Reading between the lines: Old Germanic and early Christian views on abortion
Elsakkers, M.J.

Citation for published version (APA):
Elsakkers, M. J. (2010). Reading between the lines: Old Germanic and early Christian views on abortion

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
ARTICLE XI


[Elsakkers, unpublished]
PROICIT, PURGAT ET SANAT
Emmenagogues and Purgatives for Women’s Diseases in Early Medieval Recipe Books

Early medieval recipes for emmenagogues, ‘agents that provoke menstruation, regardless of whether or not a fertilized egg is present and implantation has occurred’, and purgatives, ‘vigorously laxative drugs’, have a lot to tell us about women’s diseases and female pathology. They are associated with fertility management, because, as we know and the ancients also knew, both can act as contraceptives (like our modern ‘morning after pill’) and abortifacients. However, we tend to forget that early medieval women used emmenagogues and purgatives to promote fertility and to cure a variety of complaints that were associated with and caused by menstrual retention. In this article I will try to explain what female complaints early medieval recipes for emmenagogues and purgatives were reputed to cure, why menstruation was considered to be so important for women’s health, and whether there is evidence that these menstrual regulators were prescribed, or could have been prescribed, as an abortifacient. The recipes discussed in this article constitute a small sample of early medieval recipes for women’s diseases found in relatively small recipe books. The recipes are probably all Greek in origin, and were originally translated and/or adapted in northern Italy between the sixth and the eighth centuries.

In classical and medieval gynecology menstruation is considered a sign of good health. Amenorrhea - ‘the absence of menstruation’ - is a sign of bad health. Menstruation indicates that a woman is not pregnant, but it is also a fertility indicator: a menstruating woman is considered to be physically capable of conceiving a child, as the ancient Greek physician Soranus also noted in the late first century A.D.:

Soranus, Γυναικεία
1.29. (…) menstruation, consequently, does not contribute to their health, but is useful for childbearing only; for conception does not take place without menstruation.

The following ‘question and answer’ on menstruation from Aristotle’s Problemata in the late eighth-century Lorscher Arzneibuch informs us that a healthy woman should menstruate regularly, so that she will be relieved of the excess blood she produces.

Lorscher Arzneibuch (MS c. 795)

According to ancient and medieval medical theory a failure to menstruate causes blood to accumulate in a woman’s body. If a woman of reproductive age who is not menstruating is pregnant, her menstrual blood was thought to serve as nourishment for the fetus. If the woman is not pregnant and not menstruating, the accumulation of blood in her body can give discomfort and result in serious complaints. Menstrual retention or amenorrhea, can be caused by malnutrition and a variety of other medical conditions. The most important disorder,
besides infertility, that ancient gynecology associates with menstrual retention is suffocation of the womb. Both conditions are considered to be due to an unhealthy accumulation of excess blood in the woman’s body. Soranus summarizes as follows:

Soranus, Γυναικεία - Gynaecia
3.7. Now of those who do not menstruate, some have no ailment and it is physiological for them not to menstruate: either because of their age (as in those too young or on the contrary too old) or because they are pregnant, or mannish, or barren singers and athletes in whom nothing is left over for menstruation, everything being consumed by the exercises or changed into tissue. Others, however, do not menstruate because of a disease of the uterus, or of the rest of the body, or of both: ‘of the uterus’ if <the> condition of so-called imperforation is present, or callosity, or scirrhous, or inflammation, or if a scar has formed on a sore, or a closure of the orifice (from long widowhood among other causes), or a flexure: ‘of the rest of the body’, e.g. when it is subject to undernourishment, great emaciation and wasting, or to the accumulation of fatty flesh, or cachexia, or fevers and long ailment, or if through hemorrhoids, vomiting, or nasal hemorrhage, the substance is taken instead to these parts.6

Regular menstruation - i.e. regular purgation or cleansing of the matrix or womb - was considered a prerequisite for conception. Amenorrhea is therefore a serious condition if a woman wishes to conceive. It can be equally distressing if the woman is not planning on becoming pregnant or does not wish to have any more children. In a marginal note on ‘bloodletting’ in a tenth-century manuscript from Trier ‘bringing on the menses’ and ‘fertility’ are linked. The gloss describes where the incisions for bloodletting must be made in women who do not menstruate and ‘who do not conceive’:

Codex Trewires nr. 40 (MS 10th century)
De subitus taliis duas incidimus . propter podagricos et nefractorios . uel sciaticos . aut mulieribus que menstrua non purgant . et que non concepiunt.7

Eliminating excess blood, in this case through phlebotomy, is apparently the standard procedure for both retention of the menses and infertility; the cure should ultimately restore the woman’s menses, so that her body will function normally again, that is, so that she can conceive.

‘Menstrual retention’ was a much broader concept in ancient and medieval medicine than it is today. It not only refers to the bleeding associated with women’s monthly periods, but it also includes other kinds of uterine bleeding, such as the bleeding connected with birth (lochial discharge). Remedies for menstrual retention - often strong, emmenagogic purgatives - were also used to induce contractions in situations of difficult birth, and to expel a dead fetus or the afterbirth. ‘Menstrual retention’ can refer to a woman’s monthly cycle and to pregnancy, birth and miscarriage. Medieval recipes that restore or induce the menses were therefore associated with fertility and with infertility, because, once a woman’s menstrual irregularities and problems were resolved, she would be healthy enough to be able to become pregnant. In ancient and medieval gynecology ‘inducing the menses’ is synonymous with ‘restoring a woman’s health’.

The recipes in the early medieval recipe books give us a glimpse of ancient gynecology. They contain many prescriptions that are concerned with menstrual disorders. The problems remedied range from too much (proflavi-um) or too little to a complete absence of menstruation. They have to do with (in)fertility, conception, miscarriage, pregnancy, birth, contraception, abortion, suffocation of the womb and other female complaints and conditions. The most common complaint is menstrual retention, and most early medieval recipes for women’s diseases seem to be emmenagogues or purgatives, although we also find prescriptions for excessive, abnormally

6 Temkin 1951 [1991], p. 133.
7 The gloss was written in the margin of MS Trier Stadtbibliothek 40 (10th century), f. 24r, in a paragraph on bloodletting (f. 21v-24r), cf. Ferckel 1914, p. 135.
heavy or prolonged menses. Many recipes do not explain why the menses must be restored or induced, that is, whether cessation of the ‘menses’ has to do with missed monthly periods, pregnancy, birth, miscarriage, abortion, or other female disorders. When reading early medieval recipes on menstrual dysfunction, we must not forget that ‘menstrual retention’ and the expression ‘to bring on the menses’ can implicitly denote a much larger area of women’s complaints and diseases than we may think.

EARLY MEDIEVAL RECIPE COLLECTIONS

The early medieval recipes for emmenagogues and purgatives discussed here constitute a small sample of the available recipes. They are all in relatively small anonymous recipe books. Although we also find women’s recipes in some of the theoretical medical treatises and in the large, often bulky, handbooks, herbals and popular encyclopedic works, such as Marcellus Empiricus’s De Medicamentis, Dioscorides’s De Materia Medica, the Herbarium of Apuleius and Pliny’s Naturalis Historia, this article focuses on the smaller anonymous recipe books, because there is a greater chance that (some of) the recipes in this more practical genre were also known and used outside the walls of the monasteries that housed the manuscripts that have come down to us. Recipe books were probably used by literate, semi-literate, secular and ecclesiastical practitioners. It is possible that some of the recipes came from the oral tradition and/or were also known among the illiterate practitioners. In Italy there is evidence for a medical school in Ravenna and perhaps also for one in Milan. Between the sixth and the eighth centuries medicine was taught, and medical texts, including recipe books, were translated from Greek into Latin in northern Italian medical schools. From the sixth century onwards medicine slowly also became one of the areas of expertise of monks, because taking care of the sick was one of the duties laid down in the Benedictine Rule. Monasteries housed scriptoria and libraries, and became important centers for the dissemination and preservation of Greco-Roman medical knowledge. However, lay practitioners - both male and female (midwives) - continued to practice medicine throughout the early medieval period. Moreover, secular scribes and notaries could also be engaged to copy medical texts. Recipes and recipe books could therefore have been translated and compiled in a secular and in a clerical or monastic setting.

---

8 For a recipe for excessive menses, see, for instance, recipe 5.1.39 in the Lorscher Arnzeibuch (Stoll 1992, pp. 346-347) or recipe 44 in the Antidotarium Bruxellense I (Rose 1894, p. 376).
9 One of the manuscripts is a so-called ‘folded manuscript’, which may indicate that it was used by an itinerant doctor (MS St. Gall, Codex Sangallensis 217, cf. Köpp 1980). The fact that there are often many greatly diverging, variant versions of the same recipe, may also indicate usage.
10 Evidence for secular male and female practitioners in southern and northern Italy has been collected by Clare Pillsworth, cf. Clare Pillsworth, More to Life than Leeches? Medicine and Healthcare in Early Medieval Northern Italy, forthcoming. Clare kindly sent me draft versions of some of the chapters of her book.
12 The order of Saint Benedict was founded in early sixth-century Italy (c. 529); chapter 36 of the Benedictine Rule stipulates that monks should take care of the sick, cf. http://rule.kansasmonks.org/ and http://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0011-/P11.HTM (last accessed February 3, 2010). On early medieval medicine, including ‘Mönchsmedizin’ or ‘monastic medicine’, see, for instance: Schipperges 1964 and MacKinney 1937.
13 On Greco-Roman medical knowledge available in early medieval monasteries, cf. the famous quote on required reading for monks in Cassiodorus’s (c.485-c.585) Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum, ‘Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning’: ‘Even if you do not have knowledge of eloquent Greek literature, you have first the Herbal of Dioscorides who discusses and sketches accurately the herbs of the fields. After this read Hippocrates and Galen translated into Latin, i.e. the Therapeutics of Galen addressed to the philosopher Glacon and a certain anonymous work that has been collected from various authors; then Caelius Aurelius Medicine and Hippocrates Herbs and Cures and various other works written on the art of medicine that, with with Lord’s aid, I have left to you in the recesses of our library” (Halporn and Vessey 2004, p. 166).
14 Christie 1995 mentions guilds for document-writers in Lombard Italy (p. 191); see also: Pillsworth, forthcoming.
An important feature of the early medieval recipe books is the fact that Greco-Roman medical learning was adapted for practical usage. Early medieval recipes contain no theoretical introductions or lengthy explanations of symptoms, diagnoses, or therapies; at the most there is an - often vague or cryptic - reference to symptoms. Basically there are two kinds of recipe books: *antidotaria* and *receptaria*, but hardly any of the early medieval recipe books that have come down to us conform to the definition.\(^\text{15}\) *Receptaria* are anonymous, and the order of the recipes is usually a *capite ad calcem*, which means that the complaints and cures are discussed ‘from head to foot’. The recipes in the *antidotaria* are frequently ascribed to an authoritative, ancient medical author, and often arranged according to their ‘Arzneiform’ or ‘medicinal form’ (potion, pill, plaster, pessary, etc.). The recipes in the *antidotaria*, called ‘long recipes’, ‘Vollrezepte’ or *antidota*, are multifunctional and prescribed for a series of complaints or symptoms. They are complex, require many ingredients (*composita*), and often make use of exotic, non-indigenous ingredients. The recipes in the *receptaria* are short, hence the name ‘short recipe’ or ‘Kurzrezept’. They usually offer a remedy for one complaint, and are often composed of one main ingredient (*simplicia*). The ingredients or components are simpler and often indigenous; the short recipes can also include elements from the folk tradition, such as prayers and amulets.

The recipes were written in early medieval Latin, and most of them were ultimately based on classical and late antique sources. The recipe books that were compiled in the early medieval period reflect the knowledge of Greco-Roman medicine in sixth-, seventh- and eighth-century Italy. No two early medieval recipe books or collections are the same, and in a sense each collection represents a unique and original compilation. Many recipes were corrupted during transmission as a result of scribal errors, transliteration, translation and dictation mistakes, additions and omissions, condensation and supplementation, etc. Even so, we still can recognize the Greek or Mediterranean origin of many of the names, indications and ingredients. Sometimes recipes were adapted to their new European environment by replacing ‘exotic’ or unavailable ingredients with more indigenous and more readily available ones (*quid pro quo*), and sometimes folk remedies from the oral tradition were added. The recipes that have come down to us are probably relatively far removed from their source texts. Centuries of copying and recopying, editing and emending produced recipes written in a spelling that often seems erratic, and the overall result is frequently a recipe that is hardly intelligible. Sometimes the early medieval Latin is so corrupt that it hardly seems possible that the recipes could have ever been used in actual practice.\(^\text{16}\) On the other hand textual instability can also be interpreted as flexibility, and thus point to usage.

The following recipe for late menses in the *Lorscher Arzneibuch* illustrates the textual flexibility and instability of early medieval recipes.

*Lorscher Arzneibuch* (MS c. 795)

5.33. Confectio dithon thion, quod facit ad omnia utia stomach i, ad ptisicos, ad egros longi temporis confortandos, ad disintericos, ad leptopyrias ex cludendas, ad dolorem fa ucium et ad sinancis, ad eos qui  uigilias patiuntur et ad eos quibus aposthemate nascuntur intrinsecus.

Accipit haec: Piperis ~ I \(\int\), mellis Attici lib I, uettonicae ~ V, saxifrage ~ V, cassiae fistole ~ III, fu ~ VI, asari ~ VI.

Sicca tundis, cernis subtilissime et commisces in mortario melle despumato. Dabis autem cocliare plenum ex condito cum calida mixto, si maior valitudo fuerit, per VII dies, si uero initia occupauerit, tres sufficient. Haec potio datur etiam mulieribus quae tardius purgantur.\(^\text{17}\)

---


\(^{16}\) Both the *Glasgower Antidotarium* and the *Reichenauer Antidotarium* are rather corrupt.

A medieval recipe should consist of an indication, that is, the symptom or list of symptoms, a list of ingredients plus amounts, and short directions for its preparation and usage - in this order.\textsuperscript{18} The indication at the beginning of the recipe quoted above shows us that it was originally devised as a remedy for stomach complaints, tuberculosis, fevers, and other disorders. The indication for late menses - \textit{haec potio datur etiam mulieribus quae tardius purgantur}, ‘this potion is also given to women whose menses are too late’ - was added at the end of the recipe, instead of at the beginning where it belongs, clearly demonstrating that it is a later addition.

