM* xiv 953.

⁹ See the note *ad loc.*

parallels from *PDM* xiv, it is possible that the utterance hints at a ritual action. That is, the magician in fact anointed himself with blood while performing the rite.¹⁰

The blood may have been meant to bestow with qualities of the two birds on the practitioner,¹¹ but depending on the situation, blood and, for instance, water and other bodily fluids can in a magical context be equated with semen,¹² as found in the Greek spells of, e.g., *Suppl.Mag.* II 79 (3rd century AD) and the Nubian golden lamella T.Cair. JdÉ 71204 (3rd or 4th cent. AD).¹³ In the latter spell, which concerns the fertility of a woman, the magician offers his client “waters”¹⁴ of a falcon, from the breasts of an ibis,¹⁵ and from Anubis. The woman is invited to lie down and open her womb so that she can receive these fluids in order to get pregnant. In the former spell, the practitioner is supposed to pour blood of two divine beings into the womb of woman so as to produce the same result (cf. also *PGM XXXVI* 283–94).¹⁶ The connection between wombs and blood can also be seen in *PGM LXII* 103–6 from the third century AD. The spell gives directions for how to produce an inscribed amulet inducing

¹⁰ It is possible that the blood stood for another ingredient, perhaps an herb of some sort. Gory substances were occasionally mentioned as secret names of plants and similar (Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites* [2005], 189–98). These were occasionally explained in the grimoires. No such enumeration, however, equates the blood of these birds with a secret name for something else, which renders the explanation unlikely.

¹¹ Westendorf, “Blut” (1975), 840–42; O’Rourke, “*m.t*-Woman” (2007): 169–70.

¹² *Suppl.Mag.* II 79.1–11n. (cf. Leitz, “Beginn des Lebens” [2000], 133–35). Although the idea of semen originating from blood—present in Greek thought—could be a reason for the analogy, another contributing factor for the relation between blood and semen can be found in the fact that it was a vital component for the creation of the embryo. Blood was thought of as a binding mechanism uniting the constituents (Bardinet, *Papyrus médicaux* [1995], 139–53; Blach-Jørgensen, “Return of the Goddess” [2015], 140). See also Leitz & Löffler, *Chnum* (2019), 9–13.

¹³ Kotansky, *Magical Amulets* (1994), 361–68.

¹⁴ The connection to water is apparent in the fact that the words are lexically connected. Two of the more famous examples come from the Great Hymn to the Aten (Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten* [1938], 94.10–11) and the Tale of Two Brothers (Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* [1932], 21.5).

¹⁵ Although the word is clearly written as ἴβαιος (for ἴβεος), Kotansky, “Textual Amulets” (2019), 551–52, apparently later reinterprets it as a rendering of Isis without explanation.

¹⁶ A related observation was made in Egypt during the 1820s by Lane, *Manners and Customs* (1890), 237: “Some women step over the body of a decapitated man seven times, without speaking, to become pregnant; and some with the same desire, dip in the blood a piece of cotton wool, of which they afterwards make use in a manner I must decline mentioning.”

bleeding from a woman's genitals by opening up her womb (see below). The instructions state that it is to be written using sheep blood.¹⁷

That the identification of the magician with a phallus-glans indicates ritualized intercourse and thus injection of the life-producing liquids is possible. Such a role for Anubis, or priests disguised as the god, has been suggested,¹⁸ but might overstep the available evidence in the present case.¹⁹ Although nothing is explicitly said to be inserted into a womb in this text, the imagery of all these spells is similar on a conceptual level. The action imbued the practitioner with sexual potency, a quality that would probably enhance the efficacy of the spell.

3.2 *The motherless Anubis*

In addition to the phallic imagery,²⁰ the practitioner identifies himself as being without a mother (*mn-mtwꜣy tꜣyꜣy mw.t*) in line 3. The proclamation is surely motivated in part by the statement in line 2. It can be interpreted in various ways but should be connected to the following assertion where the magician states that he is Anubis, the Chief of Secrets of Osiris.²¹ The title not only positions the conjurer as the chief embalmer but also connects him to the

¹⁷ To use blood as ink or as an ingredient in to write down a magical formula is a common phenomenon in the magical procedures of the Graeco-Roman period: e.g., *PGM* IV 2005; 2100–6; 2208; VII 222; 300a; 652; VIII 70; XI.a 2; XII 145; XIII 315; XIX.b 3; XXXVI 71; 265. See Beck, “Rezept und zwei Beschwörungen” (2018), 47–8, for references to such practices in Coptic sources; Audouit, “Chauve-souris” (2016): 33–4, for earlier attestations.

¹⁸ Klotz, “Lecherous Pseudo-Anubis” (2012), 383–96, esp. 396.

¹⁹ As already noted (see n. 7 above), the spells involving the magician's phallus often include the instruction to have intercourse with the target of the spell. In a Demotic manual for “female sexual health,” P.Berlin P 13602, Fr. A 10 (von Lieven & Quack, “Frauenkrankheit” [2018], 237–74), the practitioner is told not to engage in such activities. The purpose of the latter spell is, however, unlike the ones found in, for instance, *PDM* xiv aimed at closing the womb of the “patient.” See below for this notion.

²⁰ One cannot but wonder if the imagery is related to the expression *wnš didi*, lit. “copulating jackal,” which seems to have been used similarly to “randy devil” (e.g., Klotz, “Lecherous Pseudo-Anubis” [2012], 383–96, esp. 388; Mathieu, *Poésie amoureuse* [1996], 173, n. 578). See, however, n. 22 below.

