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Comparing Greco-Roman Uterus Votives and Byzantine Uterus Amulets

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COMPARING GRECO-ROMAN UTERUS VOTIVES AND BYZANTINE UTERUS AMULETS*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine two groups of archaeological finds to see if common elements behind their use can be identified. The first group is Greco-Roman uterus votives from Classical (510–323 BCE) and Hellenistic (323–146 BCE) periods, and the second group is Byzantine uterus amulets from tenth and twelfth centuries CE.[1] The purpose of both the uterus votives and uterus amulets has been thought to be aiding the donor of the votive or the wearer of the amulet in pregnancy and childbirth. The votives have been seen as part of a reciprocal relationship between the donor and the deity, and serving as thanks for the healthy children or successful childbirth granted by the deity.[2] The amulets have been considered apotropaic and meant to protect women and their children from child-killing or child-stealing demons, such as the Gello.[3] They were also thought to provide safety from the "wandering womb." In antiquity, it was commonly believed that the uterus could leave its proper place and wander around the body, causing different ailments depending on where in the body it

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[1] These Byzantine uterus amulets represent but a fraction of all uterus amulets in use during antiquity and later up until the modern period. This article will focus only on a very specific type of Byzantine uterus amulets (see section 1.2), selected because of the manageable number of specimens (about 60 amulets are known) and their temporal distance from the uterus votives. Analysis of and comparison between uterus votives and contemporary Greek and Roman gemstone uterus amulets has been done by Véronique Dasen and S. Ducaté-Paarmann, "Hysteria and Metaphors of the Uterus in Classical Antiquity," in *Images and Gender: Contributions to Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Arti*, ed. Silvia Schroer (Fribourg and Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 239–261. Votives related to fertility, pregnancy, and childbirth include other types of votives in addition to anatomical uterus votives, such as women with doves, women with children, women with hands over pudenda or on wombs, kneeling nude women, and keys (see, e.g., Jens D. Baumbach, "'Speak, votives, ...', Dedicatory practice in sanctuaries of Hera," in *Le donateur, l'offrande et la déesse: Systèmes votifs des sanctuaires de déesses dans le monde grec*, ed. Clarisse Prêtre (Kernos Suppléments 23) (Liège: Presses universitaires de Liège, 2009), 203–223, Table 1). The amount of this material is so large that in the confines of this article it is possible to concentrate only on the anatomical uterus votives.

[2] See, e.g., Rebecca M. Ammerman, "Children at Risk: Votive Terracottas and the Welfare of Infants at Paestum," *Hesperia Supplements* 41 (2007): 131–151; Folkert T. Van Straten, "Gifts for the Gods," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, ed. Henk S. Versnel (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 65–151, 70–73; Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann, "Hysteria and Metaphors of the Uterus in Classical Antiquity," 250; Véronique Dasen, "Femme à tiroir," in *Naissance et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité, actes du colloque de Fribourg, 28 nov.-1er dec. 2001*, ed. Véronique Dasen (Fribourg and Göttingen, Germany: Academic Press and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 127–144.

[3] See, e.g., Jean-Jacques Aubert, "Threatened Wombs: Aspects of Ancient Uterine Magic," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 30 (1989): 412–449; Richard P. H. Greenfield, "Saint Sisinnios, the Archangel Michael and the Female Demon Gylou: The Typology of the Greek literary stories," *Βυζαντινά* 15 (1989): 83–142; Jeffrey Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 25–62; Christopher A. Faraone, "Magical and Medical Approaches to the Wandering Womb in the Ancient Greek World," *Classical Antiquity* 30 (2011): 1–32; Viltanioti, Irini Fotini. "La démone Yellô dans la Grèce ancienne, byzantine et moderne," in *Actes du colloque « Anges et Démons » tenu au Musée en Piconrue à Bastogne le 1er et 2 octobre 2009* (Brussels: Ministère de la Communauté Française de Belgique, 2012), 173–189; Camilla Asplund Ingemark and Dominic Ingemark, "More than Scapegoating: the Therapeutic Potential of Stories of Child-killing Demons in Ancient Greece and Rome," in *Therapeutic Uses of Storytelling: an Interdisciplinary Approach to Narration as Therapy* (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2013), 75–84.

settled. Several different ailments, gynecological and other, were grouped under the concept of "wandering womb."[4]

The paper will fall into three main sections. The first section will give a general introduction to uterus votives and uterus amulets (including their composition, appearance, and dating). The second section will examine the circumstances that necessitated the use of votives and amulets. The third section will examine the presumed functional principle behind the votives and amulets, the mechanism that was thought to provide efficacy to the votives and amulets, and the ritual framework of their use.

UTERUS VOTIVES

This section is not meant as a full treatise on the subject of uterus votives, but as a primer. It will give the reader a general introduction to the composition, appearance, dating, location, and use of uterus votives. Anatomical votives in general and uterus votives in particular have been thoroughly studied elsewhere, and I direct the reader to those for further reading.[5]

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[4] Plat. *Tim*. 91c: "And in women again, owing to the same causes, whenever the matrix or womb, as it is called,—which is an indwelling creature desirous of child-bearing,—remains without fruit long beyond the due season, it is vexed and takes it ill; and by straying all ways through the body and blocking up the passages of the breath and preventing respiration it casts the body into the uttermost distress, and causes, moreover, all kinds of maladies." (αἱ δ᾽ ἐν ταῖς γυναιξὶν αὖ μῆτραί τε καὶ ὑστέραι λεγόμεναι διὰ ταὐτὰ ταῦτα, ζῷον ἐπιθυμητικὸν ἐνὸν τῆς παιδοποιίας, ὅταν ἄκαρπον παρὰ τὴν ὥραν χρόνον πολὺν γίγνηται, χαλεπῶς ἀγανακτοῦν φέρει, καὶ πλανώμενον πάντη κατὰ τὸ σῶμα, τὰς τοῦ πνεύματος διεξόδους ἀποφράττον, ἀναπνεῖν οὐκ ἐῶν εἰς ἀπορίας τὰς ἐσχάτας ἐμβάλλει καὶ νόσους παντοδαπὰς ἄλλας παρέχει.) Translation by Bury, Robert Gregg, ed. and transl., *Plato. Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 250–251; Aret. *De curatione acutorum morborum*, 2.10; *PGM* VII 260–271; Hippocr. *Steril*. 35. Large parts of Hippocrates's *Nature of Women* are devoted to the movement of the uterus and how to make it return to its place (Hippocr. *Nat. Mul*. 3–8, 14, 26, 30–31, 32.46, 38, 40, 44, 47–49, 54, 58, 62, 87); Sor. *Gyn*. 3.29 (1.3.8. in the translation of Temkin, Owsei, ed. and transl. *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 9: "Although the uterus is not an animal (as it appeared to some people), it is, nevertheless, similar in certain respects, having a sense of touch, so that is contracted by cooling agents but relaxed by loosening ones." While Soranus does not share the belief of an animalistic uterus, he references it.); Gal. *De Locis Affectis* 6.5; Gal. *De Uteri Dissectione* 4. For modern research on "the wandering womb," see, e.g., Lesley Dean Jones, "The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science," in *Women's History & Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 111–137; Mark J. Adair, "Plato's View of the 'Wandering Uterus,'" *The Classical Journal* 91 (1996): 153–163; Christopher A. Faraone, "New Light on Ancient Greek Exorcisms of the Wandering Womb," *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 144 (2003): 189–197; Faraone, "Magical and Medical Approaches to the Wandering Womb in the Ancient Greek World"; Aubert, "Threatened Wombs: Aspects of Ancient Uterine Magic."