\textbf{MENSTRUAL RETENTION: general recipes}

As we said above, most recipes for women’s complaints are emmenagogues or purgatives.\textsuperscript{19} We find them in almost every early medieval recipe book. The reason there are so many recipes for ‘menstrual retention’ - in the widest sense of the word - is the fact that a menstruating woman was considered to be a healthy woman. Some recipes reflect this principle by simply stating that the recipe is beneficial for women’s health without naming any symptoms. For instance, some versions of the \textit{antidotum gera galieni fortissima}, a long, multi-purpose recipe that cures a variety of diseases and disorders, list no symptoms for its usage by women - all they say is that the potion will cure any female complaint: \textit{mulieribus salubris}, ‘for women’s health’ or \textit{mulieribus sanat}, ‘it cures women’.\textsuperscript{20} The following emmenagogue restores the menses. No additional information is given; the recipe only tells us that the menses are absent.

\textit{Berliner Antidotarium} (MS 9th-10th century) 
36. \textit{Antidotum purgans mulieribus, quibus purgatio non uenit:} costo - I, casia - I, eruse semen - I, piper - IIII, petreselin - IIII, orice semen - IIII, gligon - IIII, api semen - IIII, croco - IIII, bagas lauri - IIII, artemesia - IIII, mel quod sufficit. Dabis in aqua calida.\textsuperscript{21}

The recipe for an emmenagogic plaster in the \textit{St. Galler Antidotarium} will restore menses that have been gone for three years - implying that menstruation was important.

\textit{St. Galler Antidotarium} (MS 9th century) 
[42]. \textit{Emplastrum prouocans menstruum sanguinem inpositum super umbili cum probatum etiam si per triennium menstrua non fuerit, utere autem post balneum, id est: lupinu agreste, absentium, herba laterium quod est de cucumeris agrestis radices - singul. myrta scrip. XII, ruta scrip. XII, tundis et teris et cum fel taurinum colligis.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Many recipes deviate from this order.

\textsuperscript{19} A purgative cleanses or purifies the body, thus restoring health and humoral balance. When used in connection with women’s diseases the word is (nearly) synonymous with the word \textit{emmenagogue}. It then takes on the meaning ‘induce menstruation’. The recipes quoted in this paper all directly or indirectly claim to be purgatives or emmenagogues. Most of the ingredients are known purgatives, emmenagogues and/or abortifacients. The ingredients of the recipes in this article were checked for their purgative qualities in Keller 1988, Daems 1993, Lieberknecht 1995, pp. 55-84 and Duke 1985. The most frequently mentioned abortifacient herbs are pomegrates, silphium, pennyroyal, artemisia, rue, Queen Anne’s lace, myrrh, squirting cucumber, juniper, aloe, dittany, chaste tree, birth wort, asarum, male fern, willow, cypress, and the mint family (Riddle 1997, pp. 40-63).

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. recipe 24 in the \textit{Reichenauer Antidotarium} and recipe 102 in the \textit{Glasgower Antidotarium}; both are versions of the \textit{antidotum gera galieni fortissima}. The former is beneficial for \textit{mulieribus salubris} and the latter claims that \textit{mulieribus sanat}, cf. Sigerist 1923, p. 44 and Sigerist 1923, pp. 115-116.

\textsuperscript{21} Sigerist 1923, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{22} Sigerist 1923, p. 86.
Other recipes do not mention what kind of menstrual problems the woman is having, they only tell us that the remedy recommended - usually a potion - will work as an emmenagogue and quickly provoke the menses: *menstrua mulieribus prouocat* (…) *et cum omni celeritate parebunt.*

### Lorscher Arzneibuch (MS c. 795) 2.254. *Antidotum ad menstruum prouocandam probatissimum, quod sine dubio dare oportet.*

Recipit haec: Peganum folia, uiridis id est rueate, alteae semen id est malauuisco, leucuuiu semen id est uiola, molochonia semen id est malua, api semen, petrosilini semen, maratri semen id est fenuici, gliconi id est pulei, calamintis id est mentastro albo, agalalis semen id est vrtica maior, saturegia, asaro radices, semen artemisiae maioris, saxiffreca, uettonica, cariofilo, cinamo, costo, ireus, reuponptico, piper ana omnia, mel quod sufficit. Dabiu in modum auelanue maioris cum uino; dabiu per dies tres et abstineat ab omni agramina et aceto et elixas carnes et solubiles cibos uset. 23

### Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century) [3]. *Antidotum pancristum* qui ad omnes fortitudines necessarium est qui sic acc<sip><mu>nas im similudinem fabe egypti-tae colis in aqua calida pensu solido I, cyatis III. Epacitis cum uino calido. Epilempitics caducus cum aqua calida ipsa men<sura>. Stomaticus cum pusa calida. Hictericis cum uino. Febrictantibus cum aqua calida. Cauclusos et strangurious similiter dabius et qui typum patientur cum hydromelle, quartanis . . . tertianis . . . hora . . . sanantar. Dentes dolentibus . . . accipiant cum uino aut cum calda aqua aut cum condito detur. Tortiones iuxta iures cum aqua calida detur. Imflationes habentes ut supra datu. *Menstrua mulieribus prouocat* cum hydromelle aut cum suco fenigreci et cum *omni celeritate parebant.* Ad morsum serpentis cum mel bibatur, et de ipso medicamente in plaga mponis et ad uenenum mirificte prodest cum sucus gentiane. Recipit haec: Calamu aromaticu, cardamomu, castoreu, euforbiu, amomu, piretru, spica nardi, dauci cretici semen, rute agrestis semen, rute agrestis semen, rute agrestis semen, cossa, rosa sicca, feneculi semen ana < IIII, sisileos < XII, opiu < XX, crocu < XV, ziniber < IIII, appii semen, vosquetam ana < IIII, meu, piper albua ana < IIII, mel atticium quantum opus fuerit misces haec omnia simul tritas diligentissime et sicam miscis postea mel. 24

Sometimes we find variant versions of the same recipe *ad menstrua prouocanda* in different recipes: 58. Item *ad menstrua prouocanda* bratena, apiu radiciu, finiculio, libestico, petrosilino quoquis in uino et dabiu bibere. Et tanacita et febrefugia et artemissia cum butero mittis super umbilicum. 25

### Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes (MS 9th century) 8.[.] Item. *Ad menstruam prouocandum.* Bratena, apiu radiciu, finiculio, liiustico, petrosilino coques in uino et dabiu bibere, et tanaceta et febrefugia et artemissia cum butiro mittis super umbilicum. 26

The recipes quoted above all cure one complaint except the *antidotum pancristum.* The *antidotum pancristum* mentions women’s complaints in passing as part of a long list of indications for many different complaints and illnesses, such as stomach disorders, headaches, epilepsy, tuberculosis, melancholy, etc. References to women’s diseases are often concealed in the long multi-functional recipes. Occasionally we find gynecological recipes in a separate section, and there are also a few short recipe collections for women’s diseases. 27

The *antidotum hiera* (egia, iera, eia, gera, egys, gyra, ygia) is a multi-purpose purgative like the *antidotum pancristum.* 28 The *Lorscher Arzneibuch* contains at least thirteen versions of this popular long recipe scattered

---


27 Gynecological recipes are in a separate section of the *Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes* (Köpp 1980). The recipe book published by Brütsch 1922 (*De diversis causis mulierum*) and Egert 1936 (*Liber de causis feminarum, Liber de muliebria causa, Liber de muliebria*) are short gynecological handbooks. The three recipe books in MS Leningrad, Cod. lat. Petropol. F.v.VI.nr.3 published by Egert are designated as Egert I, Egert II and Egert III.

over its five books. We find many different descriptions of menstrual retention: *mulieribus quae non purgantur menstrua mouet* (1.30); *mouet etiam menstruum sanguinem ([5.3.2.]); ad sanguinem menstruum (menstruum) mulieris qui se celat pro vocandum (1.33; 2.235); pro vocat enim sanguinem mulieribus (2.223); ad mulieres, quae non purgantur (3.19). Two examples:

**Lorscher Arzneibuch (MS c. 795)**

1.33. Antidotum egia alia, cuius collectio talis est: Lini seminis frexi = VI, nucleorum pini purgatorum lib I, gingiberis + III, bacarum lauri + III, myrae + III, cassiae + croci. Bacas et gingiber et cassia et lini semen tundis, cernis; nucleos et crocum in mortorio fictili teris et sic species supermittis et postea mel mittis et omnis simul terenda commiscies. Ad omnes necessitates infra scripta coel I comedendum da et in uase uitero serua. Facit enim stomachum dolentibus, spleneticis, ydropicis et qui cybum non digerunt, suisscis et nefreticis et qui dolore uesic afficientur, pleureticis quibus latera dolent siue dextrvm siue sinistrv, suspiriosis qui graue suspirant id est anhelant, et daemonios et lunaticos et ad uenerem inualidis et ad ueruern, et dum non erigunt ueruern, sed diffudiant sperma, ad eos qui per somnum mingunt et ad sanguinem menstrue mulieris qui se celat pro vocandum et ad eos qui malo sunt colore, sciaticis, podagricis, paraliticis et tertianis.

2.223.[1] Antidotum egia. Piperis albi ~ I Ê VIII, gingiber ~ I et siliquis VI, amne sperma Ê VIII, anesi semen Ê VIII, petrosilini Macedonici so Ê I, api seminis so Ê I, feniculi seminis so Ê I, carei so Ê II se Ê I, libestici so Ê II et se Ê VI. Omnia puluera facis, mellis optimi lib IIII colligis, ut satis mollis et ut pro electuario accipiat coeliare per dies singulos terendum prius quonque diebus continuis et dabis ieiunio: Omnes uentositates stomachi tollit, *maxime mulieribus, quae in matricibus ventum conciperit; prouocat enim sanguinem mulieribus et stomachi dolorem tollit, reuma mitigat, dutritiam dissolut, uertiuginem capitis tollit, suspirium conpescit, striodore pectoris sedat, epatis tensionem soluit.*

There are also versions of the *antidotum hiera* in other early medieval recipe books, and again no two versions are the same.

A few examples:

**Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)**

[33]. Antidotum gera quod utebatur ptolomeus imperator, id est logadion quod nobis proditum est ad antiquam passionem, id est maniaca et omne quod ex melancoila contingit. In anno semel datum *purget* omnes humores et superprestat corpori digestionem. Non facit augustiam neque festinationes aliquas et sanum reddit corpus et ad claritatem.

**Berliner Antidotarium**

I comedendum da et in uase uitreo serua. Facit enim stomachum dolentibus,**ad sanguinem menstrue mulierum qui se celat pro vocandum** et ad eos qui malo sunt colore. Dabis sciaticis et nefreticis et ad ommen temporem passionem, accipientes terio in mense. Est enim mensura dationis antidotii huius drag. III, in multa potionem

---

29 Cf. Stoll 1992, recipes 1.30 (pp. 116-117), 1.33 (pp. 118-121), 2.223 (pp. 224-227), 2.35 (pp. 232-233), 3.19 (pp. 250-252), and [5.3.2.] (pp. 354-355).


St. Galler Antidotarium (MS 9th century)

In the following sections I will discuss the various complaints and disorders that are associated with ‘menstrual retention’ and require the use of emmenagogues and purgatives: scant menses, matrix pain and duritia, fatigatio, imbecillitas and depression, suffocatio, hysteria and wandering womb, dead blood, difficult birth, miscarriage, contraception and abortion.

SCANT MENSES
Scant menses, that is, ‘infrequent or very light menstruation’ (oligomenorrhea) or ‘a diminution of the flow or a shortening of the period of menstruation’ (hypomenorrhea), can be cured by taking an emmenagogue and/or purgative. Scant menses are called stillatim purgatio or plus minus purgare in the early medieval recipes. The following versions of the antidotum atrianu cure partially blocked or scant menses; they help bring on the menses and increase the menstrual flow.35

Bamberger Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
19. Antidotum atrianu qui facit ad omnes disperationes mortis quem dabis in omnes causas fabe magnitudein cum aqua calida &e<pati dolentibus cum idromelli aut condito renes dolentibus siue colicibus, cum aqua superscripta calida siue erigusinosi et feblicitantibus cum aqua calida epilepticis, cum aqua calida stomaticics, cum esula calida erigusinosi siue nefreticos, cum uino albo duper spleneticus, cum aqua calida dais lapides in uissica habentibus qui urina cum torqueo faciunt cum apozima et qui ex perfiricione febrium patiuntur tertiarii siue quartanarii dabis ante hora accessionis, dente uero dolentibus et cara satis granum antidoti adpositum destros, sanguine excreantibus cum pusca frigida sciaticis cum careno aut cum idromelli, inflammatione patientibus cum aqua calida ommem perfiricionem expellit. Menstrua mulieres que plus minus expurga mire celeritats coegit si detur cum apotimas fenigreci et melle, qui tussem patiuntur cum melle attico dispumatum et qui de serpentibus percussus fuerit cuius sanet ermanu gentiane admisces. Si voluerit uitatum antidoti huuii probare include gallus simul et serpente asperu, serpens uenosum occidit gallum, pone ergo antidotum eius granum in ore siue in aure galli, mox reuiuiscit. Conficitur autem sic, quia ex profundo mortis reducit ad pristinam sanitem, quod grece dicitur autora, conueniunt potiones magnitudein fabe egyipticae. Recipit et calamo aromatico Z septe, costu Z sex, sissleos Z sex, cardamomum Z quatuor, crapolahsamo Z octo, ameus Z quatuor, saccaino Z quatuor, sminis Z quatuor, ciperu Z octo, piper albu - II §, opium Z XXX, grocu - I, euforuium tres, peretrum Z quatuor, spica nardi Z tres, rute agrestis semen Z tres, cassia Z tres §, appiu semen Z quatvor, iosquiami semen Z XXX, rose sicce Z septe, costu Z sex, sisileos Z sex, cardamomum Z quatuor, crapobalsamo Z octo, ameus Z quatuor, saccapino Z quatuor, euforuiu Z tres, peretsilini semen Z octo, apobalsamo Z novi, ex ilocassia Z duo, amomu Z quatuor, mel atticum quod sufficit. Pulera cum uino optimo asparges et uteris.33

Glasgower Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)

[33] Sigerist 1923, pp. 46-47.
[34] Sigerist 1923, p. 78.
[35] Many of the recipes called antidotum theodoritum and antidotum atrianu contain nearly the same list of indications.
[36] Sigerist 1923, p. 27.