²¹ The exact phrase is also encountered in the fragmentary spell of *PGM Suppl.* 185–208 (cf. *PDM* xiv 46). Further identifications with Anubis appear in *PGM* I 247–62; *PGM* IV 126; *PDM* xiv 595; 812. See Hopfner, “Religionsgeschichtliche Gehalt” (1935): 97–9, for Anubis in the Demotic magical corpus; Ritner & Scalf, “Anubis, Archer Figures, and Demotic Magic” (2019): 185–212, for an additional role of this deity. See also n. 75 below for attestation in earlier magical corpora.

fundamentals of magic.²² Through the identification, the procedure is assimilated to the embalming ritual, gaining authority from the powerful Osirian imagery.²³

Anubis admittedly has a complicated connection to his mother(s), identified with a host of goddesses, including Isis, Nephthys, Bastet, and Hesat.²⁴ The non-existence of a mother can mean different things depending on the context. The statement can imply non-existence,²⁵ but such an interpretation is nonsensical in the present context; the cynocephalic god is a vehicle for realization of the spell. One of the versions relating to the birth of Anubis is reported by Plutarch, who tells that the god was fathered by Osiris with Nephthys. After the birth, the “biological” mother abandoned him in fear of her husband, Seth/Typhon, and the child was therefore raised by her sister (Plut.*De Is. et Os.* 14, 38, and 44).²⁶ Even if the same author claims that Isis took care of the young god as her own child, it is still possible that the epithet chosen by the magician refers to this episode.²⁷

There is another, and perhaps better, interpretation, however. The expression could hint at primordial virtues of Anubis with whom the magician is identified. The statement can be compared with, for instance, a passage from Coffin Text Spell 261, in which the deceased is identified with *Hkz*. The creative power of this entity is acknowledged through its definition as a primeval force, including being the primary offspring of the creator.²⁸ One version, B1B0

²² See the note *ad loc.* Note also that the idiom *md.t-wnš*, “jackal language,” in *Setne* II vi 13 serving as a designation of the magician’s efficacious utterances probably refers to the title *hry-sšt(š)*, which can be written with a leaning jackal. The same tradition is reflected in Horapollo 1.39 (Derchain, “Miettes” [1978]: 59).

²³ See, for instance, the depiction of Anubis standing by the mummy on a bier in connection to the attraction spell in *PDM* xii 134–46 (cf. Klotz, “Lecherous Pseudo-Anubis” [2012], 391–96). On the meaning of the image, see Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites* (2005), 34, n. 38. A number of epithets referring to the mortuary role of Anubis in the magical corpus are mentioned by Love, *Code-Switching* (2016), 126–27, n. 8, and 130. Anubis as a keyholder, portraying the god in a funerary function (see n. 78 below), is also encountered in the erotic spells of *PGM* IV 340; 1465; *Suppl.Mag.* I 46.3; 47.3; 48J.3–4; 49.10–11. See also *Suppl.Mag.* I 42.24.

²⁴ Grenier, *Anubis alexandrin et romain* (1977), 19–21; Griffiths, *Iside et Osiride* (1970), 317–19; 447; 465–66; Quaegebeur, “Anubis, fils d’Osiris” (1977): 119–23.

²⁵ Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir* (2009), 146–47. Cf. n. 27 below.

²⁶ See also Feder, “Nephthys – Die Gefährtin im Unrecht” (2008): 69–83.

²⁷ The passage would thus be comparable with the earlier expression *iw.ty mw.tf(vel sim.)*, “motherless,” found in, for instance, P.Chassinat III 2.2 (Barbotin, “Papyrus Chassinat III” [1999]: 5–50); P.Anast. V (Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* [1937], 60.10); *Eloq.Peas.* B1 95. Note that Horus can be described as ἀπάτωρ in *PGM* V 282, which should refer back to the Egyptian *mḥ iw.ty itšf*, “Fatherless child” (*LGG* VIII, 431 [s.v. *Hr*]).

²⁸ Allen, *Genesis in Egypt* (1988), 17–18; 36–8; 48–55; Ritner, *Mechanics* (1994), 15–25.

(CT III 385a), adds the description: *msy n-wn.t mw.tꜥf*, “born without a mother.”²⁹ In the New Kingdom Harris Magical Papyrus i 9rto,³⁰ Shu is described in a similar way: *nn wn mw.tꜥf*, “His mother does not exist.” The god is engendered by Atum (*wtt.n Tm*) and at the same time is self-created (*hpr dsꜥf*) according to the text. There are multiple variations of the same theme in the corpus of Egyptian religious literature describing primordial gods, such as: *ms sw iw.ty ms.twꜥf*, “Who bore himself without being born” (e.g., *BD* 15) or similar, pertaining to both male and female deities.³¹

The expressions can be compared to the Greek term ἀμήτωρ, “motherless,” applied to, for instance, Pallas Athena (e.g., Cornutus, *Theol.* 20.2; Nonnus, *Dion.* 1.84; 26.114; 37.320), Aphrodite (*Pl.Symp.* 180d; Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.5.2), and Cybele (Julian, *Or.* 5.166), often announcing a primeval self-engendering divine nature. The Christian author Lactantius (*flor.* 3rd–4th cent. AD) portrays the condition of a god in such a manner by quoting a purported oracle of Apollo on the matter (*Div.inst.* 1.7.1–2).³² He also refers to *Mercurius Termaximus* (Hermes Trismegistos). The latter apparently added the counterpart “fatherless” (ἀπάτωρ) to the description. The same epithet (ἀπάτειρα) is given to Isis in the aretology of *P.Oxy.* XI 1380.19.³³ A similar sense is implied by *Suppl.Mag.* II 65.31–34 in which the invoked deity is styled as: “self-created without the casting of seed, self-fathered (αὐτοπάτωρ) and self-mothered (αὐτομήτωρ).”³⁴

Egyptian language materials also offer parallels. The designation *pꜣ-nty mn-mt(w)ꜥf it.t* [*mw*].*t*, “The one who is without father and [moth]er,” represents the primordial god in the version of the Myth of the Sun’s Eye preserved on P.Lille 31 i 12.³⁵ The Demotic appellation

²⁹ Allen, “Coffin Text Spell 261” (1997), 17–18.

³⁰ P.Brit.Mus. EA 10042 (Leitz, *Magical and Medical Papyri* [1999], 31–50).

³¹ For instance, Isis is called: *msy(t) iw.tt ms.twꜥs*, “The one who gives birth without being born” (*Chelouit* I 11.2); Neith: *ir.t n ms.twꜥs*, “Creatrix, who has not been born” (*Esna* II 18.1).

³² The phrase is also encountered in, for instance, *Hebr.* 7.3.