[5] E.g., William Henry Denham Rouse, *Greek Votive Offerings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902); A. Comella, "Riflessi del culto di Asclepio sulla religiosità popolare etrusco-laziale e campana di epoca medio- e tardo-repubblicana," in *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Perugia* 20 (1982–1983): 216–244; Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Sara B. Aleshire, *The Athenian Asklepieion* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1989); Sara B. Aleshire, *Asklepios at Athens* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1991); Bronwen L. Wickkiser, *Asklepios, Medicine, and the Politics of Healing in Fifth-Century Greece* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Bronwen L. Wickkiser, *The Appeal of Asklepios and Politics of Healing in the Greco-Roman World* (University of Texas, 2003). PhD diss.; Gerhard Bauchhenss, "Menschliche Körperteile, Anatomische Exvotos," in *Dedications. Thesaurus Cultus Et Rituum Antiquorum, Vol. 1* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 403–405; John Boardman, Thomas Mannack, Claudia Wagner, Evgenia Vikela, and Björn Forsén. "Greek Votive Objects," in *Dedications. Thesaurus Cultus Et Rituum Antiquorum, Vol. 1* (The Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 281–288; Björn Forsén, "Models of Body Parts," in *Dedications. Thesaurus Cultus Et Rituum Antiquorum, Vol. 1* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 311–313; Jean MacIntosh Turfa, "Anatomical Votives," in *Dedications. Thesaurus Cultus Et Rituum Antiquorum, Vol. 1* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 359–368; Sfameni Gasparro, Giulia, Valentina Calì, and Ernesto De Miro, eds. *Il culto di Asclepio nell'area Mediterranea. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Agrigento 20. –22. Novembre 2005*.

Uterus votives are a subset of anatomical votives that were used specifically to promote uterine health and fertility.[6] They are found in more than 200 sites in Italy,[7] mainly from Vulci, Tarquinia, Latium, Campania, Daunia, and western Lucania, between the end of fourth century and the end of second century BCE.[8] The total number of finds is in the thousands, with more than 1,300 finds from Central Italy alone.[9] Ammerman estimates that up to 90% of all Italian terracotta votives (not just of uterus votives) belong to the votive practice of the central Italian complex, where the main stress was on the protection of women's fertility and of new-born children.[10] In Greece, anatomical votives depicting uteri are found from the Archaic (800–480 BCE) to the Hellenistic (323–146 BCE) period but are less common than in Italy.[11] The main deities called to help in matters of pregnancy and childbirth were Hera, Aphrodite, Eilethyia, and Artemis. In Temple of Hera I ("the Basilica") at Paestum, more than twenty uterus votives have been found.[12]

The uterus votives vary in shape, but often resemble a jar. They can be classified in four main types: an almond shape (*tipo di forma a mandorla*), ciabatta shape (*tipo di forma a ciabatta*), crested shape (*tipo crestato*), and an elongated shape with a cylindrical neck.[13] A votive shaped like a uterus did not necessarily mean that the donor's uterus itself had a

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(Rome: Gangemi, 2010); Teresa Alfieri Tonini, "Il culto di Asclepio e Igea in Tracia: il caso singolare di Pautalia e Dintorni," *Aristonothos* 6 (2012): 219–229; Emma-Jayne Graham, "The Making of Infants in Hellenistic and Early Roman Italy: A Votive Perspective," *World Archaeology* 45 (2013): 215–231.

[6] Anatomical votives are votives that represent the body part or organ that the deity was hoped to heal. The most common body parts depicted in anatomical votives in Greece and Rome were hands, feet, eyes, breasts, and genitals. In Italy, they were at the height of their popularity in Latium and southern Etruria between the fourth and second century BCE, while during the Imperial period they remained popular mainly in the provinces. In Greece, anatomical votives occur within cults of deities associated with health and healing such as Apollo, Artemis, Eilethyia, Hygeia, Opis, Demeter, and Asclepius (Laura Aho, "Asklepiokselle omistetut Votiivipiirtokirjoitukset." [In Finnish, "Votive inscriptions dedicated to Asclepius."] (Master's thesis, University of Helsinki, 2013), https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/38185/asklepio.pdf, 38–39, 49–52; Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann, "Hysteria and Metaphors of the Uterus in Classical Antiquity," 243–244; Ammerman,
"Children at Risk: Votive Terracottas and the Welfare of Infants at Paestum," 143–144; F. Graf. "Healing Deities, Healing Cults" *Brill's New Pauly* s.v. Brill Online, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574–9347bnpe505390 (accessed September 28, 2016)). Anatomical votives are made of clay, wood, metal, wax, or marble. Ammerman, "Children at Risk: Votive Terracottas and the Welfare of Infants at Paestum," 131 concludes that most donors could not afford expensive votives. The most common material for votives across the board was clay. It can be assumed that in general, votives made from expensive materials, such as costly metals, were used by the wealthier classes, whereas those made of wood or clay were used by the lower classes. Yet it can not be stated that all wooden and clay votives were donated by people belonging to lower classes – depending on the occasion and the deity, votives made of cheaper materials could have been favored also by people who could have afforded more expensive materials.

[7] Ulrike Ehmig, "Risikobewältigung bei Schwangerschaft und Geburt in der römischen Antike: lateinische dokumentarische und archäologische Zeugnisse," *Arctos* 47 (2013): 111–129, 122.

[8] Maria Fenelli, "Depositi votivi in area etrusco-italica. Medicina nei secoli," *Arte e Scienze* 1 (1995): 367–382, 374–375; Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann, "Hysteria and Metaphors of the Uterus in Classical Antiquity," 243–244. For votive uterus keys, see Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann, "Hysteria and Metaphors of the Uterus in Classical Antiquity," 254–255.