The *antidotum Galieni* seems to be a powder for scant menses:

**Berliner Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

37. Antidotum siue pul<em>uer</em>, que dicitur Galeni. Facit ad diuersas sthomaci passiones, epilenticis, stomachics, melan-
colicis, freneticis, subito superfcrentis membrorum saltus, ad nerorum contractionem uel frictionis, stupor in qualibet
membro si infuderit, epaticis, spleneticis, podragricis, *et mulierum causas velociter purgat*, et reparat omnia uicia ad
omnes causas, quod subito superueuiunt in corpop, ad uertiginem capitis, ad calignes et tipus. Recipit haec: aloepatite
lib. I et - II, xilobsalmas, cinamo, spleneticum, croco, ciasafistula, squinoentus ana – VI, et Æ II, costo, amomo,
absento pontico, rosa sicca ana – VI et Æ I. Haec omnia teris et pul<em>uer</em> facis, dabis exinde - I, qui febrit ex calida, qui
non cum uno pullorum canu.38

The following four versions of the *antidotum theodoritum* (teutorito, theodoriti, teodori) claim to be excellent
puragatives (*purgat optime*) that also remedy scant menses: *et mulierum causas quibus stillatim purgatio fiunt,
and [for] diseases of women for whom menstruation comes in drops*.

**St. Galler Antidotarium** (MS 9th century)

2. Incipit antidotum teodori. Hoc antidotum facit ad omnes infirmitates cefalargicis, stomaticis, spleneticis, pleureticis
et quibus scaticis scit in stomacho et quacumque mala circa uentrem et stomachum sunt et ad eos qui ex longo tedio non
reparantur, ad aurigenusos et ad malum colorem habentem, ad nita itriopecis, ad tissicum, nefreticos, ad colicos et qui
totum corpus regrauntur. Confortat mirifice ad eos qui longam egritudinem patiuntur et februent et qui assidue typum
patiuntur, datur in accessione a podacra *et mulierum causas quibus stillatim purgatio fiunt et omnium interaneorum
uitia purgat optime*. Qui acciperi ueluerit uernum et autumnum semel uel bis, non solum presentes sed etiam uentura
VI, nardustacius – VI, cinnamomum – VI, piper albo – IIII, camitrius – IIII, mirabalano – VI, asaro – IIII, piper longo – IIII,
costo – VIII, cassia fistola – III, mel quod sufficit. Quando das et adde scamanaria VI.39

The versions in the *Lorscher Arzneibuch* and the *Bamberger Antidotarium* add a passage on *suffocatio* or ‘suffoce-
ing of the womb’, a serious illness that is also caused by menstrual retention and will be discussed below: *et quae
matrice suffocantur*, ‘and for those who are suffocating in the womb’.

**Lorscher Arzneibuch** (MS c. 795)

3.41. Confectio antidoti theodoriti quod non solum praeentes infirmitates sed etiam uenturas prohibit. Aloe d<em>f</em> LX, aga-
rici d<em>f</em> XXIII, croci d<em>f</em> VI, agarii d<em>f</em> VI, reupontici d<em>f</em> VI, mastic<em>e</em> d<em>f</em> VI, nardustaci d<em>f</em> VI, cinamomi d<em>f</em> VI, piperis
albi d<em>f</em> IIII, camitrios d<em>f</em> VI, mirobalani d<em>f</em> VI, asarī d<em>f</em> IIII, piperis longi d<em>f</em> II, piperis nigri d<em>f</em> II, gentianae d<em>f</em> II,
squinoantus d<em>f</em> II, gingiber d<em>f</em> II amomī d<em>f</em> III, meu d<em>f</em> II, interionis d<em>f</em> VI, diadridi d<em>f</em> XII, costī d<em>f</em> VIII, cassiae d<em>f</em>
III, castorei aut anacardias d<em>f</em> IIII, mel quod sufficit. Dabis autem ad omnes infirmitates, cefalargicis, stomaticis,
spleneticis, pleureticis et quibus esca accecit in stomacho, et quae uercum mala circa uentrem et stomachum sunt, et ad
eos, qui ex longo tedio non reparantur, ad aurigenosus et ad malum colorem habentem, ad initia ydropecis, ad tissicos,
nefreticos, ad colicos et qui totu corpore grauntur confortat mirifice, ad eos qui longam egritudinem patiuntur et
februent et qui assidue tipum patiuntur datur in accessione, ad podacra *et mulierum causas quibus purgatio
stillatim fit et quae matrice suffocantur*, ad uentrem et omnium interaneorum uicia purgat optime; qui acceperit uernum
et autumnum semel uel bis, non solum praeentes infirmitates sed etiam uenturas prohibit.40

---

37 Sigerist 1923, p. 123.
38 Sigerist 1923, p. 74.
39 Sigerist 1923, p. 78.
40 Stoll 1902, pp. 264, 266; *Lorscher Arzneibuch* 3.41. Herstellung des Heilmittels ‘Gottesgeschenk’, welches nicht nur
bereits vorhandene Krankheiten vertreibt, sondern auch zukünftige fernhält. 60 Drachmen Aloe, 24 Drachmen Leucht-
schwamm, 6 Drachmen Safran, 6 Drachmen Wasserschwertlilie, 6 Drachmen Rhabarber, 6 Drachmen Mastix, 6 Drachmen
Indische Narde, 6 Drachmen Zimt, 4 Drachmen wölfer Pfeffer, 6 Drachmen Gamander, 6 Drachmen Behenbalsam, 4
Drachmen Haselwurz, 4 Drachmen langer Pfeffer, 2 Drachmen schwarzer Pfeffer, 2 Drachmen Enzian, 2 Drachmen
Bartgrasblüte, 2 Drachmen Ingwer, 3 Drachmen Kardamomeln, 2 Drachmen Bärwurz, 6 Drachmen Koloquintenfeisch, 12
Drachmen Springwurzauf, 8 Drachmen Kostwurz, 3 Drachmen Röhenkassie, 4 Drachmen Bibergeil oder Elefantenläuse,
Honig in ausreichender Menge. Man verabreicht es gegen alle Krankheiten, bei Kopfweh, Mund- und Magenleiden, Milz-
sucht, Seitenstechen, Sodbrennen und Aufrülpens, bei allen Beschwerden, die den Darm oder den Magen betreffen, man gibt
Bamberger Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
44. Antidotum teutorito ad omnes infirmitates, cefalargicis, stomaticis, pleureticis, peripleumonicis, spleniticis et quibus esca esacit in stomacho et quidquid mala circa stomachum abit, ad eos qui ex longa egritudine non reparantur, ad auriginosos, ad malum colore habentem ad initias ittopicis, ad tisicos et neufriticus, ad colicos et qui totum corpere grauantur, confortat mirifice, ad eos qui longa egritudine patiuntur et febriuntur et qui adsidue tipum patiuntur. Datur in accessione dragma quatuor ad podagra et mulieribus causa quibus still ant et matricem suffocantur ad uentrem et omnium interaneorum dolore vel uitia purgat optime. Qui accipit unu uernum et autumnu semel uel bis non solum presentis infirmitatis sed etiam uenturas prohibet. Recipit haec species: aloe Z LX, agarico Z uigintiqua< tuor>, groco X §, acora Z §, reuponticu Z §, mastice Z §, nardustacius Z §, cinnamomu Z §, piper album Z quatuor, gamitreus Z §, mirobalano Z §, asaro Z duo, piper longo Z duo, ameu Z duo, piper comunis Z III, gentia<na> Z duo, squinoentus Z II, gingiber Z duo, asaro Z duo, piper longo Z duo, gentia<na> Z duo, diacriciu Z duodeci, costu Z tres, cassia Z tres, mel quod sufficit. Et confectione facis et davis modo auellane maiore cum uino aut calida aqua.41

The version in the Berliner Antidotarium seems to have left out the passage on scant menses. It cures mulieres causas, ‘women’s diseases’, and suffaciof.

Berliner Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
32. Antidotum theodoritum ad omnes infirmitates, cefalargicis, stomaticis, spleneticis, pleureticis et quibus esca acitiscit in stomacho, et quicumque male circa uentre et stomaticis ad eos qui ex longo edio non reparantur, ad auriginosos et ad malum colore habemt, ad initia ydropicis, ad tisicos nefreneticis, ad colicos et qui totum corpore grauantur confortat mirifice et ad eos qui longa egritudine patiuntur et febriuntur et qui adsidue tipum patiuntur datur in accessione, ad podagra et mulieram causas et qui a matrice suffocantur, ad uentrem et omnium interanorum uicia purgat optime. Qui accipere uluit uernum et autumnum semel uel bis non solum presentis infirmitates sed etiam uenturas prohibet. Recipit haec species: aloe Z LX, agarico Z uigintiqua< tuor>, groco X §, acora Z §, reuponticu Z §, mastice Z §, nardustacius Z §, cinnamomu Z §, piper album Z quatuor, gamitreus Z §, mirobalano Z §, asaro Z duo, piper longo Z duo, ameu Z duo, piper comunis Z III, gentia<na> Z duo, squinoentus - II, gingiber - II, ameo - II, meu - II, interionis - VI, dagridio - XII, costo - VIII, casiafistule - III, mel quod sufficit, quando das - I et addis scamonia Œ I.42

The four variant versions of the antidotum theodoritum discussed above illustrate the textual variability of early medieval recipes, and clearly show us that these texts underwent many changes in the course of transmission, often adding and deleting symptoms and ingredients.

MATRIX PAIN AND DURITIA
The onset of menstruation, blocked menses and other menstrual complaints are associated with a variety of discomforts, complaints and symptoms, such as headaches, cramps, sore breasts, stomach and womb pain, duritia matricis, ‘hardness of the womb’, fatigue, constipation or diarrhea, cravings, energy loss, mood swings, depression, insomnia, etc. Nowadays many of these symptoms are called CMS or pre-menstrual syndrome.

Duritia and pain in the womb or stomach area can be symptoms of PMS, menstrual retention, a tumor, growth (myoma), or other disorders, but they can also be associated with a ‘hardness’ in the stomach area that is associated with pregnancy, birth pains, and postpartum pain. Taking an emmenagogue or purgative in order to cleanse the womb was considered an effective method to relieve pain in the womb.43 The following two short recipes containing purgative ingredients are potions for matrix pain and stomach pain.
The following recipes in the *Glasgow Antidotarium* and the *Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arzes* are plasters with purgative ingredients that should relieve womb pain.

**Glasgow Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

[347]. *Ad matricem doloris*. Semen de appium et semen petrosilino et semen ameos et semen de senapis et tus mas-culum et cera et mel et oleum quoquis in uina rudem et facis potionem et inponis super locum dolenciam.46

**Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arzes** (MS 9th century)

[6]. Item. *Ad matricis mulierum si teneurit cum dolore* siue renis siue pectenitis siue coxas uel uentrem uel sedere uel aut dormire non poterit et pereclitata fuerit. Apii semen et adipe anserino ÷ I teris ita ut spissum fiat et in usu adponis.47

The long recipe in the *Bamberger Antidotarium* cures many other complaints as well:

**Bamberger Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

6. *Antidotum <a>caristus facit ad indignatione stomachi et ad lateris dolore et ad renum dolorem, et ad column, et ad tertianas, ad quateranas et ad eos qui sanguine umont ed et ad euntris doloren et tortiones, ad eos qui non dormiunt facit et a<d> matricis dolore* uel ad mentis facit ad ciriosin epaticis si gutta aceti in potione mittas. Confectio eius hec est: storage dr. quatuor, murra trogente < quatuor, galhani < quatuor, opiu teueu < quatuor, cassia fistula < quatuor, amomu < quatuor, costu < quatuor, crocu < quatuor, piper nigrum < tres, Piper longum < tres, castoreo < tres, filio < quatuor, mel dispumatum quod sufficit. Sane qui accepturus est orcium cum aqua calima in manibus teneat.48

The *epithima diamellilotu* is a plaster for *duritia* or ‘hardness of the womb’ that is made up of emmenagogic and purgative ingredients.

**Reichenauer Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)


Pain in the womb or stomach area during or after childbirth can be relieved with the plaster plus potion described in the *St. Galler Receptarium I*. The recipe in the *Bamberger Antidotarium* cures all kinds of matrix pain, including postpartum pain.

**St. Galler Receptarium I** (MS 9th century)

A71. *Si de partu stomachus doluerit*. Marrubio et eiusco simul coque, cataplasmum superpone, sanat; et postea bona potionem bibat.50

**Bamberger Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

15. *Soteral* recipit hec: murra - I, anesu < II, squinuantu < I, S, piper nigrum < noue, cinnamomum < I, storace < sex, ydrocoloc autem < sex, silinu < uiginti, costu < sex, crocu < quinque, cassia quatuor, synonus siriatum < duodeci,
Besides remedying all kinds of womb and stomach pains (omnia matricis causam, oppressiones omnes matricis facit), the two, long, multi-purpose purgatives given below also induce the menses (prouocat et mulieribus purgationem; menstrua mulierum depotit).

Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)

Bamberger Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)

Recipe nr. 3 in the Antidotarium Bruxellense I involves an extensive procedure to restore the menses and cure pain in the womb. Treatment consists of fumigations, infusions, and potions. The recipe describes a time-consuming cleansing and purging procedure that is reminiscent of Hippocratic gynecology. It is one of the few early medieval recipes that prescribes fumigation.

Antidotarium Bruxellense I (MS 12th century; recipes 6th century)
3. Confectio medicamenti ad matrem curandam vel menstrua provocanda. primo suffumigatur mulier sedens de storace, ante quinque dies quam menstrua ei solent venire, et encopliatdium pigmentes quae inferius scripta sunt. diachylon uncia una, basilicon semuncia una, cerea ponticae = 1, adips anserini = 1, oleum liliaciu quantum necessarium fuerit. species autem solves cum oleo liliaco ita ut zema cum aqua super focum bulliat, et alterum zema cum supradictis medicamentis ex olei vapore facias calescare ut sic solvantur: et cum cooperis velle encopliandiare, antequam encopliades ventrem eius cura de sucis ptisanae nimium discotactae, inmixto clystere oleo anetino. et post istam inunctionem si purgatio menstruorum plena non fuerit subsequeta, dabis ei pulvere picae cum vino et melle et calida permixtur. sed ante quartum diem consuetus purgationes ita cura ut antequam encopliades, primo de suco ptisane discotactae cum anetino oleo ventrem curas et sic encopliades. et hoc usque ad diem purgationis, si necesse fuerit, bis in die facias, et numquam anheltul vel dolorum stomachi patietur. 54

---

52 Sigerist 1923, p. 44.
53 Sigerist 1923, p. 32.
54 Rose 1894, p. 364. Although the manuscript text is from the twelfth century, the recipes were dated to the sixth century by Beccaria (Beccaria 1956, p. 110).
Potions and plasters with purgative ingredients can cure pain in the womb due to menstrual retention or caused by the birthing process.\textsuperscript{55} We will see below that pain in the matrix is also a symptom of suffocation of the womb, and that a number of recipes in the section on ‘difficult birth and miscarriage’ also cure womb pain.