³³ See Nagel, *Isis im Römischen Reich* (2019), 605.

³⁴ See the note *ad loc.*

³⁵ de Cenival, “Oeil du soleil” (1985): 95–115. An improved translation of the text is furnished by Hoffmann & Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur* (2018), 210–13. Although the word *mw.t* is not read in this treatment, it is partially restored in the *TLA*. Stadler, *Weiser und Wesir* (2009), 146, puts forward that the phrase should be qualified with *hpr dsꜥf*, “who appears by himself” or similar, but the quoted examples suggest that this is not a necessary.

mirrors the phrase: *nn it mw.t*, “without father and mother,” describing creator deities, particularly in the Graeco-Roman period. For instance, Amun-Re is entitled *hpr m h3.t nn it mw.t*, “Who appeared in the beginning without father and mother” (*Urk.* VIII 79b). Atum is similarly called *qm3 sw ds3f nn it mw.t*, “Self-created without father and mother” (*Chelouit* III 135.8),³⁶ and Ptah is given the epithet *nb m š3c nn it mw.t*, “Who creates at the beginning without father and mother” (*Edfou* II, 37.5).³⁷

By this interpretation, the magician would become part of the pre-created world through the utterance, acquiring the powers of a divine creator, perhaps even being self-created. Such aspects can be connected to Anubis. Plutarch recounts that the dog-faced god could be equated with Kronos, personifying time, capable of begetting everything from himself and conceiving everything within himself. Thus, the god was called “dog” (*Plut. De Is. et Os.* 44). The association between Anubis and his creative power is often viewed as partially dependent on a pun between the participle κύων “conceiving” and the noun κύων “dog.”³⁸ The present description of Anubis as a primeval deity, however, suggests that indigenous Egyptian theology could also make such a connection without the need for wordplay to justify it.

The basis for claiming an identification with Anubis, and particularly the above discussed aspect of the god, would lie in the powers of a (self)-generating god, bestowing on the practitioner the same type of creativity that brought forth the world.³⁹ These powers would thus come to be used in the magical performance.

3.3 *Animal analgesia and auto-generative shrews*

The penultimate section of the incantation concerns the elimination of afflictions (*th*) in three animals, which can be related to both the fertility imagery and the role of the magician as Anubis. The three—a common number in the magical grimoires—are a black shrew, a calf, and a black cow.⁴⁰ The latter two mammals can be connected to the god in his role as the

³⁶ Zivie, “Rites d’érection” (1979), 487.

³⁷ Reymond, “Late Edfu Theory” (1965): 69; Sauneron & Yoyotte, “Naissance du monde” (1959), 66.

³⁸ Griffiths, *Iside et Osiride* (1970), 61 and 467–68.

³⁹ Ritner, *Mechanics* (1994), 17–20.

⁴⁰ See Eitrem, *Magical Papyri* (1925), 92–3. Black cows are common in the corpus of magical papyri (e.g., *PGM* I 5; III 384; IV 909–10; 1440; 3149; XIII 13; 360; 685; *PDM* xiv 88; 165; 639; 774; 778) just as many other animals (oxen, rams, asses, dogs, etc.) of the same color. Since Anubis is also connected to the color black (DuQuesne, *Black and Gold* [1996], 24–9), another bond between the conjurer and the ritual animals was

“overseer of bovines” (*imy-r(ḥ) ih.w*)⁴¹ or similar epithets,⁴² although he is not directly referred to as such in the spell. Identifying himself with Anubis, the practitioner may be assumed to have realized this aspect of the deity in taking away the afflictions of the cattle just as a good herdsman would. These two animals furthermore represent fertility.⁴³ The connection between female fertility and the cow is well attested in Egypt, and through the combination with the calf the relation between mother and child is brought forward. One represents the one giving birth, the other, the one born.⁴⁴ The shrew (*m̄m*),⁴⁵ however, at first does not seem to fit the imagery. Though the animal appears in the Graeco-Demotic grimoires,⁴⁶ none of the instances provides a viable connection with cows and calves or childbirth. Earlier instances of the animal in such or similar contexts are no more illuminating,⁴⁷ with a potential exception in the Late-period

established. The color will furthermore have connoted fecundity as it was closely connected to the fertile inundated lands (Pinch, “Red Things” [2001], 183).

⁴¹ See Smith, *Papyrus Harkness* (2005), 104.

⁴² Quaegebeur, “Anubis, fils d’Osiris” (1977): 119–30.

⁴³ See Störk, “Rind” (1984), 261; Troy, “Father Bull and Mother Cow” (2018), 94–111.

⁴⁴ Similar imagery is evoked by a passage referring to birth in the Greek-Coptic codex Michigan MS 136 (Worrell, “Magical and Medical Texts” [1935]: 17–37; Meyer & Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic* [1994], no. 43); the text has recently been reedited by Zellmann-Rohrer and Love, *Traditions in Transmission* [2022]). As part of a longer section concerning a woman in labor, lines 80–104 contain pastoral imagery of cows and other domestic animals birthing and nourishing their young; black and white sheep are mentioned as well as oxen and calves. The passage also contains several references to shepherds (ⲱⲟⲥ) and herdsmen (ⲁⲙⲉ and ⲉⲗⲟⲓⲣ).

⁴⁵ The designation *m̄m* already attested in the Middle Kingdom is rendered as ⲙⲙ in Old Coptic, while the animal is otherwise referred to as ⲁⲗⲗ (Crum, *CoptDict.*, 6a and 55b) corresponding to the Greek *μυγαλή* or *μύγαλος* in the *PGM*. The later Coptic term derives from the Demotic *ʿl*, written as *ʿr* in earlier times (see Černý, *Dictionary* [1976], 5; Vycichl, *Dictionnaire* [1983], 8; Brunner-Traut, “Spitzmaus” [1965]: 146). Vittmann, “Grammar, Lexicography and Religion” (1997/1998), 99–101, suggests that the two terms *m̄m* and *ʿr* designate two different kinds of shrews, while Černý, *Dictionary* (1976), 5; Brunner-Traut, “Spitzmaus” (1965): 146, propose that the two words were ultimately derived from the same root.