[9] Ehmig, "Risikobewältigung bei Schwangerschaft und Geburt in der römischen Antike: lateinische dokumentarische und archäologische Zeugnisse," 123; Graham, "The making of Infants in Hellenistic and Early Roman Italy: a votive perspective," Table 1, 220–222.

[10] Ammerman, "Children at Risk: Votive Terracottas and the Welfare of Infants at Paestum," 150.

[11] Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann, "Hysteria and Metaphors of the Uterus in Classical Antiquity," 244.

[12] In addition to the uterus votives, other fertility dedications are found in Hera's main sanctuaries. Figures of women with doves or dove figurines are found in Heraia at Perachora, Tiryns, Argos, Samos, and Temple of Hera at Foce del Sele at Paestum, while the votive type of a woman with child occurs in all of these as well as Temple of Hera I ("the Basilica") at Paestum (Baumbach, "'Speak, votives, ...' Dedicatory practice in sanctuaries of Hera," 206, 213, 221, Table 1).

[13] Fenelli, "Depositi votivi in area etrusco-italica. Medicina nei secoli," 314–375; Dasen and Ducaté-Paarmann, "Hysteria and Metaphors of the Uterus in Classical Antiquity," 244.

physical or medical problem. It could also be a return gift to the deity for a fulfilled wish or prayer for children or health.[14] Uterus votives were deposited in the sanctuary of the deity they were donated to.

It is likely that a great portion of the donors of votives were women,[15] and of all anatomical votives, uterus votives were especially important to them.[16] The portion of women making up the donors of inscribed votives varies both geographically and between Greek and Latin inscriptions.[17] Uterus votives do not spell out explicitly what was their exact purpose. Most uterus votives do not have inscriptions, and on the ones that do, the inscription did not typically state what the reason was for donating the votive or what specifically was hoped to be gained by the use of it. At its simplest, a votive inscription could be just the name of the deity it was dedicated to, with sometimes the name of the donor.[18] Common phrases were settled into abbreviations, such as VSLM (*votum solvit libens merito*). Typical inscriptions included terms for donating or dedicating, such as *donum* (gift), *sacrum* (consecrated, sacred), and *votum* (vow) in Latin, and ἀνάθημα (that which is set up), δῶρον (gift), εὐχή (prayer, vow), μνημεῖον (memorial, monument), and εὐχαριστήριον (expressive of gratitude) in Greek.[19]

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[14] Aho, "Asklepiokselle omistetut votiivipiirtokirjoitukset," 38; Aleshire, *The Athenian Asklepieion*; Björn Forsén, *Griechische Gliederweihungen. Eine Untersuchung Zu Ihrer Typologie Und Ihrer Religions—Und Sozialgeschichtlichen Bedeutung. Papers and Monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens, Vol. 4* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute at Athens, 1996); Forsén, "Models of Body Parts." The general consensus is that votives were given to deities as conditional gifts, as a payment of a wish fulfilled, not unconditional gifts given purely in honor of the deity. Votives have also been found in graves, but considering the principle of function of votives, these are not about communicating with the dead or with underworld deities, but most probably about recycling votives as grave goods.

[15] F. Graf. "Healing deities, healing cults" *Brill's New Pauly* s.v. Brill Online, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574–9347_bnp_e505390 (accessed September 28, 2016).

[16] On the use of uterus votives for the protection of children, see Ammerman, "Children at Risk: Votive Terracottas and the Welfare of Infants at Paestum."

[17] According to Aho's calculations, of votives dedicated to Asclepius, the percentage of female donors was about five. Of votives with Greek inscriptions, the percentage is five, and with Latin inscriptions it is three. However, of the anatomical votives at the Athenian sanctuary of Asclepius, half of the donors are women (Aho, "Asklepiokselle omistetut votiivipiirtokirjoitukset," 101). Jacquemin has found the proportion of votive donors to be one woman to ten men. Jacquemin also notes that while epigraphists tend to overlook the significance of female donors, archeologists tend to over-attribute finds of personal adornments to female donors (Anne Jacquemin, "L'inverse est-il vrai? Peut-on penser la donatrice dans un sanctuaire masculin?," in *Le donateur, l'offrande et la déesse. Systèmes votifs des sanctuaires de déesses dans le monde grec*, ed. Clarisse Prêtre (Kernos Suppléments 23) (Liège: Presses universitaires de Liège, 2009), 69–79; see also Jörg Rüpke, "Dedications accompanied by inscriptions in the Roman Empire: Functions, intentions, modes of communication," in *Dediche sacre nel mondo greco-romano: diffusione, funzioni, tipologie—Religious Dedications in the Greco-Roman World. Distribution, Typology, Use*, eds. John Bodel and Mika Kajava (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2009), 31–41.

[18] Aho, "Asklepiokselle Omistetut Votiivipiirtokirjoitukset," 33, 34, 49; Maria Letizia Lazzarini, *Le Formule delle Dediche Votive nella Grecia Arcaica* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1976), 58–60, 87– 109, 111–139; Günther Schörner, *Votive im Römischen Griechenland* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 13–20. Laura Aho has studied the structure of votive inscriptions and found the *pro salute* structure typical of Latin inscriptions, while the ὑπέρ particle combined with the genitive case was characteristic of Greek inscriptions. The reason for giving a votive was typically expressed with the Latin particles *ex* (most commonly *ex voto*), *ob*, and *causa*, and the Greek ἐκ and ἕνεκα (Aho, "Asklepiokselle omistetut votiivipiirtokirjoitukset," 45, 47, 49).