**FATIGATIO, IMBECILLITAS AND DEPRESSION**

Some of the long recipes quoted above (antidotum hiera, antidotum theodoritum) claim to offer relief for female complaints associated with PMS and menstrual retention, such as headaches and stomach pains. Physical and emotional symptoms that are also associated with - but not necessarily due to - menstrual retention are mentioned in the following two variant versions of the antidotum dianacardium. This general purgative cures fatigatio, ‘tiredness’, and imbecillitas totius corporis, ‘total bodily weakness’, in women. Imbecillitas can refer to almost any of the symptoms associated with PMS and blocked menses. The phrase *ita ut (de) se disperent*, ‘in such a way that they themselves despair’, may be a reference to the mood swings, the feelings of anxiety, despair and depression many women experience before their periods.

**Lorscher Arzneibuch (MS c. 795)**

5.1.27. Antidotus dianacardium quae facit ad stomachicos, qui fatigacionem et horromore patiuntur siue suum siue alienum et omnes partes fatigatas ex stomacho et reumate omnium articulorum, ad cordis pulsum et omnen eius causam certe circa uelamn iupnis, ad epar non tumentem dumtaxat, ad splen, ad colom, ad capitii uertiginem atque obliuionem, ad caligine, ad causas renicularum atque uitiae, ad totius corporis uenas immundas et ad mulieres partes, quae fatigacionem et inbecillatem totius corporis patiuntur ita, ut de se disperent siue nimietate siue constrictionem san quiris patiuntur, sic prodest, ut mirum sit. Accepit haec: Spicenardi, folio, croci, meua anu ertem, aloes epaticae lib i, carpobalsami ∼ IIII, zinziberis ∼ IIII, m<−>ticis ∼ i, iris ∼ VI, cassiae epistulae ∼ IIII, epiti Attici leuiores quod quasi capilli sint ∼ IIII, sciaunautu ∼ IIII, cariofilii ∼ IIII, rapontici ∼ IIII, mirobalani purgati ∼ IIIII, anacardii ∼ i, fenuculi radicium corticis uirdis purgat et lotae et modicum subsecctae lib VIIIII, aceti fff VIIIII, melissi optimi ff IIIII. Cortices concides minutatim et infundis in acteto per dies VII. Postea coques modicum, donec radices coquantur, quas tollis et in mortario teriis fortetter, donec in gluten redigantur et rursus mittis in acetum et coque lonto igne, donec acetum ad tertiam decoquantur, quo deposito atque tepefacto exprimit radices ita, ut nullus in eis suus remaneat, dein deinde acetum diligentissime colas, addes mel et coques lentier ad carbones, donec in meliss aquatiosis spissutudinem redigatur; post quae commices omnes species et teris in mortario fortitter et mittes in dolosum argenteum siue uireum et dabis cum aqua calida magnam potionem usque ad ½ minorem Ń VIIIII, inferiorem Ń IIIII, in fine mensurae Ń I et dabis - si potest - cotidie aut alternis diebus aut certe septimo die exceptis canicularibus diebus orrne tempore. Conficintur mense Maio uel Junio, ne radices fenuculi aut ante tempus emecet sint aut post tempus siccae.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} There are many more recipes for matrix pain. The *St. Galler Antidotarium* has two recipes for ‘oils’ that claim to have soothing, relaxing and sedative qualities. *St. Galler Antidotarium* [131] is a recipe for *oleo roseo* or ‘rose oil’, and *St. Galler Antidotarium* [138] is a recipe for *oleo lentiscinum*, ‘oil of the mastic tree’ (cf. Sigertist 1923, pp. 96-97). The recipe for ‘rose oil’ was apparently very popular, because we also find the recipe in many post-Salernitan recipe books and gynecological handbooks (see, for instance: Green 2001, pp. 196-197 and the Dutch translation of the *Antidotarium Nicholai* (Van den Berg 1917, pp. 104-105).

Both versions of the *antidotum dianachardium* explain why women suffer from *fatigatio*, *imbecillitas* and despair: it is because ‘they suffer from surplus and constricted blood’ (*siue nimietate siue constrictionem sanguinis patiuntur*). This is a reference to classical theory on menstruation and menstrual retention, which believes that the excess blood - *nimietas*, ‘superfluity’ - of a woman suffering from menstrual retention accumulates in her body, and clogs up in her womb, causing congestion or constriction (*constrictio sanguinis*). If surplus blood is not expelled on a regular basis, that is, if menstruation stagnates or is interrupted, a woman will become ill. The *antidotum dianachardium* contains purgative ingredients, and provides relief by eliminating a woman’s surplus blood. The recipe itself says that it works like a charm: *sic prodest, ut mire sit, ‘it is so beneficial that it is miraculous’.*

The following purgative - again a version of the *antidotum hiera* - not only cures depression (*animi subductio, ‘a withdrawalness of the mind’*), but it also induces the menses (*menstrua movet*), expels a fetus during a miscarriage (*pecus in auorsum expellit*), and soothes matrix pain (*matris dolorem lenit*).
This recipe shows us that the female complaints listed here were all considered to be connected, because they all require the same remedy: a purgative potion. A congested matrix can cause fatigatio, imbecillitas and depression. The word imbecillitas may also refer to more serious problems such as suffocatio and hystera, disorders that will be discussed below.

**SUFFOCATIO, HYSTERIA, WANDERING WOMB**

Uterine suffocation, called suffocatio, pr(a)efocatio or hystera in medieval recipes, is a serious illness that is due to menstrual retention. Its symptoms include fainting spells, palpitations and difficulty in breathing. If untreated, it can cause madness and a condition known as ‘wandering womb’. Suffocatio is caused by the accumulation and congestion of surplus blood in the womb, and it is a debilitating condition of the matrix that was well-known in classical gynecology. Treatment is usually some sort of purgative that should help expel the excess blood, as in the following two variant versions of a recipe for a purgative potion with only one ingredient (agaricus). The remedy is said to have been recommended by the fourth-century Greek medical writer Oribasius of Pergamon.

Liber de muliebria causa (8th-9th century)


Liber de muliebria (8th-9th century)


The antidotum stephanen also prescribes a purgative for suffocation of the womb: ad mulieres que prefocantur de matrice, ‘for women who are suffering from prefoeatio of the womb’.

Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)


Glasgower Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)

[207]. Antidotum de stefanen qui facit mirifice ualde cui melior alius non est, facit ad collum, ad pleureticos, ad tissicos et qui cibum non continent, ad mulieres qui profucantur de matricem, ad emtoicos. Recipt hec: storace, I, castoreu < I, mirra < I, oppio < II, groco, aneti semen < IIII, appii semen < IIII, daucu < IIII, trita omnia et cribellata cum melle coctam comiss, dabis in mode fabe egypcie cum aqua calida.


60 Recipe 4.67 in the Lorscher Arzneibuch is a recipe for postpartum depression (cf. the section on ‘difficult birth and miscarriage’ below).

61 In Egert’s recipes there are a number of recipes for suffocatio and ‘wandering womb’, many of which have parallels in the Vademecum. The Vademecum has two recipes for ‘wandering womb’, it does not have any recipes for suffocatio.

62 The official name for agaricus or agaricum is polyporus officinalis L, ‘Löckerschwamm (Daems 1993, pp. 111-112).

63 Oribasius’s work was translated into Latin in sixth-century, Ostrogothic Ravenna. Henning Morland has shown that two different translations of Oribasius were made in Ravenna during the Ostrogothic period (493-555), cf. Morland 1932 and Morland 1940.”

64 Egert 1935, p. 26. (Egert II)

65 Egert 1935, p. 37. (Egert III)

66 Sigerist 1923, p. 43.

67 Sigerist 1923, p. 155.
The following purgative also cures suffocation.

**Liber de muliebria causa** (8th-9th century)

81. *Ad officiationis* et, qui sanguinem per os uominet, et qui puncta facit subitus spatula et in mamilla: saturated semen medio calice, aneto semen medio calicis, caballodella, quae in fluxum aut in cisterna crescit, radices eius manipule maiore simul teris cum uino calices VI et colabis et addis piper et gignibe, postea cum unatus fuerit, de ipsa pocione calida cum buter calice plenum bibat et sic fortiter cooperis cum in lectum, ut suedes, et super ipsa iniuria [Egert: *inguisa (?)] iaceat; mirificum est. 68

Recipe nr. 41 in the *Liber de muliebria* explains that one of the symptoms of *suffocation* is a ‘choking feeling’ (*quod a collo strangulat*). The remedy, a plaster plus potion, will make the womb turn back in the direction of the pectus, ‘chest’ (*ut reuertatur ad pectus*). The recipe shows us that the womb was thought to move around, as in classical gynecology.

**Liber de muliebria** (8th-9th century)

41. *Ad suffussionem matricis, id, quod a collo strangulat, ut reuertatur ad pectus: am(m)oniaco cum sucus absenti destemperas et lenis cum pinna uentrem, inponis stomacho suso, quod commouet in isso [Egert: iusum], postea facis potum casie manip. I, ruta manip. I, artemisia manip. I, quouquis in uino, ut sint staupos III et reuertatur ad uno, et da bibere. 69

42. Item facis cataplasma, quod mittas iissum: ruta et afromito commiscis et uteiris.

43. Item furoras mollissimas tirtici excaldatast mititis ad stomacho et ventri et umbilico.

Three of the four emmenagogic purgatives called *antidotum theodoritum* that are quoted in the section on ‘scant menses’ are also beneficial for suffocation of the womb, thus illustrating the causal relationship that there was thought to be between obstruction of the menses and *suffocation*. 70 The following two practically identical variant versions of the *antidotum theodoritum* are interesting because they explicitly state that there is a causal relationship (*ex quibus*) between retention and suffocation: *ex quibus autem matricis suffocationes uocatae, ‘from suffocations of the womb are induced’*. They also describe another complication caused by *difficultas purgationis* and suffocation: *incorruptiones circa secum loci generantur*, ‘corruptions around the sexual organs are generated’.

Apparently, menstrual obstruction can also cause damage to the sexual organs.

**Lorscher Arzneibuch** (MS c. 795)

3.42. Ein ‘Gottesgeschenk’, welches dem ganzen Menschen hilft. Es wird folgendermaßen hergestellt: 60 Drachmen Aloe, 24 Drachmen Leuchtschwamm, 6 Drachmen Safran, 3 Drachmen Rhabarber, 4 Drachmen Grimbalde, 2 Drachmen Haselwurz, 8 Drachmen Kostwurz, 6 Drachmen Wasser-Schwertlilie, eine einzelle Elefantenlaus, 6 Drachmen Röhrenkasse, 6 Drachmen Zint, 4 Drachmen Balsamholz, 3 Drachmen Indische Narde, 3 Drachmen Bärwurz, 2 Drachmen Gamander, 4 Drachmen weißten Pfeffer, Honig soviel wie nötig. Es hilft denen, die im Kopf geplagt werden, bei Schwindelanfällen, bei Kopfweh, Fällsacht und bei den Leiden, welche die Brust und den ganzen Brustkorb

---

68 Egert 1936, p. 33. (Egert II). For *officatio*, read: *sufficatio*.


70 Bamberger Antidotarium, nr. 44 (et mulieribus causa quibus stillant et matricem suffocantur), Lorscher Arzneibuch 3.41 (ad mulierum causas quibus purgatio stillatam fit et quae matrice suffocantur), and Berliner Antidotarium nr. 32 (et mulierum causas et qui a matrice suffocantur).

71 Stoll 1992, p. 266; ‘Lorscher Arzneibuch’ 3.42. Ein ‘Gottesgeschenk’, welches dem ganzen Menschen hilft. Es wird folgendermaßen hergestellt: 60 Drachmen Aloe, 24 Drachmen Leuchtschwamm, 6 Drachmen Safran, 3 Drachmen Rhabarber, 4 Drachmen Haselwurz, 8 Drachmen Kostwurz, 6 Drachmen Mustix, 6 Drachmen Wasser-Schwertlilie, eine einzelle Elefantenlaus, 6 Drachmen Röhrenkasse, 6 Drachmen Zint, 4 Drachmen Balsamholz, 3 Drachmen Indische Narde, 3 Drachmen Bärwurz, 2 Drachmen Gamander, 4 Drachmen weissen Pfeffer, Honig soviel wie nötig. Es hilft denen, die im Kopf geplagt werden, bei Schwindelanfällen, bei Kopfweh, Fällsacht und bei den Leiden, welche die Brust und den ganzen Brustkorb
The version of the antidotum theodoritum in book four of the Lorscher Arzneibuch is not only beneficial for suffocatio (prefaticio), but this purgative remedy also helps women suffering from ill health and depression after a miscarriage: post aduersum attenuate fuerint id est disturbuerint, ‘[women who] are weak after a miscarriage, that is, they are ‘disturbed’ (or distressed’).

Lorscher Arzneibuch (MS c. 795)

5.13. Antidotus Theodoritus faciens ad totum hominem conficitur ita: Aloes d...
Retention of the menses and the resulting suffocation of the womb can also cause mental illness. The following two versions of the *antidotum theodoritum* (dianachardium) show us that suffocatio or prefocatio that is caused by menstrual obstruction can develop into *hysteria* or madness: *et ad mulierem cui tardat purgatio que uocantur esterete et que prefocationem patiuntur*, ‘for women whose menses are slow or obstructed, who are called hysterical, and who suffer from prefocatio’.  

**Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)**  

**Glasgower Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)**  

73. Antidotum theodoritum. Aloenapatie dr. LX, acaricu dr. LXIII, cinnamomu dr. VII, nardostacias dr. III, cussia saringes dr. VI, camitreos ponticum dr. III, esquinantu dr. II, diagridiu dr. XII, xilobalsami dr. IIII, mastice dr. VII, careu dr. VI, crocuy dr. VI, costu dr. VIII, aouru dr. III, drueu dr. II, acoru nigrdr. II, gentiana dr. III, piper longum dr. II, anacardi dr. IIII, mel dispumatum quod sufficit. Dabis dr. IIIII aut duas aut una uel dimidia sic dabis in muls. Facit autem ad habcsconsas causa, maxime que in capite sunt et athomaticus et epilepticus et ad epatis dolorem et quecumque causa in thorace fit, pleureticus, espicentricus et suspiriosus et ad eos, qui non digierunt et qui con dolore fuerint in esthomacum uel intestinorum uel ex longo lauore egrotantibus et ad colerea et ad pallore facit et ad ipsa colera, qui hictericos conuerit ex quibus infusio ydropis facit et incipientibus tissics et freneticus et qui colicis sepius fiunt et qui grabidinem tocius co rporis paciuntur, resumer autem et eorum uirtutem et ad corporis prestat niimiam foritutinem et ad eos qui uarios dolores paciunt et febricitantibus et qui multum sudant et tipum tentant. Dabis eis postquam diestum fuerit, et podagricibus dabis ante passionem, misericordia prodest et ad mulierem cui tardat purgatio que uocantur esterete et que prefocationem patiuntur et qui difficile digerit et uentrem sine dubio curat.  