⁴⁶ *PGM* IV 2455; 2464; 2592; *PDM* xiv 323; 376–78; 744; 1207; *Suppl.Mag.* I 43.2. The spells are designed to both create attraction between a man and a woman or induce blindness. The latter probably can be connected to the animal’s association with Horus in Letopolis, *Mhn.ty-(n)-ir.ty* (see Brunner-Traut, “Spitzmaus” [1965]: 153–57; Vernus, *Athribis* [1978], 398–99). Its liver could also be used to poison a man. Worn in a ring it could give fame (Felber *et al.*, *Spitzmausmumie* [1997], 12; Hopfner, *Tierkult* [1913], 34). In *PDM* xiv 323 the conjuror identifies himself with the animal (see above).

⁴⁷ In P.Ebers a powder made of the shrew is used to dry out wounds or to heal a sick ear, while the Ilahun Veterinary Papyrus refers to its smell (Brunner-Traut, “Spitzmaus” [1965]: 146–47). The scent of the animal is

iatromagical P.Brooklyn 47.218.2. There a divine form of the animal used as a simile appears in a spell directed against stillborn children.⁴⁸

It is possible that the shrew—a nocturnal animal corresponding in that aspect to the “night raven”—was included because it represented yet another aspect of birth, autogenesis. *BD* 145 claims that the animal appeared in primordial times.⁴⁹ But more relevant is the so-called Illustrated Brooklyn Magical Papyrus⁵⁰ (v 7) from the Late Period, which refers to Amun as a: *ꜥꜥꜥ*⁵¹ *pr m sin*, “Shrew that went forth from clay.” Although *sin* is usually regarded as a superior quality of clay from which, for instance, figurines and bricks could be produced rather than regular Nile mud,⁵² the text brings to mind three passages from Pliny (*Nat.hist.* 9.84), Diodorus Siculus (1.10), and Plutarch (*Quest.conviv.* 2.3), echoing the ideas expressed in the papyrus.⁵³ The authors mention that mice (*musculus*/μῦς)⁵⁴ were brought forth by the soils of Egypt, still being partially shapeless as they crawled out. Pliny in particular connects this event to the wet mud produced by the Nile, while Diodorus states that this happened at certain times in Thebes. In this connection, the etymology of *ꜥꜥꜥ* is relevant. The term relates to *ꜥꜥ* or *ꜥꜥꜥ.t*, Coptic (o)ome, which designates a type of muddy soil.⁵⁵ The name of the animal should accordingly be understood as “the muddy one,” referring to the legend of mice crawling out of the mud.⁵⁶

also mentioned in the Manual of the Sachmet priest (Osing & Rosati, *Papiri geroglifici e ieratici* [1989], 199 and 209–10).

⁴⁸ Guerneur, “Papyrus médico-magique” (2012), 548 and 553.

⁴⁹ Cf. *LGG* II, 114–15 [s.v. *ꜥꜥꜥmw*]; Ikram, “Monument in Miniature” (2005), 337.

⁵⁰ Sauneron, *Papyrus magique* (1970).

⁵¹ See n. 45 above.

⁵² Harris, *Lexicographical Studies* (1961), 202–4. Perhaps the material was chosen due to the productive nature associated with it.

⁵³ Agut-Labordère, “Musaraignes” (2006): 269. The connection between mud and shrews was pointed out early on by Hopfner, *Tierkult* (1913), 33. See also Dawson, “Mouse” (1924): 83; Brunner-Traut, “Spitzmaus” (1965): 154–55; Burton, *Diodorus Siculus* (1972), 52–3; Heerma van Voss, “Drei Kleintiere” (2004), 235.

⁵⁴ The shrew and the mouse were clearly recognized as different animals by the Egyptians, but the two were in reality often conflated. The animal sarcophagi for shrews often contained mice (Vymazalová & Šůová, “Ancient Egyptian Mouse” [2016]: 189–90). It can be assumed that they were to some degree interchangeable (See also Chassinat, *Mystère d’Osiris* [1968], 601–4; Guerneur, “Papyrus médico-magique” [2012], 553, n. 67; Heerma van Voss, “Drei Kleintiere” [2004], 235).

⁵⁵ Agut-Labordère, “Musaraignes” (2006): 270.

⁵⁶ As such the term is surely related to *ꜥꜥꜥ.t* and *ꜥꜥꜥ* discussed by O’Rourke, “*ꜥꜥꜥ.t*-Woman” (2007): 166–72 and “*ꜥꜥꜥ*-Male” (2010): 45–53. Due to the animal’s appetite—the shrew must consume roughly twice its body weight

The concept of birth from silt is not limited to mice in contemporary imagination; Plutarch also claims that snakes, cicadas, and frogs appear in this fashion. Other authors drew on the same idea, which *mutatis mutandis* can be connected to Egyptian creational accounts, mentioning that the Nile mud gave birth to frogs (Horapollo 1.25)⁵⁷ and eels (Arist.*Hist.an.* 6.16)⁵⁸ or creatures in general (Ov.*Met.* 1.416–437; Mela 1.52).⁵⁹ The Church father Basil of Caesarea (*flor.* 4th cent. AD) combines all these views in his *Hexæmeron* (9.2): eels, flies, frogs, and mice emerge from humid soil. He notes that mice are particularly abundant in Thebes during the wet season.⁶⁰ That such beliefs were common among the Egyptian population is implied by the fact that similar ideas were still present in the Egyptian countryside until recent times.⁶¹

The profusion of mice at certain times accurately reflects real conditions after the inundation, but such a birth also resembles Egyptian ideas about creation, which also starts in shapelessness and a humid environment.⁶² The shrew could thus represent a motherless birth; it came into being through self-creation⁶³ in a manner reminiscent of the appearance of the Egyptian creator deity. As such, the shrew would fit in with the two other animals. By including the shrew, the calf, and the cow in the spell the magician created in his performance a form of merism covering all aspects of birth.

3.4 Preventing miscarriage?

daily in sustenance—it has been suggested that the term originally means “glutton,” being a reduplication of the verb *ʿm*, “devour” (Brunner-Traut, “Spitzmaus” [1965]: 127; Felber *et al.*, *Spitzmausmumie* [1997], 11; Vycichl, *Dictionnaire* [1983], 43).