[19] Aho, "Asklepiokselle omistetut votiivipiirtokirjoitukset," 45, 47, 49; John Bodel, "'Sacred Dedications': A Problem of Definitions," in *Dediche Sacre nel Mondo Greco-Romano: Diffusione, Funzioni, Tipologie—Religious Dedications in the Greco-Roman World. Distribution, Typology, Use*, eds. John Bodel and Mika Kajava (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2009), 17–30, 20–22 raises the important question of whether changes in Greek and Latin dedicatory formulas reflect underlying changes in practice or belief, or if the changes happen only on the linguistic level. In addition, it must be noted that while consecration and

Given the high rates of infant and maternal mortality and the precariousness of pregnancy and childbirth, one would expect more inscriptions to explicitly give thanks for a successful birth. However, only two votive altar inscriptions from Italy state this purpose clearly: one from third century BCE and another from second century CE. This lack has been noted by Ehmig, who concludes that non-epigraphic votives must have played a bigger role than inscriptions as thanks for a successful birth.[20]

BYZANTINE UTERUS AMULETS

As with the preceding section on uterus votives, this introduction to Byzantine uterus amulets is by no means meant to be exhaustive, but to give the reader a basic understanding of what these amulets are. For broader and more detailed treatments on the subject, one should turn to the principal works on the matter.[21]

The group of Byzantine uterus amulets that is the focus of this article vary in material, including lead, bronze, silver, gold, and gemstone, and in shape, from pendants to tokens and rings. The surviving body of these Byzantine amulets has been dated "post-iconoclastic," broadly between tenth and twelfth centuries CE, on epigraphic and stylistic grounds.[22] The amulets form a coherent group by two features: a magical formula addressing the uterus (Gr. *hystera*), therefore known as the *hystera* formula,[23] and a motif of a face surrounded by

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dedication were one and the same in the Classical Greek world, in the Roman world, they were different, yet complementary, concepts.

[20] Ehmig, "Risikobewältigung bei Schwangerschaft und Geburt in der Römischen Antike: Lateinische Dokumentarische und Archäologische Zeugnisse," 113–115. Ehmig examines uterus votives (pp. 121–123), gemstone uterus amulets (pp. 124–126), and uterine keys (pp. 126–128), and identifies three motives used in Roman antiquity in context of pregnancy and childbirth: swaddled child (*Wickelkind*), uterus motif, and key motif (p. 128).

[21] See, e.g., Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 79–94; Armand Delatte, and Philippe Derchain. *Les Intailles Magiques Gréco-Egyptiennes* (Paris: Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque nationale, 1964); Vitalien Laurent, "Amulettes Byzantines et Formulaires Magiques," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 36 (1936): 300–315; Schlumberger, Gustave. "Amulettes Byzantins Anciens," *Revue des études grecques* 5 (1892): 73–93; Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition"; Jeffrey Spier, "A Revival of Antique Magical Practice in Tenth-Century Constantinople," in *Magic and the Classical Tradition*, eds. Charles Burnett and William F. Ryan (London: The Warburg Institute, 2006), 29–36; Jeffrey Spier, "An Antique Magical Book Used for Making Sixth-Century Byzantine Amulets?," in *Les Savoirs Magiques et Leur Transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, eds. Véronique Dasen and Jean-Michel Spieser (Florence: Sismel, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014), 43–66; Gary Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 65–86; Gary Vikan, "Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 145–163; Gary Vikan, "Magic and visual culture," in *Greek Magic: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, ed. J. C. B. Petropoulos (London: Routledge, 2008), 53–57; Alicia Walker, "A Reconsideration of Early Byzantine Marriage Rings," in *Between Magic and Religion*, eds. Sulochana Ruth Asirvatham, Corinne Ondine Pache, and John Watrous (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 149–164.

[22] Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," 31–33. However, the dating is not ironclad, and earlier dates for some of the finds have been suggested (see, e.g., Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," 78).

[23] For the *hystera* formula, see, e.g., François Lenormant, "Une Incantation Magique Chaldéenne," *Revue archéologique* 34 (1877): 254–262; Laurent, "Amulettes Byzantines et Formulaires Magiques"; Alphons A. Barb, "Diva Matrix: A Faked Gnostic Intaglio in the Possession of P. P. Rubens and the Iconology of a Symbol," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 193–238, notes 300–303 on pages 236–237; Alphons A. Barb, "Antaura. The Mermaid and the Devil's Grandmother: A Lecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 1–23; Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," 77; Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," 29–31, 44–50; Spier, "A Revival of Antique Magical Practice in Tenth-Century Constantinople," 32; Spier, "An Antique Magical Book used for Making Sixth-Century Byzantine Amulets?," 54–65; Faraone, "Magical and Medical Approaches to the Wandering Womb in the Ancient Greek World," 23; Heta Björklund, "Classical Traces of Metamorphosis in

snakes, known as the *hystera* motif.[24] The formula is repeated in a range of variations, all comparing the uterus to animals, reflecting the belief, already formed in antiquity, of the uterus as an independent being with an animal nature. One variation of the formula reads ὑστέ[ρα] μελάνη μελανωμένη ὸς ὄφης ἠλησε κε ὸς δράκον συρίζι ("uterus, black, blackening, slither like a snake and hiss like a serpent),[25] while another reads ἠστέρα μελάνη μελανομένι ὸς ὄφης κήλησε ὸς θάλασα γαλήνησον ὸς πρόβατον πραην κε ὸς κατνός… ("uterus, black, blackening, calm like a snake, be calm like sea, be gentle like a lamb and like a cat…").[26] I have previously argued that the formula echoes the typical language used to portray metamorphosis in Greek and Latin literature.[27]

The amulets also include other inscriptions to convey that they are for the well-being of the uterus,[28] as well as the Trisagion formula,[29] Psalm 90 (LXX 91),[30] and numerous images. A demon figure is often depicted together with the rider saint, the demon prostrate and pierced with the rider saint's lance or trampled by his horse.[31]

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the Byzantine Hystera Formula," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 70 (2017): 151–166. See also Louis Arnaud, "L'Exorcism κατὰ τῆς ἄβρας Attribué à Saint Gregoire," *Échos d'Orient* 16 (1913): 292–304.

[24] The *hystera* motif has been treated in Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, 90–91; Barb, "Diva Matrix: A Faked Gnostic Intaglio in the Possession of P. P. Rubens and the Iconology of a Symbol," 201–202, 208–212; Barb, "Antaura. The Mermaid and the Devil's Grandmother: A Lecture," 9; Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," 76–81; Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," 38–42.

[25] Translation by Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," 29, with modifications. A lead pendant from Asia Minor (inv. no. ω-198, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 1, Pl. 1a).

[26] Translation by Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," 29, with modifications. A bloodstone amulet (inv. no. MP–H–1865, Muzeum Narodowe Ziemi Przemyskiej, Przemysl, Poland; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 57). Note that here the formula mistakenly asks the uterus to "calm like a snake" instead of "slither." In Björklund, "Classical Traces of Metamorphosis in the Byzantine Hystera Formula," 158 I have suggested reading κατνός as καπνός (smoke), but on further consideration, I think that the reading suggested by Laurent, "Amulettes byzantines et formulaires magiques," 304 and reproduced in Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," 29 as *cat* is equally, if not more, possible.

[27] Björklund, "Classical Traces of Metamorphosis in the Byzantine Hystera Formula."