Expurgat nobiliter non solum presentes causas sed que forsitan sperantur.  


74. Sigerist 1923, pp. 45-46.
The following recipe is a powder that will cure any complaint that has to do with the womb (ad omnem matricis causam) and hysteria.

Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)

[26]. Antidotum pigra magna. Ad multa precipue ad purgationem feminarum hac unicunque. Recipient hec: Aloe dragm. XX, xilobalsamum scripula XVIII, cinnamomum scripula XIII, spica nardi scripula XVIII, mastice scripula XVIII, crocu scripula XVIII, agaricu scripula XVIII, dabis cum musa cyatis III, pulucri scrip. VI, hanc si consuescet femina igitur accipere in paucos dies grande adiutorium sentiet. Singularis enim potio feminis ad omnia, ad stomachachum et epar et splen et uentris difficultatem ad matricis mania id est qui maniam capitis patiuntur uicio matricis. Post hac uero ne subito a potione discedat, accipiat aquam absenthi vel quod est melius aloen purum et omnes reliquias sordium penitus auferantur.77

The word *mania*, ‘madness’, in the recipes below may be a synonym of *hysteria*, but it is also possible that *mania* is a more serious mental illness that develops, if menstrual retention remains untreated. Recipe 26 in the Reichenauer Antidotarium is a *potio feminis ad omnia*, ‘a woman’s potion for everything, especially ad matricis mania id est qui maniam capitis patiuntur uicio matricis’, for insanity of the matrix, that is, for those who suffer from madness of the head due to an illness of the womb’. Note that part of the indication has been inserted after the recipe.

Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)

[26]. Antidotum pigra magna. Ad multa precipue ad purgationem feminarum hac unicunque. Recipient hec: Aloe dragm. XX, xilobalsamum scripula XVIII, cinnamomum scripula XIII, spica nardi scripula XVIII, mastice scripula XVIII, crocu scripula XVIII, agaricu scripula XVIII, dabis cum musa cyatis III, pulucri scrip. VI, hanc si consuescet femina igitur accipere in paucos dies grande adiutorium sentiet. Singularis enim potio feminis ad omnia, ad stomachachum et epar et splen et uentris difficultatem ad matricis mania id est qui maniam capitis patiuntur uicio matricis. Post hac uero ne subito a potione discedat, accipiat aquam absenthi vel quod est melius aloen purum et omnes reliquias sordium penitus auferantur.77

The word *metromania* in the next recipe is probably a synonym of *mania*; the recipe cures praeterea mulierum, *qui ex matrice uexantur cum metromaniae* ‘especially women, who are afflicted with metromania [that comes] from the womb’.

Lorscher Arzneibuch (MS c. 795)


The recipe below is found in a short gynecological treatise called *De diversis causis mulierum*. This text is probably based on an early translation of the Hippocratic *Diseases of Women*. The recipe links diseases of the matrix, mental depression (vpocondriacam) and suffocatio (affocatio).

---

75. Sigerist 1923, p. 109. For *dieriet* read *digerit*, *difficilem* = *difficilem*, *tocius* = *totius*, *paciuntur* = *patiuntur*, *prefucionem* = *prefocationem*, *caussas* = *caussas*, *agaricum* = *agaricum*, etc. (cf. the version in the Reichenauer Antidotarium [29]).

76. Sigerist 1923, p. 54.


De diversis causis mulierum (MS 8th-9th century)

30. Ad matrice, quae ipocondria subcadit et offectionem facit. Quae si surculum bibat, suspirium et dolor stomaci sequitur, flegma accida umant, os corum aquabibur et pedes frigidi sunt. Si celerius matricem de ipocondrium nun separatur, caput et lingua stupent, et sine uoce sunt, et dentes strident et post modicum tempus caput et ceruix dolet. Curabis ex calificacionis, et naribus impone non bene olida, ut dolor sedat, da eis in pocione farmacum, et succum tisane accipiant, et uominum prouocabis et ex clisterie curabis, quibus adhuc inserta sunt. Ad collo matrice lana inponis oleo mirtino intincta et in naribus mitte oleo amaranthinum et farmacum inunguis; sic sternatum prouocas. Haec omnia facis, donec matrix ad locum suum uertatur; hec faciendum est in die bis uel ter.79

Like suffocatio, ‘wandering womb’ is a concept that was borrowed from classical medicine. It is the worst case scenario for menstrual retention. Serious menstrual congestion causes the womb to move around in a woman’s body, and this can ultimately lead to death. We find many recipes for wandering womb in De diversis causis mulierum. As in the Hippocratic Diseases of Women, separate recipes are given for each location the womb could have wandered to.80 In the example below the womb has moved up to the liver:

De diversis causis mulierum (MS 8th-9th century)

31. Si matrix ad epur ascendit, sic intelligis: sine uoce fiere solent, dentes [i]strident, color uiridis est. Haec omnia dum sana est. subito contingunt maxime uringins, quae maioris sunt etate, et uioduis. Haec steriles frequentius et aliquando post partum fit, aliquando non. Si hoc contingit, oporit matricem manibus tenere pare gorzando in loco suo reuocare et ex uino hos carum bene lauare et succum cantabi tenere cum oleo dulce infundere. Postea species male odore naribus infunde et infieri fomicare species bene olentis et purgere, si colera est, ex farmaco celerico, si flegmata est, flegmaticis species purgetur. Lac ascenium aut capruna potui da. Oporit fouere matrice species bene olentibus, suponere farmacum, qui dicitur bupifitus (?), alia die, qui dicitur metopon; post dies II clisterie bene olentis curabis, postea gloggano, posteo (sie!) fomicabes de aramatibus. Haec omnia fieri oporit uioduis et sterelis. Utilis non illis est, ut concipiant; urinins hoc utilissimum est. Si ad urinum suum convoutur, tunc dabis in uino castorio et nuclium usque dies XX; caput uero non oporit unguere, nique per naris species odorosis aliuid detur. Item lislfsgo, lini semen, alfta da eis ieuinis in pocione cotillas III; postea sambuci folia quoquis in aqua et calida fomentabis. Item ordigo quoquis in aqua et fomentabis, similiter uietie et oleo roseo a foris perungues.81

However, most early medieval recipe books simply give a general remedy to make the womb move back to its original place in the woman’s body - no matter where the womb is considered to have wandered off to.82

Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes (MS 9th century)

[7.] Item. Ad matrice qui loco suo non habet ut reuertatur ad locum, duriciam nullam habeat. Medulla ceruuna ÷ II, adipe anserino ÷ II, cera pomica ÷ II, butirum ÷ II, succum fene greci quartario I oleum cum succum commiscat et tamdu coques usque ad mensura olei remaneat et solutis illis supra memoratas, oleum cum ipsis commisse. Hic pirum utiisime in omnes causas.83

Liber de muliebria causa (MS 8th-9th century)

24. Pissarium, qui facit ad matricem, qui in loco suo non est, ut reuertatur ad locum et duriciam nullam habeat: Medulla ceruuna unc. II, adipe anserino unc. II, cera pumica unc. II, butero unc. II, fenogreco succum quartarium I, lini semen succum quartarium I, oleum quartarium I; oleum cum sucis commiscatis et coquis, quamdui oleira mensura remaneat, et solutis illis supermemoratis oleum commiscis cum ipsis; est hic piussarium in omni rem utilissimum.84

De diversis causis mulierum (MS 8th-9th century)

22. Pissarium ad matrice, quae in loco suo non est, ut rediat ad locum, et duriciam tollit: medulla ceruuna, adipe anserinio, cera pumica, butero, fenogreco ius, lini seminis ius, oleo ane emina semis; oleo et ius miscis, quoquis, usque ad mensura olei rediat, suprascriptas species resolui, commiscatis omnia et uteres, quia ad hoc utilissimum pisarius est. Pisarium ad matrice, si foris uersa est: rosa sica, mala granate corticius aneunc. VI, agazia unc. 1, gallas dragm. III; hec omnis teris cum uino austero et sic lana intingis, matrice adponis; ipsis pisarius fluxum sanguinis stringitis.85

79 Brütsch 1922, pp. 27-28.
81 Brütsch 1922, pp. 28-29.
82 On the wandering womb, cf. the literature in note 2.
83 Köpp 1980, p. 29. ‘Vademecum’ [7]. Item. Ebenfalls wenn die Gebräumter nicht am rechten Ort ist, damit sie wieder zu rechtgerückt wird und Beschwerdefreiheit eintritt. Vermische 2 Unzen Hirschmark, 2 Unzen Gänsefett und je 2 Unzen mit Bimsstein geglättetes Wachs und Butter mit Saft von Bockshornklee und einem Quartarium Oel, um es solange einzu-
84 Egert 1936, p. 27. (Egert II)
All three variant recipes ad matrice qui loco suo non habet, ‘for the womb that is not in its place’, are pessaries. The original recipe is probably also ultimately Hippocratic in origin. Besides helping the matrix return to its place, the remedy also cures hardness of the womb (duritia). It is one of the few recipes containing an animal ingredient: medulla ceruuna, ‘hart’s marrow’.

The recipes for purgative potions below furnish us with a list of symptoms of wandering womb (de signa matricis, quando loco suo non est, ‘On the signs of the womb that is not in its place’), such as a pain in the left side, inflammation of the stomach, shivering, etc.

Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes (MS 9th century)
[17.] Designa matricis quando in loco non est. Dolor sinistri lateris et ipso latere ascendit, uoluendo ad stomachum cum inflamatione, et inglutire aliquid non permititt et frigus patitur cum tussione membrorum et sonitum cum ructatione, cum iussum redit qui bibit potionem talem factam: semen apii et fenum grecum teris et cum uino dabis bibere. 86

Liber de muliebria (MS 8th-9th century)
46. De signa matricis, quando loco suo non est: dolor senextri lateris et ex[ip] ipsa latere ascendi uoluendo ad stomaco cum inflacione et inglutire aliquid non permititt et frigus pat(iur) cum tensione membrorum et finitum cum rup-tacione, cum iusum redit. Quibus pocionem talem facis: semen apii et fenogrego teris et cum uino das bibere. 87

The majority of the recipes for disorders of the matrix discussed in this section explicitly suggest causality between menstrual retention and the womb on the one hand, and suffocatio, hysteria, mania and wandering womb on the other: suffocatio matricis, prefocare de matrice, matricis mania, ex matrice uexantur. They give us a view of the Greco-Roman theoretical framework that lies behind the gynecological recipes in the early medieval recipe books. The disorders described are caused by menstrual retention, that is, an unhealthy accumulation of excess blood in the womb. The recipes are all purgatives, and most of them also alleviate other symptoms of menstrual retention, such as headaches, stomach-aches, and mood swings.

DEAD BLOOD

Excess blood that has accumulated in a woman’s body and become clotted or congested is called ‘dead blood’ in the following three variant versions of the antidotum maurentius. Dead blood is the substance that obstructs the matrix and causes the health problems described above. The recipes called antidotum maurentius purge or cleanse a woman, and get rid of the waste material that is causing obstructions in her body and making her sick: sed et mulieribus quae non purgantur commouet emortuum sanguinem, ‘and also for women who do not purge, it (re)moves dead blood’. Judging from its ingredients this recipe is a powerful emmenagogue and purgative that will cure retained menses, and thus help the woman regain her health.

Lorscher Arzneibuch (MS c. 795)


87 Egert 1936, p. 40. (Egert III)
retinent et accidium uel fumigosum ructuant, per digestionem sanat nee non et eam infirmitatem curat, quae iber dictur. Accepit autem haec: Piperis albi ~ I, zinziberis ~ I, petroselini ~ II, amoeus ~ II, caros ~ XVIII, liustici ~ VIII. Haec omnia tundis et simis cum melle Attico pensis IIII. Teris diligenter in mortario per dies V ad solem et coUegis uase stagno siue uireo.

Bamberger Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
5. Antidotum qui dictur Maurentius faciens ad stomachi dolore ex quo et duritie nascentur, coi3iere una dausum cum calida, compecsit dolorem autem sepisius accepta soluit etiam duritias excertos in capitis et grandivinem relebat faucium indignationem similer et compecsit et chidoas reuma et susipirio compecsit et uocem denuo restiuet et compecsion et sanat et tussem et epaticis duritiam soluit et splenis dignatio digerit. Similer his et compecsion et tortionem in- testinorum et quod pleuritics dictur statim accepta sanat, disintercis his in solio caldari mixta uino accepta conuenit, si his his fabricitauert au cum aqua calida his qui longio tempore egrogrant et qui cotidianas aut quarternas patiuntur aut biduas uel tertianas data conuenit. Sed et mulieribus qui non purgantur et commouet et mortua am sanguinem abortivum uero peruersum sine aliquo periculo producit. Sed et post aborsum data purgat et statim compecsit dolorem simul etiam inflatione et dolorem stomachi et uentositaatem uel suffocationem quod et mulieribus et uiris uere solet. Statim date omnia his de stomachi infirmitate nascentur. Data ergo cum calida ut diximus uniuersa sanat. Sed eos qui escam non retinent et acidum uel fumigosum ructuant per digestiones sanat. Necnon etiam infirmitate curat quod gera dictur. Accepit autemhec: piper album ~ I, zinziber ~ II, petroselino ~ II, ameus ~ VI, careo ~ dece et octo, liustici semen ~ VI dece et octo. Hec omnia tundis et cernis et mellis atti a po<cula> quatuor mittes teris diligenter in mortario per dies quinque ad so<lem> et colligis in uas stagno siue uireo.

Berliner Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
[51]. Antidotum maurentium, qui facit stomachi dolorem, ex quo duritie nascentur, d[u]ab<is> cum aqua calida co- liario I, cumpiscis dolerius sepisius accepta etiam duritiam soluit scotos in capitis et grandivinode relevat, faucium indignationem similier compecsit et susipirio conuenit et susipirio compecsit et uocem denuo restiuit et compecsion et tussem sanat, epatis duritiam et splenis dignationis digerit, similer autem et tortiones intestinorum et pleorectis statim sanat, desintercis autem in calido duleo mixto uino accepta conuenit et in febris cum aqua calida. Is autem qui longo tempore egrogrant uel qui cotidianas aut quarternas patiuntur data conuenit et mulieribus qui non pregnate commouet mortua am sanguinem abortivum uero uel fumigosum prooducit et post aborsum data purgat, et statim compecsit dolor. Simul etiam inflationem et dolorem stomachi et uentositaatem uel suffocationem quod mulieribus et uiris solet fieri data iuuat. Omnes autem quae in stomacho infirmitates nascentur data cum calida uniuersa sanat. Ad eos qui esca non tenent et acidum et fumigosum ructuant per digestiones sanat. Recipit haec: piper albo ~ I, gingiber ~ I, aloe ~ II, petroselino macedonico ~ I, fenculo ~ II, ameo ~ II, caregio ~ III, liuestic e semen ~ II, aniso ~ I, apio ~ II, mel quod sufficit. Tere ad solem per dies V.