⁵⁷ The idea mirrors concepts from the Hermopolitan cosmology (Kákosy, “Frosch” [1977], 334–36).

⁵⁸ This is possibly a reference to Atum (Gamer-Wallert, “Aal” [1975], 1).

⁵⁹ See Sauneron, *Papyrus magique* (1970), 29.

⁶⁰ The author speaks about rain, which is surely a conflation with the inundation. The “mistake” is perhaps influenced by Aelian, *Nat.an.* 2.56 and 6.41, who mentions in the first instance that mice appear in Thebes (cf. Diod. 1.10) when it hails and in the second that mice materialize everywhere in Egypt during rainfall. The same topic can also be found in Macrobius, *Sat.* 7.16.12.

⁶¹ Dawson, “Mouse” (1924): 83; Maspero, *History of Egypt* (1901), 223–24, n. 2. See also Lehoux, *Creatures Born of Mud* (2017).

⁶² Allen, *Genesis* (1988), 4–5; 13–14; 20.

⁶³ Burton, *Diodorus Siculus* (1972), 52–3; Heerma van Voss, “Drei Kleintiere” (2004), 235; Vymazalová & Sůvová, “Ancient Egyptian Mouse” (2016): 191.

Repelling affliction is paralleled by the last magical statement in line 9: the practitioner binds or restrains (*snh*) something inside the back (*s3*) of the patient.⁶⁴ Due to the difficulty of interpreting the object in question, the sense of the last passage remains unclear. The meaning of the verb, however, is better established and of significance for the interpretation of the text. It should relate to the utterance in line 2: “[His/Its] womb-mother will not give birth to [him/it].” The latter statement can be interpreted as the primary purpose of the spell. Someone or something is not to be born. Whether the utterance refers to the weakness mentioned in the first line or to a still unborn child is not apparent. The latter may have been further specified in a longer spell from which the current text could have been extracted. The weakness is potentially the ailment of the woman treated with the spell, causing problems for which magical aid was required. In such a case, it is conceivable that the term refers to a condition of the uterus or the placenta, which potentially could cause a fetus to detach prematurely.

Taking the phrase at face value, avoiding a premature birth seems to be a palatable assumption. How the expression of not giving birth is to be interpreted literally is unclear. Is the spell directed at preventing a birth,⁶⁵ a premature birth, or is the expression merely a metaphor? If the spell were intended to prevent miscarriage,⁶⁶ however, one would expect another verb than *msi*, such as *hwi*, “cast out,” *hsi*, “descend,” or similar.

In relation to birth, *snh* can be regarded as an antonym of *sfn*, “loosen, untie,” which can signify the act of parturition.⁶⁷ The verb used in the present text can thus be interpreted as a counteraction of delivery, perhaps, as already mentioned, a premature one. Loosening and tying are semantically close to opening and closing the womb, and both are commonly associated with pregnancy, birth, and miscarriage.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ See the note *ad loc.*

⁶⁵ The phrasing can perhaps be compared to a passage in, for instance, *BD 32: iw Slq.t m h.t.i nn msi st*, “Selket is in my body. I will not give birth to her,” which later on in the spell is elaborated: *iw iw.tyt m h.t.i*, “What is in my body does not exist.” That is, one is not to create dangers by giving birth to it.

⁶⁶ See Töpfer, “Physical Activity of Parturition” (2014): 326–27, for other sources discussing the phenomenon.

⁶⁷ von Deines & Westendorf, *Wörterbuch der Medizinischen Texte* (1961/1962), 747; Arnette & Labrique, “Amonet parturiente” (2015), 18–21; von Lieven & Quack, “Frauenkrankheit” (2018), 268.

⁶⁸ Ritner, “Uterine Amulet” (1984): 209–21. See also Aubert, “Threatened Wombs” (1989): 421–49, for materials in Greek and Latin of which many refer back to older Egyptian practices. The possibility of the spell being directed towards restraining movements of the uterus (Faraone, “Magical and Medical Approaches” [2011]: 1–32) is tempting, but such concepts are not originally Egyptian, despite the existence of Roman-period magical texts with

The instance can be compared to a passage in the magical codex Michigan MS 136, 69–73:⁶⁹ εἶτμασι̅ο̅ ἄνετε̅ε̅τ̅ εἰ̅ω̅τ̅τ̅ ἄνετ̅ω̅τ̅⁷⁰ · εἶτρε̅ σοο̅υ̅ζε̅ νιμ̅ ρω̅α̅γ̅ · ω̅αν̅τ̅ν̅ σοο̅υ̅ζε̅ ἄα̅β̅ρη̅ν, “I cause the pregnant to give birth, I close those who miscarry, and I cause every egg to be useful (fertile), save for the infertile egg.” The act of sealing “those who miscarry” can be interpreted as mechanically preventing a premature birth but is usually understood as referring to closing the womb so as to stop bleeding, which indicated that a woman was not pregnant. A hemorrhage points to either menstruation or an impending miscarriage.⁷¹

A similar notion is present in the Demotic iatromagical text of P.Berlin P 13602; passages refer to sealing (*db̅*) a woman in order to allow her to give birth.⁷² The idea of closing a womb by means of magic is also encountered in, for instance, the New Kingdom *LMP* (London Magical Papyrus) Spells 25; 27–30; 33.⁷³ Spell 28 is relevant to the understanding of the Coptic passage; the act of preventing vaginal bleeding makes the woman fertile. The act is explained as: *srwd̅ sw̅h̅.t̅ pw̅*, “It means that the egg is made strong.”⁷⁴ In Spell 27, the practitioner identifies himself with Anubis (*ink̅ Īnpw̅*),⁷⁵ who is said to close a dam, which is a metaphor for halting a bleeding.⁷⁶ Then the magician declares: *s̅fh̅ ʒ̅s̅.t̅ m̅-̅i̅*, “Isis has delivered through me.”⁷⁷ The latter statement is a consequence of a paused hemorrhage, which indicates that she is pregnant and also able to give birth. Anubis also serves as the entity whose powers are used to halt vaginal discharges of blood in Spells 29 and 30. The connection between Anubis and spells for preventing miscarriage aids the identification of the purpose of the present spell.⁷⁸

the aim to prevent the phenomenon (e.g., *PGM* VII 260–271; Aubert, “Threatened Wombs” [1989]: 425, n. 7). The amulets also do not refer to birth.