[28] πρὸς ὀφέλίαν ὑστέρας on a lead amulet (inv. no. 1207, Numismatic Museum, Athens; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 8) and ὑστέρηκον φυλακτέριον on a lead amulet (Archaeological Museum of Corinth; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," no. 10), a silver amulet (Archaeological Museum of Corinth; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 40), and a bronze amulet (Archaeological Museum of Corinth; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 44). These are not intentional, but the result of the amulet maker mistakenly inscribing the title of the spell from the magical handbook along with the actual inscription.

[29] Ἅγιος ὁ Θεός, Ἅγιος ἰσχυρός, Ἅγιος ἀθάνατος, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς. In Latin it is known as *Ter Sanctus*. The amulets often use Ἅγιος Ἅγιος Ἅγιος as shorthand for the Trisagion.

[30] "You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot." (Ps. 90(91).13 NRSV).

[31] The following amulets depict the prostrate demon figure with the rider saint: a lead amulet from Constantinople (Schlumberger 63, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 16), a lead amulet from Asia Minor (inv. no. ω-1161, the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 17), a lead amulet (once in Constantinople, property of P. Khirlanghijd; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 18), a lead amulet from Constantinople (Schlumberger 19, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 19), a lead amulet from Asia Minor (inv. no. 986.181.74, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 20), a lead amulet from Asia Minor (Zurich market, L. Alexander Wolfe and Frank Sternberg, Auction xxiii, 1989, lot 258; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 21), a lead amulet from Asia Minor (in a private collection; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 22), a lead amulet (in a private collection; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 24), a silver amulet from Asia Minor (inv. 1980.5, Ashmolean

By their design, the Byzantine uterus amulets were clearly meant to be worn upon the person as a pendant or a ring, or carried in a pocket—not placed in a church or sanctuary. Due to the lack of a definite find context,[32] it remains unclear whether amulets were inherited from generation to generation or if a new one was made for each wearer. Also unclear is what level of attention was devoted to the customization of the amulet or whether they were purchased *prêt-à-porter*.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF VOTIVE PRACTICE AND AMULET USE

In this section, I will focus on the realities of women's lives that contributed to the use of votives and amulets in antiquity and Byzantine period. Up until the medical advances of the twentieth century, pregnancy and childbirth posed great risks to a woman's life and health. The rates of maternal and infant mortality are assumed to have been high. From Early Neolithic to Roman Imperial era, death in childbirth and from complications after birth were common enough to result in a lower average age at death for women than men.[33] Estimates of maternal death in Classical antiquity fall between 5 in 20,000 to 25 in 1,000.[34] In addition, those who survived childbirth and postpartum complications could still face a lifetime of debilitating factors such as fistulas or uterine and vaginal prolapse.

The lack of actual medical science and understanding of female physiology led to the grouping of many gynecological ailments under the umbrella term "wandering womb."[35] As already stated, the shape of uterus votives often resembles a jar, which makes sense in the light of textual sources that compare the uterus to a jar or a box.[36] In texts such as the Hippocratic corpus, we encounter the idea that the uterus could be attracted by pleasant smells and repulsed by unpleasant smells; had the uterus been displaced, it could be cajoled back to its proper place by placing fragrant balms or ointments near the vagina and smelly ones under the nostrils.[37]

Museum, Oxford; see Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," no. 33), two lead amulets from Istanbul (inv. nos. 11.20 (M) and 11.188 (M), Istanbul Archaeology Museums, see Kiziltan, Zeynep and Gulbahar Baran Çelik, eds., *Stories from the Hidden Harbor: Shipwrecks of Yenikapi* (Istanbul: Ege Yayinlari, 2013). Exhibition catalogue, 133, nos. 80 and 81).

[32] James Russell, "The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 35–50.

[33] Among adult females (15+ years), in the Classical era, the average age at death was 36.8 years; in the Hellenistic period 38 years; in the Roman Imperial era, 34.2 years (Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 76–77, Table 4). In Roman Egypt, the female life expectancy at birth landed between 20 and 25 years, averaging at 22.5, and at 10 years old, between 34.5 and 37.5 years (Roger S. Bagnall, and Bruce W. Frier. *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90, 138). In the early 14th century, female life expectancy at birth was 22.5 years. Data from the Byzantine period is unfortunately sparse, and the data that does exist is from different periods that are not comparable with each other. However, as a general trend, in the Byzantine period life expectancy remained low (Angeliki E. Laiou, "The Human Resources," in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century, Vol. 1*, eds. Angeliki E. Laiou and Charalampos Bouras (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002), 47–55).

[34] *OCD* s.v. "Childbirth" (E. G. Clark). Revised 3rd edition (2003), 321. While Emiel Eyben, "Family Planning in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *Ancient Society* 11–12 (1980–1981): 5–82 concentrates on ancient male writers' views on family planning and abortion, speculation on women's possible reasons for using contraception is relegated to the conclusions. These reasons, curiously, are not thought to include wishing to not die in childbirth.

[35] See note 4.

[36] E.g., Hippocr. *Epidemiae* 6.5.11; Hippocr. *De mulieribus* 1.33; Hippocr. *Genit*. 9.3.

[37] Hippocr. *Nat. Mul*. 3: "Open her mouth and pour in very fragrant wine, and hold evil-smelling fumigants under her nostrils and fragrant ones below her uterus." (καὶ τὸ στόμα διαγαγὼν οἶνον εὐωδέστατον ἐγχέαι, καὶ προσέχειν πρὸς τὰς ῥῖνας καὶ ὑποθυμιῆν τὰ κακώδεα, ὑπὸ δὲ τὰς ὑστέρας τὰ εὐώδεα.); Hippocr. *Nat.*

Folklore provided an explanation for child and maternal deaths: demons that killed pregnant women and killed or stole newborn children. The first mention of such a demon, here called Gello, in literature dates back to Sappho: Γέλλως παιδοφιλωτέρα ("fonder of children than Gello").[38] The belief in Gello was still alive in Michael Psellus's (1017/1018– 1078) time, since he references the superstitions surrounding her, while stating that such demons were not real and people should give up the belief in them.[39] It was commonly believed that women who died before their time (that is, unmarried and childless) would become child-killing demons themselves.[40] The idea that one could stop these demons and secure the favor of gods by the use of amulets and votives provided a sense of control.

THE PRESUMED FUNCTIONAL PRINCIPLE OF VOTIVES AND AMULETS

This section will illustrate the principle in which votives and amulets were thought to work through the concept of "the law of similarity," compare the use of votives and amulets to that of Roman *tabulae,* and consider the magical power accorded to writing as well as to holy or magical images.