The antidotum maurentium can also be prescribed when a woman is having a miscarriage: abortium (abortitum) uero peruersum sine aliquo periculo producit, ‘it expels a still-born child (miscarriage), even in breech position, without any danger [to the woman].’ The potion also helps a woman recover from the miscarriage (or abort-
tion?), and works as a painkiller: *sed et post auersum data purgat, et statim conpescit dolorem*, ‘and if given after the miscarriage, it purges [the woman] and immediately relieves the pain’.

The version in the *Berliner Antidotarium* contains two interesting variants. In the first place, it has *mulieribus qui non pregnante, commouet emortuum sanguinem* ‘for women who [are] not pregnant [anymore? - yet?], it (re)moves dead blood’, instead of *mulieribus quae (qui) non purgantur (…)*, ‘for women who do not purge (…)’, and in the second place, it omits the word *perversus*, ‘malpresented, malpositioned, in breech position’. For a comparison of the variant versions, cf. below Table 2, under C. The first variant links ‘dead blood’ and pregnancy. The phrase can refer to menstrual retention, but *non pregnante* may also indicate that the woman has just had a miscarriage, that the fetus or the afterbirth has not yet been (completely) expelled or that the lochia is stagnating. It is also possible that *non pregnante* means ‘not pregnant yet’, suggesting that ‘dead blood’ is causing obstructions in the woman’s body that prevent the woman from becoming pregnant. In this case the purgative might indirectly promote fertility, because removing ‘dead blood’ should restore the menses, so that she will be able to become pregnant. The omission of the word *perversus* in the phrase *abortiuum uero sine aliquo periculo producit*, ‘it really expels a still-born child (a dead fetus) without any danger’, makes a broader interpretation of the word *abortiuum* possible. Without the word *perversus*, ‘malpresented’, the phrase *abortiuum … producit* can not only refer to a ‘miscarried fetus’ or a ‘miscarriage’, but it can also take on the meaning ‘to induce an abortion’.

The main meaning of *aborsus* and *abortium* in these recipes is ‘miscarriage’.\(^\text{92}\) When reading these early medieval recipes with twenty-first-century eyes we are inclined to translate *aborsus* with ‘abortion’ and *aborsum facere* with ‘to have an abortion’ or ‘to abort’. True, the word also means ‘abortion’, and many of the recipes may be ambiguous, but we must not forget that its primary meaning in early medieval recipes is ‘miscarriage’.\(^\text{93}\) In the sections below we will again come across the word *aborsus* with the meaning ‘miscarriage’, and we will see that *aborsum facere* also means ‘to have a miscarriage’.

‘Dead blood’ can be explained as congested or congealed blood due to blocked menses and/or an incomplete miscarriage (or abortion). In other words, ‘dead blood’ can refer to both menstrual retention and to retention associated with the birthing process, including postpartum retention of the afterbirth or the lochia. The context of the *antidotum maurentius* suggests that *emortuum sanguinem* refers to a dead fetus. However both explanations are possible. Dead blood is polluted matter that should be removed in order to restore a sick woman’s health.

**DIFFICULT BIRTH AND MISCARRIAGE**

The recipes in this section deal with ‘retention’ that is connected with difficult birth and miscarriage. This type of ‘retention’ can lead to serious complications, even death, if excess fluids and waste matter that are congested in the *matrix* are not expelled. The purgative recipes discussed in this section accelerate the birthing process, help remove the afterbirth and stimulate the lochial discharge, so that the womb is cleansed after a miscarriage. Basically, there seems to be no difference between a purgative that stimulates the menses and one that is used in connection with birth or miscarriage (*aborsus*).  

\(^{92}\) ‘abortion’, *aborsus* (*auorsus*), ‘young fetus; abortion’, *abortio(r)*, ‘miscarry’. Stoll 1992 translates *abortivum perversum* as ‘abzutreibende Fehllage’; I think *perversus* means ‘malpresented’, that is, ‘in breech position’.

\(^{93}\) Note, however, that all three variant versions consistently use two different words - *abortium* and *aborsus* - to refer to miscarriage and/or abortion.

The *diaspoliten antidotus* is a remedy with purgative ingredients that is recommended to help expel a ‘(living) fetus’ (*partum expellit*) and/or the afterbirth (*secundas mulierum educit*).\(^{94}\) It probably induces contractions and labor, and speeds up the birthing process.

**Reichenauer Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

[42.] Diaspoliten antidotus, qui facit ad hec: stomachum excitat, digestionem accommodat, aluum mollit, biles extenuat, utia pectoris, lateris, locerinis ae renum mitigat, *partum expellit*, *secundas mulierum educit*. Recipit haec: ruta, piper, petroselinum, cynimmin, zinzerana - VI, nitru - III. Sed cynimmin prius aceto maceratur, deinde torretur et uniuersa coneusa et cribrata mella attico colliguntur et uteris.\(^{95}\)

The *St. Galler Antidotarium* has a short recipe for difficult birth. The potion should be used *ut mulier se a partu mundetur*, ‘so that the woman may purge herself of the *partus*’.

**St. Galler Antidotarium** (MS 9th century)

A69. *Ut mulier se a partu mundetur.* Berbena trita cum aqua recenti da ei bibere, mundat et sanat.\(^{96}\)

Use of the word *mundetur* and the phrase *mundat et sanat*, ‘cleanses and cures’ indicates that the recipe probably also helps remove the afterbirth and induce the lochial discharge.

There are also recipes that are prescribed especially to remove the afterbirth; the first recipe is a soup or broth.

**Liber de muliebria** (MS 8th-9th century)

81. *Ad secundas mulieris:* liquamen bonum cocl. III das bibere et sanat.\(^{97}\)

**Liber de causas feminarum** (MS 8th-9th century)

82. *Mulier si peperit et secunde iuxtae consuetudinem non exierit, coclearios III puledii distringito in uino bono et contritum dabis bibere.*\(^{98}\)

89. Post *partum mulieris (ut) secunda sequantur,* plantagine tribulata ex aqua calida bibat.\(^{99}\)

The two general purgatives given below can also be used to help eject the afterbirth (*secundas mulierum educit; secundis mulierum producendis*). Both multi-purpose potions are ascribed to famous authorities (Marcellus Empiricus, Hadrianus).

**Reichenauer Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

[11]. Antidotus polichristus a marcello acceptus. Melius operatur quam illa que ex multis migmadibus conficitur uel illa mitritatia, qui facit colicis cum aqua cyatis tribus, epaticis cum uino mulso, febricitantii cum aqua, lateris dolori cum aqua mulsa, opisthotonicis cum aqua qualid a, stomaticis cum pusca, indigestis similiter, dysintericis, renibus laborantibus, spleneticis, cauculosis et stranguria patientibus gluttire dabis ut supra, qui a perfrictionibus laborant, si febricitant mire prodest, si gluttiant, paralyticis prodest, *secundas mulierum* educit, si cum mulsa bibatur, ptysicis prodest, curat et uulnera que intra thoracem nasci possunt. Recipit hec: crocu scripulum I, opiu scripulum II, euforbiu scripulum I, piper un<cia> I, piretru scripulum I, spicanardi scripulum I, daucu scripulum I, petroselinum scripulum II, yosquiamu scripulum II, opobalsamu scripulum II, cassie fistule scripulum II, ells dispumatum quod sufficit, dabis et hoc magnitudinem fabe singulis passionibus.\(^{100}\)

**Glasgower Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)


\(^{94}\) In the early medieval recipes word *secunda* is often used for ‘afterbirth’ instead of *secundina*.

\(^{95}\) Sigerist 1923, p. 49; *coneusa* should probably be read *contusa*.


\(^{97}\) Egert 1936, p. 43. (Egert III)

\(^{98}\) Egert 1936, p. 20. (Egert I)

\(^{99}\) Egert 1936, p. 22. (Egert I)

\(^{100}\) Sigerist 1923, pp. 41-42. *Qualida > calida*. There does not seem to be a related recipe in Marcellus Empiricus’s *De Medicamentis*. 
The *antidotum diestorium* - also a purgative potion - claims to induce the lochial discharge:

**Glasgower Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

37. Antidotum diestorium adest opticus facit ad epaticos et qui tusse longa habent et ad infirmos, quos aqua coegit et ad mulieris qui pos<or> partum non purgant: sthorace - VIII, resina tereuentina - VI, murra - III, yrin illirica - III, iusquiamu - III, estrumum - III, pipers albi - I, dauis in uino bibere.102

The recipes for difficult birth quoted above do not tell us whether the fetus is alive or dead, that is, whether we are dealing with difficult birth, miscarriage, or perhaps abortion. However, the recipes in Table 1 (p. 39) all clearly indicate that the fetus is dead and that the woman is having a miscarriage (or an abortion).

Table 1 contains variant versions of recipes for miscarriage (*aborsus*) and the expulsion of a dead fetus found in two short recipe books: the *Liber de muliebria causa* and the *Liber de muliebria*, and in the section on gynecology in the *Vademecum eines frühhmittelalterlichen Arztes*.103 As in the Greek *Diseases of Women*, a list of recipes that cure the same complaint is given, so that healer and patient were given a choice. When comparing these three recipe books to their probable Greek sources, the Hippocratic gynecological texts, we see that the author-compilers chose only a limited number of recipes for one complaint, and that certain types of recipes - especially fumigations - were almost consistently left out.104 It is also evident that all three texts must have a common Latin ancestor, because even the order of the recipes is the same. The *Vademecum* contains fewer recipes per complaint than the other two texts, so that the *Liber de muliebria causa* and the *Liber de muliebria* must be older. Because the *Vademecum* seems to be an abridged version, the manuscript (a folded manuscript) may therefore indeed, as Köpp suggested, have belonged to an itinerant doctor. The *Arzneiform* of most of the recipes discussed here is the potion; occasionally other *Arzneiformen* are used. The recipes in row one of Table 1 are pessaries, recipe nr. 70 in the *Liber de Muliebria* is a plaster (column two, row four), and the two remedies for women having birthing difficulties in row six must be taken in a bath (*lavatio*). There are hardly any differences between the variant versions of the purgative remedies for miscarriage in Table 1, which is remarkable, because the variant versions of many of the so-called long recipes often differ greatly (see, for instance, Table 2, below, p. 40).

It is possible to interpret the word *aborsus* as ‘abortion’ in the recipes in row one of Table 1: *ad mulierem qui aborsum facit et non purgat*, ‘for a woman who is having a miscarriage (or an abortion) and does not purge’. However, this is probably not the ‘intended’ meaning of the word in this context.105 The word *aborsus* in the phrase *ad mulieris auorsum* in the following version of the *antidotum theodoritum* probably also means ‘miscarriage’, but, here too, *aborsus* can be interpreted as ‘abortion’.

**Berliner Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

12. Antidotum theodoritum, ad omnia utilissimo purg<ato<ri> o qui facit ad dolorem capitis, sthomaticis, epilenticis, melancholicis, maniacis, ad pectoris, ad lateris dolorem, ad malas humores conectos, quibus esca acidiscit in sthomaco, ad tisicos et ad eos qui reumaticas passiones patiuntur, et ad eos qui in magroconios ueniunt, hoc est in longa egritudine, ad hictericos, ad ydropicos, ad nefreticos et qui graue corpus habent, ad colum, per hunc antidotum repleti et sani fiunt, ad pedes plurimum dolentes, ad incipientem dolorem podagri et *ad mulieris auorsum* et ad eos qui corruptelam uentris patiuntur et sthomaci, ad epaticos, ad spleneticos, soluit autem uentre sine molestia. Accipiendum est uernum et

---

101 Sigerist 1923, p. 100. (tisicis > fisicis?, ptisicis?)
102 Sigerist 1923, p. 106. For diestorium read digestorium.
103 Köpp 1980, and Egert 1936 II-III. All three texts seem to be Hippocratic in origin and are perhaps abbreviated adaptations of the Hippocratic *Diseases of Women*. Perhaps they were derived from early Latin translations of the Greek Hippocratic *Diseases of Women* that were made in sixth-century Ravenna. See also: note 80.
104 Cf. Sigerist 1923 on fumigations, p. 174. The sample of early medieval recipes discussed in this paper has only one recipe that prescribes fumigation (*Antidotarium Bruxellense I 3*), cf. p. 13.
105 On the word *aborsus*, see also: the sections on ‘dead blood’ and ‘abortion and contraception’.
There are recipes for miscarriage in almost every recipe book. The following purgatives found in the ninth-century *St. Galler Receptarium I* bring on labor and expel a dead fetus. Recipe A136 can also be used for cows with a dead calf or for other farm animals.¹⁰⁷

**St. Galler Receptarium I (MS 9th century)**

A136. *Ad feminam aut quemlibet pecus si in ea mortuus fuerit partus.* Ebuli radices teris et cum aqua bibat, et si non febricitat, in uino bono.¹⁰⁸

**St. Galler Receptarium I (MS 9th century)**

A60. *Si partus in utero mortuus fuerit et discuti non potest. Ad matrici extensionem et partus excutiendus.* Braci brinnato in olla ponatur cum aqua fenuculi radices, leuistici radices uno corpore, bulliatur bene ut ipsa aqua dulcis sit et postea refrigereat, tepelacta bibatur, mater extenditur, partum excluditur, et si non postes mundare, pumunculo qui nascitur in fonte dabis ei bibere; si aliquid male habet proicit, purgat et sanat.¹⁰⁹

Recipe A60 is especially interesting, because it claims to be able to widen the exit of the womb of a woman who is insufficiently dilated: *Si partus in utero mortuus fuerit et discuti non potest. Ad matrici extensionem et partus excutiendas, ‘If the partus has died in the womb and cannot be expelled. For widening of the womb and in order to expel the partus’.* This recipe also neatly summarizes the beneficial effect of emmenagogues and purgatives: *proicit, purgat et sanat, ‘it expels, purges, and cures’.*

A recipe in the *Glasgower Antidotarium* - attributed to the medical authority Vindicianus - illustrates the many uses of purgatives, and again shows us that no distinction was made between menstrual retention and other kinds of ‘retention’. The *antidotum uindiciani* can stimulate menstruation (*mulieribus menstrua provocat*), it can expel a miscarriage (*auorsum proiciet*), and it also claims to be an especially suitable potion, if tears, lesions or wounds have developed in the womb (*maxime si uulnera in matrice fuerit nata*).