⁶⁹ See n. 44 above.

⁷⁰ See Vychichl, *Dictionnaire* (1983), 271.

⁷¹ See Ritner, “Uterine Amulet” (1984): 212–14 and 221. See also Blach-Jørgensen, “Return of the Goddess” (2015), 146.

⁷² von Lieven & Quack, “Frauenkrankheit” (2018), 257–74, esp. 271.

⁷³ P.Brit.Mus. EA 10059 (Leitz, *Magical and Medical Papyri* [1999], 51–84).

⁷⁴ Cf. Hippoc. *Mul.* 1.25; P.Berlin P 15784+ (Fischer-Elfert & Krutzsch, *Magika Hieratica* [2015], 146–51).

⁷⁵ Cf. Meyrat, *Papyrus magiques du Ramesseum* (2019), 204.

⁷⁶ See Pehal & Preininger-Svobodová, “Death and the Right Fluids” (2018): 116, for the connection between the Nile and blood.

⁷⁷ Leitz, *Magical and Medical Papyri* (1999), 68, understands the passage as referring to being freed from fetters, but see Westendorf, “Beiträge zu den medizinischen Texten” (1966): 146.

⁷⁸ See Griffiths, *Iside et Osiride* (1970), 466–67, for the god’s connection to birth. The god, often as a mummy, can also appear on the so-called uterine gem amulets (Ritner, “Uterine Amulet” [1984]: 209–21), probably for the

In this light, the blood representing fecundity would be aimed primarily not at getting the woman pregnant but at keeping her in this state, unless the spell in fact were designed to prevent her from getting pregnant all together—perhaps by an undesired party (cf. P.Ramesseum IV C 19–24). But the latter interpretation appears less plausible.

In *LMP* Spell 25, 27, and 28, a linen amulet connected with the magical procedure is supposed to be placed (*rdi*) on the backside (*ph.wy*)⁷⁹ of the patient, while Spells 29 and 30 specify that it is to be put inside the vulva (*iwf*). The topic of backside-aches and labor is thermalized in another New Kingdom Papyrus: P.Leid. I 348, Spell 34, which reads: *ʒs.t hr mn.t ph.wy-s m iwr mh ʒbd.w-s r rh.t m iwr.t ... nn ms*, “Isis is suffering in her backside being pregnant, her months have been completed according to the (set) number in pregnancy ... without giving birth.”⁸⁰ The reason why the backside is mentioned may have to do with pains in the lower back associated with menstruation, miscarriage, and labor.⁸¹ The Coptic text mentioned above refers to days in parturition and birth, portrayed as being relieved from a birth brick (lines 75–77), and describes a procedure related to the back of a woman in labor (lines 80–81): *ⲛⲉⲣⲁⲁⲓ ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲗⲉⲃⲉⲛ ⲛⲧⲉⲥⲁⲓⲥⲉ ⲉⲡⲉⲥⲏⲧ*, “You are to apply it (oil?) downwards between the ridges (?) of her spine.” It is possible that the Coptic procedure was aimed at alleviating labor-induced pains in the lower back, facilitating the birth, perhaps preventing miscarriage, and safeguarding the mother to be able to take care of her child. The text continues by prompting the patient to be

same reasons. The inclusion of Anubis ought to be connected, at any rate partially, to his role in spells counteracting miscarriage. The god’s role as *κλειδοῦχος*, “keyholder” (Parlasca, “Anubis mit dem Schlüssel” [2010], 213–32, with further refs.), representing him as a *psychopompos*, might also be considered as a factor in his presence on these amulets. Usually a key is represented below the uterus, symbolizing the capacity to regulate the body part, as either opened or closed, for either supporting birth or preventing blood flow or similar. In addition, other gods associated with birth can be seen connected to keys, such as Hathor, Bes, and Khnum.

⁷⁹ The transcription follows Leitz, *Magical and Medical Papyri* (1999), 67–8. Note that the term “abdomen” is also used by the editor in Spells 27 and 28. Blach-Jørgensen, “Return of the Goddess” (2015), 139–40, suggests that the term could be translated “pubic region.” Guerneur, “Recette iatromagique” (2015), 167 and 175, translates “anus” in a similar context (cf. Leitz & Löffler, *Chnum* [2019], 33).

⁸⁰ Borghouts, *Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I 348* (1970), 31. Spells 28–33 concern related topics.

⁸¹ See, however, Guerneur, “Recette iatromagique” (2015), 175.

sound and restore (σμινε) herself and her womb (οοτε), serve (αμωε) her young (μας),⁸² and lactate (ῑ ερωτε) for the child (αηρε), identified with Horus.

While none of these passages is a direct parallel to the final statement of the present spell, the mentions of the back or backside of a woman—although different terms are used—indicate a connection among the texts and suggest that they were all related and aimed at solving the same type of problem. The texts also display a close resemblance in terms of topic and actors impersonated for the sake of efficacy. Thus, one could suggest that they were part of the same continuous tradition.⁸³

3.5 Pottery magic

As mentioned, the incantation is inscribed on a fairly large piece of pottery (18 × 10.5 cm). It is possible that magicians kept such pieces in their libraries of spells—magical handbooks were not exclusively written on papyrus⁸⁴—but this was hardly the case here. This is indicated by, for instance, the spell’s lack of a heading and it was personalized; it seems to mention an individual by name. It must *ipso facto* have been drafted for a particular occasion. But what would this occasion be? The text could have been written down as an *aide-mémoire* during a magical performance; the ostrakon contains the words uttered by the magician. The spell is, however, rather simple, and an experienced practitioner can be expected to have remembered the specific words.