As explained in the previous section on the life circumstances necessitating the use of votives and amulets, women faced great risks to their life and health when pregnant and

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Mul. 26: "When the uterus causes suffocation, hold all sorts of evil-smelling fumigations under the patient's nostrils: pitch, sulfur, horn, lamp wick, seal oil, castoreum; below her genitalia (sc. fumigate with) fragrant ones." (Ὁκόταν πνίγωσιν αἱ ὑστέραι, ὑποθυμιῆν χρὴ τὰ κακώδεα πάντα ὑπὸ τὰς ῥῖνας, ἄσφαλτον, θεῖον, κέρας, ἐλλύχνιον, φώκης ἔλαιον, καστόριον· ὑπὸ δὲ τὰ αἰδοῖα τὰ εὐώδεα.); Hippocr. *Steril*. 35: "Fumigate beneath her genitalia with evil-smelling substances and beneath her nose with fragrant ones." (ὑποθυμιῆν δὲ ὑπὸ τὰ αἰδοῖα κακώδεα, ὑπὸ δὲ τὰς ῥῖνας εὐώδεα·) Translation by Paul Potter, ed. and transl., *Hippocrates, Vol. 10. Generation. Nature of the Child. Diseases 4. Nature of Women and Barrenness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 197, 225, 391. Aret. *De causis et signis acutorum morborum*, 2.11: "Sometimes the mouth of the womb only, as far as the neck, protrudes, and retreats inwardly if the uterus be made to smell to a fetid fumigation; and the woman also attracts it if she smells to fragrant odours." (προσπίπτει κοτὲ τὸ στόμιον τῆς ὑστέρης μοῦνον μέσφι τοῦ αὐχένος, ἀλλ᾽ αὖθις εἴσω δύεται, ἢν ὀσφραίνηται ἡ ὑστέρη θυμιήσι κακώδεϊ. ἕλκει δὲ αὐτέην καὶ ἡ γυνὴ, ἢν ὀσφραίνηται θυμιητῶν εὐωδέων.) Translation by Francis Adams, ed. and transl., *The Extant Works of Aretaeus, The Cappadocian* (Boston: Milford House Inc., 1972 [1856]). See also Holt Parker, "Women and Medicine," in *Blackwell Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, eds. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 107–124; Adair, "Plato's View of the 'Wandering Uterus'"; Faraone, "New Light on Ancient Greek Exorcisms of the Wandering Womb."

[38] Sapph. *Fr*. 178. Zenobius preserves this fragment in his *Proverbs* (Zen. 3.3 (i 58 Leutsch-Schneidewin), and explains the reference thusly: "a saying used of those who died prematurely, or of those who are fond of children but ruin them by their upbringing. For Gello was a girl, and since she died prematurely the Lesbians say her ghost haunts little children, and they attribute premature deaths to her." (ἐπὶ τῶν ἀώρως τελευτησάντων, ἤτοι ἐπὶ τῶν φιλοτέκνων μέν, τροφῇ δὲ διαφθειρόντων αὐτά. Γελλὼ γάρ τις ἦν παρθένος, καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀώρως ἐτελεύτησε, φασὶν οἱ Λέσβιοι αὐτῆς τὸ φάντασμα ἐπιφοιτᾶν ἐπὶ τὰ παιδία, καὶ τοὺς τῶν ἀώρων θανάτους αὐτῇ ἀνατιθέασι.) Translation of Sappho and Zenobius by David A. Campbell, ed. and transl., *Sappho, Alcaeus. Greek Lyric, Volume I: Sappho and Alcaeus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 177. See also Martin L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 58.

[39] Psellus records that the nature of Gello is believed to be antithetical to childbirth (ἡ Γιλλὼ δύναμίς τις πρὸς τὰς γενέσεις καὶ τὰς οὐσίας ἀντίθετος), that Gello was said to kill pregnant women and to harm the womb (αὕτη γοῦν τά τε κυοφορούμενα, φησίν, ἀναιρεῖ καὶ ὁπόσα τῆς μήτρας διολισθήσοι) and mothers of deceased infants called their children Γιλλόβρωτα, "eaten by Gello" (τὰ γοῦν συντακέντα τῶν νεογνῶν Γιλλόβρωτα αἱ περὶ τὴν λεχὼ ὀνομάζουσιν). Psellus also recommended people to give up the belief in demons (τὰ μὲν ἀνάγων εἰς ὑψηλοτέρας ἐννοίας, τὰ δὲ ἀπὸ δοξῶν ἀρχαίων εἰς τὰς δημώδεις ὑπολήψεις κατάγων). Michael Psellus: *Philosophica minora II*, 49.1–28 (ed. Martin L. O'Meara, ed., Michael Psellos: *Philosophica Minora II* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1989)).

[40] Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead. Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 164–165 (see also pages 188–199, 224); Karen Hartnup, *'On the Beliefs of the Greeks': Leo Allatios and Popular Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 155–157 (see also pages 85–172).

giving birth, leading to an overall lower life expectancy up until modern times. Getting pregnant might be difficult, miscarriages could happen, one could die in childbirth, and children could die. In absence of medical science and understanding of bacteria, viruses, and the mechanism of diseases, these events must have seemed random and illogical. Both health and sickness were thought to be in the hands of the gods, and it was hoped that they could be influenced by prayers, gifts, and magical means. Many magical ways of healing are built on the concept of "sympathetic magic."[41] It is based on "the law of similarity"— the concept of *similia similibus curantur* ("like cures like").[42] The law of similarity and the idea of *sympatheia*—that same produces and attracts same, that objects once in contact continue to have an effect on each other, that a part represents the whole— was still alive and well in Byzantium.[43]

Votive practice was centered around a sanctuary or a cult site of a deity. This context must be taken into account when analyzing a votive and its meaning. Ammerman concludes that the meaning and purpose of votives can not be studied without comparing the votive within its own frame of reference: by viewing it against other votives within the same sanctuary as well as in the wider context of the city-state or area.[44] A votive must always be considered in connection with its donor (whether or not named by inscription), the donor's connection to the deity the votive was dedicated to, and the wish or prayer of the donor. The

[41] Such magical healing spells are preserved in the Hellenistic Greco-Egyptian magical papyri (Karl Preisendanz, Ernst Heitsch, and Albert Henrichs, eds., *Papyri Graecae Magicae = Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri. 1–2* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1974); Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986)). Even though many spells in the magical papyri give recipes including several ingredients, these ingredients did not have any medically effective substances that could have healed ailments.