**Glasgower Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)**


The core text of the following seven versions of the purgative recipe called *antidotum hiera* has been expanded with indications for obstructed menses or purgation, and miscarriage; six versions also claim to relieve (post-

¹⁰⁶ Sigerist 1923, pp. 69-70
¹⁰⁷ Note that *pecus* must be translated as ‘cattle’ here; in the other recipes *pecus* is a synonym of ‘fetus’.
partum) pain. All seven versions have been tabulated in Table 2 under A and B, along with three recipes called antidotarium maurentius (Table 2, under C), because the latter contain similar indications in the same order (cf. the section on ‘dead blood’).

The first three variants cure menstrual retention (ad purgationes femine), help to safely expel a dead fetus when a woman is having a miscarriage (petus mortuam excludis et per aborsum sine periculum lapsus facit), and work as a painkiller (fisis dolorem):

(1) Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
   [63]. Antidotum ygia filigratis, ad omnes dolores, ad uertiginem capitis, ad fuitum tumorum, dyspnocicos, ad uocem obscuran, ad stridorem pectoris, ad duricium tussis, ad dolorum intestinorum, lateris et uessice, ad purgaciones femine, petus mortuam excludis et per aborsum sine periculum lapsus facit, fisis dolorem, limosis, arenesos, cauculosis, ympiciis, pitisiciis, sintetcicis, ystericis et cibum non continentibus. Recipit haec: piper unc. I, petрослini drag. III et semis, ameos drag. III et semis, cum modico pulsa, in apozima mytre aut lentisci aut mali granati susci aut lenticule.112

(2) Glasgower Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
48. Antidotum egia. Est ad omne dolorem sathomaci et ad uertiginem capitis et ad fuitrum tumorum et ad uoce tumoris et ad suspirium et ad uoci escuritatem et ad estridorem pectoris et ad tussem et splenis et punctas et torciones intestinorum et renum dolorem et lateris et uissice et dissipaciscis febrisbus perseverantibus, cotidians, tercianis et quarternis purgacacem faciant, femina si pecus mortuam excludet per aborsum sine periculo lapsus faciet bus dolores fixis dolores sed ad lienos renos et cauculosus presuras esthomacu vel subducione[nis sed et cibos non continentibus acida et fumosa et ruptantibus et morbum regium curat. Piper album = I, petрослino macedonicum > VIII, ameos > VIII, fenuculi semen > VIII, careos > XXI, luisticia > XXI, ginguer – I, tunsu criullella aiunto melly tymino dispumato opium missis reponis in doleo lo plumbeo uel uitreo et dabis coeliacri I in aqua calida, in uino autem disinteriscis amixta aqua calida et si sene febrisbus fuerit optimus experimentatun est.113

(3) Miscellanea Tironiana (MS 9th century)
Antidotvm egias est ad omne dolorem stomachi, ad uertiginem capitis, ad fuitrum tumorum, uave tumoris, susprium, voci obscuritatem, stridorem pectoris, tussem, duricium icinoris, splenis punctus, tortiones intestinorum et renium, dolos lateris, visicae, dissecisceris febrisbus perseverantibus, cotidiansris tertiaruiris, quartaruiris, purgacionem femineae. Pecus excludit per aborsum sine periculo lapsus. Facietbus fistulis dolores sedat limosis et arenessos et cal-culosus. Praessura stomachi vel subductionis, sed et cibis non continentibus et acita stomacho ruptantibus, sed et morbum region curat, id est: Piper alicuid recipit partim VIII, ginguer partim VIII, petрослilo partim II, apii semen partim II, carego partim VI, livistes semen semen partim VI, finicii semen partim II, amomii semen partim II, cinimo partim VIII, anaso partim VI, miconum id est papaver partim VI, haec omnia tunsu et cribara et mixto mel optimo dispumato pondo III miscis, repenis in dolio lo vel plumbo. Dabis clocleiro I in aqua kalida, et dissecisceris in vino admixta aqua kalida.114

Versions (1) - (3) are more or less the same, except the passage on ‘pain relief’, which reads fistulis dolores sedat, ‘it soothes pains due to fistulae’ in (3), instead of fisis dolorem (fisis dolores), ‘the [postpartum] pain is stopped (stabilized)’ (1) - (2).115 The word lapsus, ‘a falling, slipping, sliding; failing, fault, error’, occurs in all three versions, and seems to be used in the sense ‘expulsion of the partus’, ‘birth process’ or ‘delivery’.116

Version (1) - et per aborsum sine periculum lapsus [=lapsum] facit - can be translated as: ‘and [if given] for a miscarriage it induces expulsion without danger [to the woman]’.117

The fourth version of the antidotum hiera (called ygna) contains the same components (cf. Table 2). The passage on ‘pain relief’ is missing, and the passages on ‘blocked menses’, ‘miscarriage’ and ‘safe delivery’ are different,

111 Bamberger Antidotarium nr. 15 (cf. pp. 11-12) also eases postpartum pain: et dolore matricis siue post partum conpescit, and recipe 4.67 in the Lorschera Arzneibuch relieves women who are weak or ill after a miscarriage (cf. pp. 17-18).
112 Sigerist 1923, p. 35 (petus = pecus, ‘fetus’).
113 Sigerist 1923, p. 107.
114 Schmitz 1896, pp. 48-49.
115 Fistula, ‘a sort of ulcer, fistula’, could also refer to tears or other wounds caused during the birthing process. However, because none of the other variants mention fistulae, nor is the word mentioned in any of the other recipes dealt with in this paper, it seems likely that fistulis is a scribal or a transcription error for fisis or fixis.
116 I have, however, not been able to find any other instances of, or references to lapsus with this meaning.
117 Versions (2) and (3) can be translated as: (2) purgacionem faciant femina si pecus mortuam excludet per aborsum sine periculo lapsus facientius fixis dolores, ‘they [the herbs, ingredients] cause purgation in a woman, if the fetus is dead, it expels [if given] for a miscarriage without danger [to the woman], after expulsion has been caused (induced), the pains are stopped (stabilized)’; (3) purgationen femineae pecus excludit per aborsum sine periculo lapsus facientius fistulis dolores sedat, [for] a woman’s purgation, it expels a [living?] fetus [if given] for a miscarriage (abortion?) without danger [to the woman], after expulsion has been caused (induced), it soothes the [postpartum] pains of the fistulae (wounds, tears).
but their meaning is the same: datur etiam mulieri qui non purgat, mouet etiam pecus in utero ferentibus. Per aborsum data expellit sine ullo labore, ‘it is also given to a woman who does not purge, it also removes a (living?) fetus in the womb of pregnant women (ferentibus), [if] given for a miscarriage (or abortion?),’ it expels without any effort (easily).

(4) Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes (MS 9th century)
Ygra. Quid facit ad multas passiones. Ante omnia stomachi dolor emundat, duritia que fieri solet datur autem cocleario ex aqua calida, statim dolorem mitigat, asiside datum duritia soluet, uter(t)iginis etiam capitis emund(at) grauitudinem, releuet fa(ucium) et ube tumore, mitigat suspirium, concescite uoces obscuratatem, reformat ad loquendum, tusse sanat, dur(tia) locinis purgis, splenis tumorem siccet, punctos et tumorem intestinorum et tortiones datum statim sedat dolorem, sed renum et laterum, dolentibus pleuresis, strangurrih prodest. Desinterisci solis in uino datur, cotidianarisis, tercia naris si accepitam emundat, datur etiam mulieri qui non purgat, mouet etiam pecus in utero ferentibus. Per aborsum data expellit sine ullo labore; corporis limosis, ae rosin, cauculosis frequenter data omnia resoluit, sine ullo dolore presuras resoluit sthomati et animi subductiones quod frequenter tan uris, quam etiam mulieribus fieri solet statim ostendit spem salutis, cunctos tocius corporis sanat. Cibus non continentibus acida et fumus exibit, digesgeionet et morbo regium sanat. Receptim hec: Piper albo – I, petrosilino scripula G III, fenocolo semen scripula VIII, caseo scripula XXI, ameos scripula VIII, liuistrico scripula XXI GG I – I, api semen d III, anese d III, omnia pulera facta cum mel dispumato comisce.

Versions (3) and (4) omit the word mortuam in pecus mortuam, so that pecus can also refer to a ‘live’ fetus; aborsus can then also refer to abortion. Version (4) has sine ullo labore, ‘without any effort’, where the other variants read: sine periculo, ‘without danger’. The correspondences between the variant versions in Table 2 show us that all four versions are related, but that (1), (2) and (3) are more closely related to each other, and probably nearer to the recipe’s archetype than (4). The variation in these recipes also indicates that there must have been many intermediate versions that are now lost. Versions (1) - (4) of the antidotarium hiera are not easy to translate; however, versions (5) - (7) seem to pose even more interpretation problems.

(5) Berliner Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
2. Antidotum eygas, quod interpretatur salus hominis facit primum ad sthomaci dolorem ex aqua calida coel. I. Statim dolorem mitigat, suspirium concescite, tumorem ubi fuerit desiccat, uoces abscensiones reformat, loquela reddit, strictorem pectoris linet, tusse sanat, duritia icoris aspargit, splenis tumorem siccet, punctas et turciones stentinarum tollit, renium dolorem sanat, lateris dolorem id est spleneticus curat, uissice dolorem incidit, strangurriam mitigat, desintericius cum uino uetere prodest admixta aqua calida, febrimentibus cotidianarisis, tertianarisis, quartanarisis in uino utere datur, menstrua mouet, mortuam pecus expellit, aborsum uel purgatum sicut supra dat concepto confirmat, dolorem matricis sedat, cauculosos frequenter dato subuertit, constrictionem stomaci releuat, strictorem animae subuertit, punctam et tortionis totius corporis reformat, cibo non contiones prodest, acidas et fumus exibit, morbo regium sanat. Recipient haec: Piper album – VIII, gingiber – VIII, petrosilino – II, appii semen – II, ameos scripula VIIII, omnia pulera facta cum mel dispumato pond. IIII miscis

(6) Reichenauer Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
[37]. Antidotum ygia quod interpretatur salus omnis. Facit primum ad stomachi dolorem ex aqua calida coelarium I, statim dolorem mitigat et assidui suspirium composit. Tumorem uue descacet, uoces adsonetionem reformat, ad loculam reddirtur. Uterginein emendat, strictorem pectoris linet, tusse sanat, duritia icoris solut, splenis tumorem siccet, punctas sanat, laterum dolorem, id est pleureticos, curat, uessice dolorem mitigat et strangurriam, febrimentibus cotti-


119 Sigerist 1923, pp. 67-68.
The passages on purgation and a dead fetus in versions (5) - (7) of the antidotum hiera use different words than versions (1) - (4). An important difference between these three versions and the four versions discussed above is the fact that in (5), (6) and (7) the phrase sine periculo was replaced by a passage on the conceptus (‘that which was conceived, the fetus’) that seems to contain a contradiction in terms: abursum uel purgatum sicut supra dat concepto [=conceptum] confirmat, [‘for’ a miscarriage or purgation, ‘if’ one gives [it] as above, it confirms a conceptus’ (5).122 Variant (6) has si quis supradat instead of sicut supra dat, and adds the short subclause: ne sublatur that is not easy to interpret: abursum partum si quis supradat conceptum ne sublatur confirmat, [‘for’ a miscarriage [or] a partus [a miscarrying partus?], if someone gives [it] [as] above, the conceptus is not removed [born], it confirms [it]’ (6).123 Version (7) of this passage is equally puzzling, and has servandum instead of confirmat: et qui non purgant uel ad partum uel aborsum leduntur ad conceptum servandum, ad alentum, ‘and [for] those who do not purge whether they are hurt (suffering) due to birth or miscarriage (abortion?),’ to protect the conceptus, to sustain [it = the partus]’.

On the version in the Reichenauer Antidotarium Sigerist remarked: “Ein Antidot dient zur Festigung der Konzeption bei Neigung zu Abort”.124 If Sigerist is right, this purgative can help bring on the menses, expel a dead fetus, and at the same time ‘confirm’ conception: effects that seem to contradict each other. Perhaps this passage means that the woman can be sure she is pregnant, if this purgative is administered, and it does not cause menstruation or the expulsion of the fetus. Another explanation for the contradictio in terminis could be that this remedy was part of a purgative or cleansing treatment for women who wish to conceive, as in version (8) below. The indications and the order in which they are listed are more or less the same in all seven variants of the antidotum hiera. If we compare these variant versions of the antidotum hiera to the three versions of the antidotarium maurentius, we see that all ten recipes discuss purgation or menstruation, the expulsion of a dead fetus, miscarriage, a safe delivery and pain relief in the same order. Some of the recipes seem to be related, but others only seem to be distantly related to each other; however, the number of variant versions shows us that these

---

120 Sigerist 1923, p. 48.
121 Sigerist 1923, p. 28.
123 Sublatur is a problem; this verb form is non existant, but may perhaps be a new formation based on sublatus with the ending -atur. It is also possible to read: ne sublatum for ne sublatur, that is, ‘it is not destroyed’. Cf. however, usage of the word sublatus in article 5.1 of the early ninth-century Lex Frisionum: infants ab utero sublatus, ‘a child removed (born) from the womb’, cf. Elsakkers, Reading Between the Lines, chapter 1.
recipes were popular, and that there must have been intermediate versions that did not survive the ravages of time.

Version (8) of the *antidotum hiera* reflects ancient gynecological theory; it says that regular menstruation is a prerequisite for conception, and that taking a purgative can help prevent future miscarriages.

**(8) Glasgower Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)


The purgative recipe in the *Glasgower Antidotarium* is apparently recommended as part of a therapeutic procedure for women who keep having miscarriages: *mulieris qui non portatur optime curat*, ‘it cures a woman who cannot carry a child to term’ and it should ultimately help restore menstruation, thus increasing a woman’s chances of becoming pregnant and having a normal pregnancy.¹²⁶

The relatively short version of the *antidotum hiera* in the *Berliner Antidotarium* quoted below summarizes the uses of this multi-functional purgative for women in three words: *ad mulierem utia*, ‘for women’s diseases’. This short phrase tells us that this purgative can be used to cure almost any of the complaints and diseases associated with women and menstrual retention.

**(9) Berliner Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)


The nine variant versions quoted above suggest that the *antidotum hiera* was a very popular, multi-purpose recipe; the textual variation points to usage.

Together the purgative and emmenagogic recipes quoted above show us that they can be used for any kind of menstrual retention, and that ‘menstrual retention’ can refer to menstruation, difficult birth, miscarriage or the expulsion of a dead fetus, the afterbirth, and the lochia. The word *aborsus* denotes a ‘miscarriage’, but it can occasionally also be interpreted as ‘abortion’. The following section deals with recipes for contraception and abortion.