There are two other possibilities for understanding the medium of the spell, and these are not mutually exclusive. *Suppl. Mag.* I 5 from the 3rd century AD is a short missive sent to an individual with access to magical writings to copy a textual amulet (περίαμμα) against tonsillitis on a gold leaf. He was asked to record it on a tablet or a strip of papyrus (πιττάκιον) and to send it to a third individual. Whereas the final product would have been designed for a particular individual, it is not sure that the dispatched text already was. Requests for medical

⁸² Beyond merely connecting to the Osirian sphere, identifying the mother as the goddess Isis, the word chosen to designate the child in the first instance fits in well with the bovine theme of the spell. Although μας can designate a child, it is used predominantly for animal offspring (Crum, *CoptDict.*, 185b).

⁸³ See Dosoo, “Ritual Discourses” (2016), 699–716; Quack, “Kontinuität und Wandel” (1998): 77–94, for discussions about the relation between earlier Pharaonic and Graeco-Roman and Late Antique magical practice in Egypt.

⁸⁴ Cf. Blumell & Dosoo, “Dark-Eyed Beauty” (2018): 208. For instance, *O.Leid.Dem.* 334, a collection of iatromagical recipes, suggests that formularies could be kept on ostraca as works of reference by practitioners.

amulets are also known from later periods. Another text relevant in this respect is the 4th century AD Graeco-Coptic letter *P.Kellis* 35. The document forms part of the correspondence between two parties, where the writer of the letter apparently earlier has been asked to find a spell and send it to the recipient of the letter. He could not, however, find the requested incantation and instead sent a different one, but promised that he would send the correct one if he found it. The alternative spell was appended to the letter.⁸⁵ Unlike DOW 113, which contains only the spoken part of a magical ritual, the one sent contained both the words to be uttered and the ritual prescriptions appearing as a verbatim extract from a formulary.

The two texts show that invocations were exchanged in written form between practitioners or perhaps even between practitioner and clients. The Demotic ostrakon under discussion could fit into such a pattern. Someone had requested that an expert produce a spell and then to send it off. Contrary to the Kellis letter, however, the magical text, or at any rate the magical utterance, would have been conveyed in a separate medium, that is the ostrakon, perhaps in the same sort of “draft” form suggested by the Greek letter (*Suppl.Mag.* I 5) preceding the engraving of the second amulet.

The present ostrakon, however, may have been more than a writing medium to convey an invocation between magical specialists. It could in fact have served as an amulet.⁸⁶ Among the instructions for spells in, e.g., *LMP*, most amulets were to be made of linen, but other materials could be used, and part of the preparation was to utter a magical invocation over them before applying them to the patient.⁸⁷ One instance stands out: the above-mentioned Spell 27. The magical recitation to be spoken over the piece of linen was also to be written down on the amulet:⁸⁸

*ink Īnpw {pf} pn dñi dñi.t ink Īnpw sḥ ʒs.t m-ʕi ʕ.wyʕi [...] wt-ʕi⁸⁹ ḥm pr ʒs.t st-s ìm-tn dd.tw r(ʒ) pn ḥr
stp n ḥʒ.tyw sh(.w) r(ʒ) pn ḥr-f mi-qd rdi(.w) n s.t (ḥr) pḥ.wyʕs*

⁸⁵ Both texts are discussed by Love, *Code-Switching* (2016), 273–77. For related examples dating to the period after the Arabic conquest, which concern sending protective amulets, see Garel, “Papyrus iatro-magique” (2016): 45–55; *O.Frange* 190 and 191.

⁸⁶ See J. Dieleman, “Textual Amulets” (2015), 23–58, for the use of textual amulets in Egyptian magic.

⁸⁷ E.g., *Spells* 25; 28; 29; 30.

⁸⁸ See Leitz, *Magical and Medical Papyri* (1999), 68, for textual commentary.

⁸⁹ The word lost in the lacuna ends with a pustule determinative and plural strokes. It has been interpreted as *wt*, “bandages,” but this reading is far from certain. The reading probably connects to the verb *sḥ* earlier in the line.

“I am this Anubis, who closes the dam. I am Anubis, and Isis has delivered through me, while my arms [...] my bandages. Turn back, so that Isis may come forth, so that she may shoot among you.” This spell is to be recited over a strip of fine linen. The whole spell is to be written on it. (It) is to be placed on a woman, (on) her backside.⁹⁰

Though not clearly attested as amulets before the Graeco-Roman period, ostraca along with metal plaques (e.g., *PDM* xiv 1005) certainly began to serve as such in their own right after Alexander’s conquest of the country. A few ostraca, which all are dated to the Roman period or later, have been identified as amulets by their editors due to their constitution, whether containing a drawing (e.g., *Suppl.Mag.* II 68) or an inscription indicating such a function (e.g., *Suppl.Mag.* II 58).⁹¹ In the latter case, all extant copies contain Greek texts. Further, in the Graeco-Egyptian corpus of magical texts,⁹² there are a handful of spells that specify how ostrakon amulets were supposed to be produced,⁹³ among which there is even a Demotic instruction: *PDM* xii 62–75. Most spells of this kind focus on aggressive magic,⁹⁴ but one example serving a more relevant purpose deserves to be highlighted. Written in a Christian context, the Greek magical handbook *Suppl.Mag.* II 96.48–50 (5th or 6th cent. AD) contains the following brief instruction:

For a woman in labor. “Come out from your tomb, Christ is calling you.” A potsherd (ὄστρακον) on the right thigh.⁹⁵

Although the instruction may appear elliptical; it is not clearly stated whether the recited words are to be written on the piece or spoken over the piece or the parturient on whose thigh the potsherd was to be placed, based on several parallels F. Maltomini concludes that the

⁹⁰ Dieleman, “Textual Amulets” (2015), 34.

⁹¹ The text references the writing material upon which it was inscribed as made of stone (λίθος)—the curse aimed at making an individual as silent as the stone upon which the curse was written—but the piece is a potsherd.

⁹² The practice survived until Medieval times, since it is also present in the Arabo-Coptic magical papyri (Martín Hernández & Torallas Tovar, “Ostrakon” [2014]: 786–88).

⁹³ See *ibid.*: 781–84.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*: 798.