[42] This was eloquently put into words in James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1922. Repr., New York: Cosimo Books, 2009 [1922]), 11: "First, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. The former principle may be called "the law of Similarity," the latter the Law of Contact or Contagion." While I do not think Frazer should be unquestioningly used as an authority, and many of his ideas deserve the rejection they have received, in this instance I think he might be describing something that is essential in the way humans categorize and associate things and see causal links between events. The effect of magical thinking on people's decision making and psychology has been studied by e.g., Eugene D'Aquili, and Andrew Newberg. *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999); Jeffrey S. Levin, and Preston L. Schiller. "Is there a Religious Factor in Health?," *Journal of Religion and Health* 26 (1987): 9– 36; Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause. *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine, 2002); Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman. *Why We Believe What We Believe: Uncovering our Biological Need for Meaning, Spirituality, and Truth* (New York: Free Press, 2006). On general works on the psychology and biology of religion, see, e.g., Henk S. Versnel, "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer," in *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, ed. Henk S. Versnel (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1–64; H. W. Pleket, "Religious History as the History of Mentality," in *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, ed. Henk S. Versnel (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 152–192; Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *The American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 813–836; Walter Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Newberg and Waldman, *Why we Believe what we Believe*; Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[43] Katerina Ierodiakonou, "The Greek Concept of *Sympatheia* and its Byzantine Appropriation in Michael Psellos," in *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, eds. Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi (Geneva: La Pomme d'Or, 2006), 97–117.

[44] Ammerman, "Children at Risk: Votive Terracottas and the Welfare of Infants at Paestum," 132–133. Rebecca M. Ammerman, "The Naked Standing Goddess: A Group of Archaic Terracotta Figurines from the Sanctuary in the Località Santa Venera at Paestum," *American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (1991): 203–230 has reconstructed the beliefs that influenced the use of votives, and how these beliefs have been set in the framework of a specific cult.

more personal the votive was to the donor and the more time and effort had been exerted in procuring or manufacturing it, the better and more efficiently it was thought to work. This emphasis on the effort suggests most votives would have been manufactured by the donors themselves, and many were. On the other hand, several found votives are made in molds,[45] meaning there was commercial mass production. A mass-produced votive could have been bought on the way to the sanctuary.

The shape of the votive could renew and strengthen the already existing aspects and functions of the deity that the votive was dedicated to, but it could also create wholly new meanings. These new meanings could be short-lived and unique, meaningful to only one worshipper's personal relationship with the deity.[46] Behind the act of donating a votive is the idea of a reciprocal relationship between the worshipper and the deity where the worshipper first asks the deity for a favor and vows to give a return gift, if and when the favor is granted. After the favor is granted, the worshipper donates a votive to the deity in a sanctuary or a temple. In this way, a votive serves as thanks for a granted favor.[47] Anatomical votives fall under the sphere of representative magic: the idea that not only the votive but the body part depicted by the votive became property of the deity. By producing a replica of a uterus and dedicating it to a deity, it was hoped that the uterus of the donor would also come under that deity's protection.

Contemporary to the votive practice was the Roman practice of using tablets (*tabulae*) in making treaties and contracts (between humans as well as between humans and gods in ritual settings). The *tabulae* were not simply a surface on which the words specifying the contract were written, nor (in Meyer's words) "a memorandum of an action" but an integral part in the process of generating and facilitating the desired outcome. The result could not have been realized, were it not for the existence and the act of making and inscribing the *tabula*. In this, *tabulae* were required to complete the chain of action and to bring it to closure. Making and inscribing a *tabula* was integral in the process of making a contract or vow true both in the world of humans and the world of deities.[48] As this example of *tabulae* shows, writing is not merely writing, but it makes the words written true in the physical world. Therefore, inscribing magical formulas on an amulet was not only an act of reproduction of text but a magical act in and of itself.[49] This belief that the power of magical

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[45] M. Haase. "Votive practice" *Brill's New Pauly* s.v. Brill Online, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e12208090 (accessed September 28, 2016); Ammerman, "Children at Risk: Votive Terracottas and the Welfare of Infants at Paestum," 139–140.

[46] M. Haase. "Votive practice" *Brill's New Pauly* s.v. Brill Online, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e12208090 (accessed September 28, 2016).

[47] E.g., Bodel, "'Sacred dedications': A problem of definitions," 18, 22; Rüpke, "Dedications accompanied by inscriptions in the Roman Empire: Functions, intentions, modes of communication," 31–33; Elizabeth A. Meyer, *Legitimacy and Law in the Roman World: Tabulae in Roman Belief and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101–102; see also *Dig*. 50.12.2pr (Ulpian): *Si quis rem aliquam voverit, voto obligatur. Quae res personam voventis, non rem quae vovetur obligat. Res enim, quae vovetur, soluta quidem liberat vota, ipsa vero sacra non efficitur* ("Where a person vows anything, he is bound by his vow, but the obligation attaches to him who makes the vow, and not to the property; for where anything is vowed and delivered, it releases the person, but the property does not become sacred." Translation by Samuel Parsons Scott, *The Civil Law* (Cincinnati: Central Trust, 1932)).

[48] Meyer, *Legitimacy and Law in the Roman World: Tabulae in Roman Belief and Practice*, 92, 96, 101.

[49] Compare this with the hand-copying of magical manuscripts and books, written in Latin or the vernacular European languages, in medieval Europe. The hand-copied manuscripts and books continued circulation in thousands, despite the invention and spread of the printing presses. One reason proposed for this was the widely held idea that a printed book had no intrinsic magical power, and in order to be effective, the ritualistic copying of a new book by hand was required. Yet, most people in need of magical fixes were not "earnest practitioners" who would have cared whether the spell came from a printed book or a painstakingly hand-copied grimoire. The continued popularity of the hand-copied manuscript was due to the fact that the demand for printed books exceeded the supply, and so manuscripts continued to be copied. Owen Davies,

formulas was realized when they were written down or recited out loud played a large role in Greco-Roman magical practice.[50] By inscribing the magical *hystera* formula on the amulets, the amulet maker not only copy the text, but made its message real.

In order to illuminate the mechanism that was perceived to provide efficacy to the Byzantine uterus amulets, I will take a parallel from the post-iconoclastic idea of how Christian imagery exerted power in the case of textile decorations. In Maguire's view, the difference between pre- and post-iconoclastic textile decoration was not only due to developments in technology and changes in fashion, but to "a new consensus about the way in which Christian imagery worked."[51] In the post-iconoclastic thought, images were not considered to be able to contain power in and of themselves, but only as intermediaries. The real, and only, source of power was God. While God's power might have worked through the images, the images themselves were not powerful or magical, whereas in pre-iconoclastic thought, the images themselves could have harbored innate power.[52] By depicting the rider saint conquering the demon in the Byzantine uterus amulets, it was hoped that through *sympatheia* this would also take place in real life: the divine power of God, working through the image of the rider saint, would repel and defeat the child-killing demon believed to be — symbolically or factually — behind gynecological and fertility problems. The amulets were apotropaic, meaning they aimed to avert evil and protect the wearer of the amulet. They were not left as thanks to God the way votives were deposited in the sanctuaries. If they were, one would expect to see variations of εὐχή or χάρις in their inscriptions (as is the case with Greco-Roman uterus votives[53] and Byzantine marriage rings[54]), not the exhortation "help the wearer," βοηθεῖ τῆς φορούσης.[55]

Both in the use of *tabulae* and the magical power of writing, and in the power accorded to images, we can see the same underlying principle as in the use of votives and

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Grimoires: A History of Magic Books (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30, 53–54; Robert Mathiesen, "The Key of Solomon: Toward a Typology of the Manuscripts," *Societas Magica Newsletter* 17 (2007): 1–9; Stephen Charles Haar, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?* (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 158–159; Florent Heintz, *Simon 'Le Magicien': Actes 8, 5–25 et L'Accusation de Magie contre les Prophétes Thaumaturges dans l'Antiquité* (Paris: Cahiers de la Revue biblique, 1997), pt. 4.

[50] This idea of correct recitation ensuring efficacy can be seen in early Roman law, where following strict ritual was key for an agreement or a verdict to be recognized as valid. The tiniest mistake would render the whole affair invalid, forcing the participant to start over (Meyer, *Legitimacy and Law in the Roman World: Tabulae in Roman Belief and Practice*, 87, 91; Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 205ff). See also Fritz Graf, "Magie et Ecriture: quelques Réflexions," in *Écrire la Magie dans l'antiquité: Actes du Colloque International (Liège, 13–15 Octobre 2011)*, ed. Magali de Haro Sanchez (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2015), 227–237; David Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions," *Helios* 21 (1994): 189–221. It is notable that this requirement of flawlessness apparently was not a concern with the Byzantine uterus amulets. They display misspellings (e.g., δράρκον for δράκων in an enameled copper pendant, inv. no. OA 6276, Louvre) that one would not expect to be present had the amulet maker been following a magical handbook flawlessly (although one must allow for the possibility that the handbook been copied erroneously). In addition, they do not distinguish between long and short vowels (ο and ω; δράκων written as δράκον, λέων written as λέον, ὡς written as ὸς) or between letters which were pronounced the same (η and ι; snake written as both ὄφις and ὄφης).

[51] Henry Maguire, "Magic and the Christian Image," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 51–71.

[52] However, this is a theological distinction, and it is unclear whether lay folk using holy or magical images would have cared about such distinctions.

[53] See note 19.

[54] Walker, "A Reconsideration of Early Byzantine Marriage Rings," 154.

[55] See, e.g., a silver ring in British Museum (Ormonde Maddock Dalton, *Catalogue of the Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1901), 24, no. 142).

amulets: objects in this world (the mundane world of humans) carrying their power and meaning into another (heaven or the world inhabited by deities).

CONCLUSION

In the pre-modern era, pregnancy and childbirth could be life-threatening for both the woman and the child. When faced with the possibility of death or a life-time of post-partum medical problems, one must have felt powerless and helpless. Since the deaths of mothers and children must have seemed unpreventable and random, folklore provided an explanation in the form of child-killing and child-stealing demons. The medical wisdom of antiquity grouped many gynecological ailments under the umbrella term "wandering womb." Rituals for repelling the demons and the wandering womb with amulets and the offering votives gave the feeling of at least doing something. Several steps of the process— the preparing or buying the votive or amulet, the journey to a sanctuary to deposit the votive —helped to resolve the anxiety revolving around the issue.

The intended goal behind the use of uterus votives and uterus amulets was ultimately the protection of women's fertility[56] and of new-born children— in fact, several uterus amulets plainly state that they were for the well-being of the uterus.

The power of both the votives and the amulets lies in representative and sympathetic magic, and the concept of "the law of similarity." The votives worked through representative magic: as the votive reproduction of the uterus was donated to the deity, the real physical uterus of the donor became under the deity's protection as well. In the case of amulets, inscribing the amulet with the *hystera* formula, the *hystera* motif, and the rider saint defeating a demon was thought to influence real events through *sympatheia* as images of saints transmitted God's power and writing itself was a magical act.

Votive practice was based on a reciprocal relationship between the donor and the deity.[57] Votives served as thanks for a favor already granted by the deity in the past, while amulets were apotropaic and tried to avert misfortune in the future. I would suggest that this temporal aspect is more important than the choice of material— votives made of metal, just like the uterus amulets, have been found, and while no clay uterus amulets from the Byzantine period have been found, there is no technical reason why one could not have been manufactured. This is underlined by the fact that votives were left in a sanctuary, having fulfilled their purpose, while amulets were carried upon one's person as a defense.

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[56] An interesting case of pilgrimages for fertility in more recent times is the legend of the Dutch Margaret of Henneberg, married to Count Herman of Henneberg. There are several variants of the legend, but in all the Countess mocks a woman of lower status with a multiple pregnancy (in some account twins, quadruplets in others). The woman then curses the Countess to give birth to as many children as there are days in a year. On Good Friday in 1276, the Countess gave birth to 365 finger-sized children, who all died, along with their mother. While Margaret of Henneberg did indeed die on Good Friday in 1276, in reality she only had two children, a son and a daughter. In the 17th century, childless women would travel to the Henneberg family castle in Loosduinen, Netherlands, to wash their hands in the basin where, according to the legend, the 365 babies were baptized. Literature suggests that the legend was prompted by a hydatiform mole (Bondeson, Jan and Arie Molenkamp. "The Countess Margaret of Henneberg and Her 365 Children," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 89 (1996): 711–716; L. J. Rather, "Ambroise Pare, the Countess Margaret, Multiple Births, and Hydatidiform Mole," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 47 (1971): 508–515).

[57] The votive practice never really ended. As Christianity took over, the votive practice of Graeco-Roman religion was carried on in the new religion. Especially in the Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches, votives still play a major part in religious practice. The British Museum has several examples of modern anatomical votives in its collections (e.g., a stone spleen from sixteenth-seventeenth century Spain (inv. no. 1957,0205.1), an amber phallus from eighteenth-nineteenth century Italy (inv. no. WITT.116), wax phalli from eighteenth century Italy (inv. nos. WITT.319 and WITT.320), and Sicilian silver lungs from between 1950–2002 (inv. no. Eu2002,05.6).