⁹⁵ See Maltomini, “papyri greci” (1979): 81–4, for a detailed commentary.

directions were unexpressed, and the words were to be written on the ostrakon.⁹⁶ That the formulary contains directions specifying which words are to be written on the sherd seems indeed to be the case. There are Byzantine examples of similar practices, for instance, in the works of the physician Aetius of Amida (*flor.* 5th–6th cent. AD), who trained in Alexandria.⁹⁷ Book 16 of his medical treatise, *Iatrica*, is devoted to gynecological and obstetrical problems. A few manuscripts of the work contain instructions for how to use papyrus and ostrakon talismans for counteracting problems in childbirth.⁹⁸ In one such procedure (16.15.8), which was also useful for releasing stillborn children, the practitioner is told to place an amulet of papyrus (χάρτης) on the thigh of a woman in labor. It was to be inscribed with the words from John 11.43: “Lazarus, come out” with the addition “Christ is calling you.” When the child was on its way, the amulet was to be removed. Another instruction for easing birth in the same work (16.15.9) involves a fresh potsherd (ὄστρακον) attached in the same place. It too was to be inscribed with three lines of text: “Christ was born, Christ was buried, Christ is risen.”⁹⁹ This piece was to be removed from the leg of the patient once the child was born. The striking resemblance between the Byzantine work and the quoted passage in *Suppl.Mag.* II 96 suggests a common source to the texts.¹⁰⁰

A possible precedent for this practice is found in the lapidary of Damigeron-Evax,¹⁰¹ a work that displays Egyptian influences.¹⁰² There two stones, *exhebenus* (7.7) and galactite (34.28), are regarded as possessing obstetrical qualities when used as amulets. The first one produced rapid delivery if tied to the right thigh of a parturient woman. The second one assisted in painful births when knotted to the left thigh of a woman in labor with a thread made of wool from a fecund sheep.¹⁰³ In this connection, a passage from P.Berlin P 13602 may be noted. In Fr. B x

⁹⁶ *ibid.*: 83. See also Zellmann-Rohrer, “Incantations” (2019), 290–91.

⁹⁷ See Grimm-Stadelmann, *Untersuchungen zur Iatromagie* (2020), 492–93.

⁹⁸ Romano, “Ricette superstiziose” (1994), 595–600.

⁹⁹ Grimm-Stadelmann, *Untersuchungen zur Iatromagie* (2020), 447–48, mentions another instance where an ostrakon is used in a magical procedure to alleviate abdominal and uterine pain. See Maltomini, “Papiri greci” (1979): 83, for further references to using ostraca as birth amulets in magical procedures. Additional parallels are furnished by Zellmann-Rohrer and Love, *Traditions in Transmission* (2022), 181–83.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Brashear, “Greek Magical Papyri” (1995), 3464–65.

¹⁰¹ Halleux & Schamp, *lapidaires grecs* (1985), 193–290.

¹⁰² Quack, “Zum ersten astrologischen Lapidar” (2001): 337–44.

¹⁰³ See Aubert, “Threatened Wombs” (1989): 442.

+ 17, something is to be placed on, or done to, the thigh (*pkꜣ*) of a woman for her to give birth. But further details remain obscure. The passage is fragmentary.¹⁰⁴

LMP Spell 27 states that the prescription is supposed to be written on the talisman itself and thus serves as a parallel to these later examples of textual amulets. The passage indicates that the spoken and written words complemented one another, and, therefore, the same can be postulated for the Demotic example. The magical instructions in the Demotic formularies contain a large number of references to the practice and even the literary evidence, e.g., *Setne I* and *II*, suggests something similar.¹⁰⁵

Although not written in the same language and coming from different cultural contexts, these parallels make a case for seeing DOW 113 in a similar light. Even if the above-mentioned Greek instructions for ostraca amulets were supposed to assist childbirth, and the Demotic one appears to concern rather the prevention of a miscarriage or similar, they all relate to the same sphere of complications. As has been seen above, employing ostraca as amulets was a fairly common practice in Egypt. It is, therefore, probable that the ostrakon functioned as a talisman inscribed with the utterance of the practitioner similarly to the prescription found in, for instance, *LMP*. If we assume that the ostrakon, similarly to the Byzantine birth amulets, was supposed to be placed on the thigh of the patient, its dimensions can more readily be explained. Its size and slight arch are well-disposed for such a placement during a magical performance.

4. Conclusion

The Demotic spell found in DOW 113 is firmly grounded in older Egyptian traditions. The imagery and techniques used are already encountered in earlier manuscripts. The text is not a mere relic from the past; the recorded practices are also mirrored in contemporary formularies from Egypt of the Graeco-Roman period as well as later sources from the wider Mediterranean region. As such the text serves as an example of how religious practices—particularly magical ones—interacted beyond what can be defined as the traditional sphere. Consequently, they have to be analyzed from a wider perspective. With this in mind, despite the opaque language of invocations and the fact that the text lacks an explicatory heading, it is possible to identify its purpose. It belongs to the world of iatromagical obstetrics and was devised to prevent a premature birth or miscarriage.

¹⁰⁴ von Lieven & Quack, “Frauenkrankheit” (2018), 166.

¹⁰⁵ Love, “Narration of Magical Practices” (2020); Ritner, *Mechanics* (1994), 38–50 and 60–4.

This objective was probably achieved through ritual actions alongside words. The practitioner possibly anointed himself with bird blood, representing life-giving fluids and imbuing himself with fecundity, and associated himself variously with deities and other entities pertaining to the same sphere. Although the spell hardly concerns the impregnation of a woman, the sexual powers coming from the procedure would equip the magician with the right type of authority to attain his goal. The conjuror further eradicated the affliction by analogy, via three animals representing various aspects of birth. This action mirrored the intended outcome of the incantation. Relieving the animals of infirmity paralleled a similar outcome in the beneficiary of the spell. As the three creatures were freed from ailment, so would the patient be. As a consequence, she would not experience the pain associated with birth or the misfortune of a premature one and, thus, the undesirable outcome could be avoided.

Besides furnishing a new example of an iatromagical spell, the ostrakon appears to be one of few known actively applied magical texts in Demotic: an inscribed amulet. That is, an incantation produced to benefit the interests of a particular individual.

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