**CONTRACEPTION- ABORTION**

Early medieval recipes are not concerned with theoretical issues such as the moment of conception, or a woman’s ‘safe’ or ‘fertile’ periods. In these recipes menstruation is the fertility indicator. Regular menstruation not only means that a woman can become pregnant, but it also indicates that she is *not* pregnant. Women who want to become pregnant and those who do not want to become pregnant must therefore both have regular periods.

¹²⁵ Sigerist 1923, p. 114.
¹²⁶ See also: recipe 95 in the *Reichenauer Antidotarium*, a recipe for a pill that will prevent an ongoing miscarriage and relieve serious pain: *Facit ad aborsum et graves dolores. Si quis hunc trociscum acceperit, tenet pecus et numquam aborsum facit* (Sigerist 1923, p. 56).
¹²⁷ Sigerist 1923, pp. 70-71.
They must not suffer from blocked or ceased menses, or from other menstrual disorders. According to ancient and medieval medicine emmenagogues and purgatives help promote regular menstruation, and, as we saw above, the early medieval recipe books contain a great deal of purgatives for women. This means that we should expect at least some of the early medieval recipes to mention fertility management. However, the actual number of recipes is disappointing - compared to the huge amount of recipes for menstrual retention. Fertility promotion is only mentioned explicitly in a few recipes, and at the same time there are also very few recipes that explicitly claim to be abortifacients or contraceptives. Besides, as we saw above in the sections on ‘dead blood’ and ‘difficult birth and miscarriage’, recipes that use the ambiguous words aborsus or abortivum are concerned with miscarriage - even though the word aborsus can sometimes be interpreted to include ‘abortion’. The main meaning of aborsus in the early medieval recipes is ‘miscarrage’.

The following quote from Soranus’s Gynaecia shows us how closely abortion and contraception were considered to be related. Soranus gives a recipe for a purgative (Cyrenaic balm), and says that it works as a contraceptive, because it ensures regular menstruation.

Soranus, Τονυστρόφινον - Gynaecia
1.19.63. (…) Once during the month to drink Cyrenaic balm to the amount of a chick-pea in two cyaths of water for the purpose of inducing menstruation. (…) However, these things not only prevent conception, but also destroy any already existing. 129

At the end of the recipe, however, he warns us that the remedy also acts as an early stage abortifacient. The message is clear: cessation of menstruation indicates pregnancy.

Five recipes for contraceptives were found in the sample of early medieval recipes discussed here. They all have the heading ut mulier non concipiat, ‘so that a woman does not conceive’. The third and fourth recipes are variant versions.

Glasgower Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
[299]. Mulier ut non concipiat uulba leporis assa ieiuna lauerit in uino et manducet. 130

Glasgower Antidotarium (MS 9th-10th century)
[300]. Item alias. Sarcus [read: stercus] de mule accipiat et grana qui ibidem sunt X et exinde accipiat et munditer lauet munditer cum uino manducet. 131

Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes (MS 9th century)
[11.] Ut mulier non concipiat. Musteli masculi testiculis tollis et ipsam uuuam dimittis. Inuoluis eos in pelle asenis et legauis mulieri et non concipit. 132

Liber de muliebria (MS 9th-10th century)
28. Ut mulier non concipiat, mustile masculi coliolus tollis et ipsum uuum demittis, inuoluis eos in pellem asenis et legauis mulieri et non concipit. 133

Although we might expect these four recipes to be emmenagogues or purgatives like Soranus’s prescription, they in no way resemble the recipes discussed in the sections above. In the first place they contain strange and perhaps also repulsive animal ingredients instead of vegetable ingredients: sexual organs and excrements (uulba leporis, ‘a hare’s vulva’, musteli masculi testiculis, ‘a male weasel’s testicles’, and stercus de mule, ‘a mule’s

---

128 Strangely enough, only a few recipes explicitly claim to promote fertility, cf., for instance, St. Galler Receptarium I A57 (Jörnmann 1925, p. 17), Antidotarium Bruxellense I 5 (Rose 1894, pp. 365-366), Antidotarium Bruxellense secundum 185 (Rose 1894, p. 394), Reichenauer Antidotarium 110, 142, 143 (Sigerist 1923, pp. 59, 65, 65) and Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes I-4 and Liber de muliebria 4, 4a, 5, 7 (Köpp 1980, pp. 29; Egert 1936, p. 34). Some of the fertility tests are ‘gender tests’: ut concipiat et masculum pareat (Vademecum 4; Liber de muliebria 7).
130 Sigerist 1923, p. 140.
131 Sigerist 1923, p. 140.
133 Egert 1936, p. 37. (Egert III)
excrements’), and secondly, we cannot be certain that these ingredients work as a purgative. The first two remedies must be eaten, but the last two recipes seem to be amulets rather than medical recipes. In fact, they are examples of exactly the kind of remedies Soranus deplores.\(^{134}\)

The fifth contraceptive recipe also seems to be magical. As many grains of barley must be put into the afterbirth as the number of years the woman does not want to conceive (\textit{quod annis uoluerit … tot grana ordei mittat}); a great deal of handfuls must be added, if the woman never wishes to give birth again (\textit{si numquam uult parire}).

\textit{Liber de muliebria} (MS 9th-10th century)

96. \textit{Item ut non concipiat}, quod annis uoluerit, in secundas suas tot grana ordei mittat, quod annis uacare uoluerit; si numquam uult parire, plinas manus mittat ….\(^{135}\)

None of the above mentioned early medieval contraceptives seem to be very helpful or effective - at least not according to our standards.

There are only three early medieval recipes that explicitly claim to be abortifacients, and this is very little compared to the huge amount of recipes for blocked or ceased menses. The first recipe is in the ninth-century \textit{St. Galler Receptarium I}. It is called \textit{potio denoncupata}, ‘unnamed, unmentionable or taboo potion’, and was considered to be a magical recipe for abortion by Jerry Stannard, an American authority on medieval plants and recipes.\(^{136}\) The text is so corrupt that it is hard to understand why Stannard considered it a recipe for abortion, and it is even harder to determine its meaning.

\textit{St. Galler Receptarium I} (MS 9th century)

A141. \textit{Potio denoncupata}. Herba maleficia proice et ter guga si ossa non habuerint et medulla hominina quamlibet diuturnas expellit.\(^{137}\)

‘Unmentionable or taboo potion. Throw the magical (or: poisonous) herb(s?) [in a kettle], and take three gulps [or: gurgle three times] if [the fetus] does not have bones yet, and it will expel human marrow no matter how many days old it is.’\(^{138}\)

The translation given above is tentative.\(^{139}\) The words \textit{medulla}, ‘marrow’, and \textit{ossa}, ‘bones’, refer to different stages of fetal development. According to the embryology in Vindicianus’s \textit{Gynaecia} (late fourth century AD, North Africa) a fetus’s marrow becomes firm in the seventh month, and its bones develop in the eighth.\(^{140}\) The \textit{potio denoncupata} uses the words \textit{medulla} and \textit{ossa} to distinguish between early term and late term abortion, but we do not know exactly what stage of development or month ‘without bones’ refers to in this text. Perhaps ‘bones’ denotes the stage when ‘movement’ is felt, and the mother is beginning to feel the fetus’s ‘form’ or contours, because its bones are starting to harden, so that an earlier stage than Vindicianus’s seventh month was meant.\(^{141}\) All we know is that the recipe says it cannot terminate a late pregnancy, only an early pregnancy (\textit{si

\(^{134}\) Soranus, \textit{Gynaecia}. ‘1.19.63. (…) Others, however, have even made use of amulets which on grounds of antipathy they believe to have great effect; such are uteri of mules and the dirt in their ears and more things of this kind which according to the outcome reveal themselves as falsehoods’ (Temkin 1956 [1991], p. 66).

\(^{135}\) Egert 1936, p. 44. (Egert III) The dots represent a gap in the text.

\(^{136}\) Stannard 1985, p. 193: ‘(…) an unidentified plant. (…). The plant in question is called \textit{herba maleficia} and the present reference, the only one I have yet found, occurs in a ninth-century recipe collection from St. Gall. It appears, in a badly garbled passage, that this plant was regarded as an abortifacient. From a theological point of view, it was a product of magic, hence demonic or maleficent.’

\(^{137}\) Jöirimann 1925, p. 30.

\(^{138}\) I owe a debt of thanks to many friends who were ‘forced’ to read this recipe, and give their opinion. Extra thanks are due to Marietje van Winter for helping me with the translation in a long email conversation.

\(^{139}\) \textit{Habuerint} was translated as a third person singular; here in the plural, perhaps because of its proximity to the word \textit{ossa}. \textit{Guga} is either a hapax or a scribal error, the translation ‘drink’ or ‘gulp’ is a wild guess, based on an association with the word \textit{gula}, ‘throat’.


\(^{141}\) Movement is first felt in or before the fifth month of pregnancy; the fetus’s bones begin to harden from the fourth month onwards, cf. \textit{Het grote wonder} (=\textit{A Child is Born}), p. 93, p. 103 or \url{http://www.babycenter.com/pregnancy/fetaldevelopment} (last accessed February 4, 2010): ‘His skeleton is starting to harden from rubbery cartilage to bone’ (four months).
ossa non habuerint). If this interpretation is correct, and the *potio denoncupata* really distinguishes between early term and late abortion, this is a unique recipe for abortion.\(^{142}\) The potion’s name, *potio denoncupata*, and its unspecified ingredient(s), the *herba maleficia*, ‘magical or poisonous herb(s)’, indicate secrecy. Perhaps only insiders - women? - knew the secret, perhaps recipes for abortion were not supposed to be written down and were usually passed on by word of mouth, and/or perhaps the subject was taboo.

The multi-purpose recipe called *pentadeos antidotus uel tyriaca* is an antidote for all kinds of poison (theriac) that also cures other illnesses.

**Reichenauer Antidotarium** (MS 9th-10th century)

[34]. *Pentadeos antidotus uel tyriaca appellatus, qui facit ad omnia uenena serpentium uel ad morsum canis rabiosi, seu simie, ad salamandre et muris, ad araneae morsum, ad rane rubete et scorpiionis et araneorum uel egneumonis morsus uel qui uenenum biberit seu telo ueneno percussus fuerit, ad pleureticos et ad tussem ueterem, ad peripleumonicos, ad suspiriosos, ad anhelitum, ad constrictionem thoracis, ad eos qui anhelantur, ad eos qui dixit sedent surgere non possunt, ad eos qui quibus caput assidue dolet, ad tyriacos, ad totem, ad empiicos omnibus cum mulsa tepida, ad uinos et melle, spleneticis cum aceto aut decoctione absinthii, tussientibus cum aqua ubi fenum grecum decoxeris, sanguinem excreantibus cum pusca frigida, nefreticis et cauclosis et stranguriosis cum aqua tepida, aurugionis et hydropicis cum uino et mel. Si lebitrum cum mulsa tepida, colics cum mulsa, dysintericis cum uino tepido, sciaticis et paralyticis cum mulsa tepida, qui strophum patiuntur idem ad imflationem stomachi seu ventris uel frigdore aliquo cum decoctione fenugreci, que potio ad omnis superscriptas uenena cum uino tepido danda est. Recipit hec: aristolocie radices siccas I, gentiane radices siccas I, myrre troclitis I, uacas lauri purgatas I, semen rute siccum I, mel quod sufficit. Facit ad pustulas mala, uel *si conceptum excutere uolueris, post balneum potui dabis*.\(^{143}\)

At the end of the recipe we find a supplement to the indication that says that the potion will cure pimples (acne?), and that it can also be used as an abortifacient, if it is taken after a bath: *si conceptum excutere uolueris post balneum potui dabis*, ‘if you want to expel a conceptus, you should give the potion after a bath’. This part of the indication was probably added at a later stage, because it was inserted after the list of ingredients, instead of at the beginning of the recipe, where the rest of the indication is. The ingredients were all known for their abortive qualities. The verb form *uolueris* (2nd person singular) of the verb *uelle*, ‘want, wish’, in the phrase *si conceptum excutere uolueris* is interesting, because it denotes volition on the part of the mother.

We also find the verb *uelle* in a fragment of a seventh-century recipe book in Ivrea manuscript 92 of which only the list of title headings survives:

**Ivrea fragment** (MS 7th-8th century)

*ad avorsus qui sibi facere voluerit. cxiii.*\(^{144}\)

This small fragment clearly indicates that the recipe is for voluntary or intentional abortion: *ad avorsus qui sibi facere voluerit*, ‘for an abortion that she wants to do to herself’, even though we have no idea what kind of recipe was in the lost recipe book. This is the only recipe that uses the word *aborsus* in the meaning ‘abortion’, but here, too, its basic meaning is ‘miscarriage’ - to be explained as ‘self-induced miscarriage’ in this context.

The three recipes for abortion are all remarkable in their own way: the indication on abortion in the *Reichenauer Antidotarium* is a later addition, showing us that the recipe did not initially include abortion, the *potio denoncupata* is a strange, secret recipe that distinguishes between early term and late term abortion - the only recipe of its kind that I have come across in early medieval medicine - and the fragment in the Ivrea manuscript contains only the title of the recipe, but is otherwise remarkably informative. It seems as if these recipes have all come down to us by some strange coincidence or stroke of luck. This and the lack of more recipes for abortion - which

\(^{142}\) The Old Germanic laws and the early medieval penitentials that distinguish between early term and late term abortion set the dividing line between the third and the fifth month. Cf. Elsakkers, *Reading Between the Lines*, passim.

\(^{143}\) Sigerist 1923, p. 47.

\(^{144}\) Giacosa 1886, p. 662. The fragment published by Giacosa is the index of a lost recipe book found on a parchment folio dated to the seventh or eight century.
is surprising, compared to Greco-Latin texts on the subject - suggests that abortion was either prohibited, disapproved of, and/or considered a dangerous procedure, as Soranus also acknowledges. In the first book of his Gynaecia Soranus explains how to prevent or terminate pregnancy, but at the same time he also warns women that abortifacients and contraceptives are often dangerous medicines:

Soranus, Γυναικεία - Gynaecia
1.19.60. (...) And since it is safer to prevent conception from taking place than to destroy the fetus (...).
1.19.64. Yet if conception has taken place, one must first, for 30 days, do the opposite of what we said earlier. But in order that the embryo be separated, the woman should have <more violent exercise>, (...). She should use diuretic decoctions which also have the power to bring on menstruation, and empty and purge the abdomen with relatively pungent clysters (...).
1.19.65. For a woman who intends to have an abortion (...) Another vaginal suppository which produces abortion with relatively little danger: Of wallflower, cardamom, brimstone, absinthium, myrrh, equal quantities, mould with water. (...) one must, however, beware of things that are too powerful (...). After the abortion one must treat as for inflammation.146

Very few recipes for abortives and contraceptives have survived in the early medieval recipe books. However, the recipe in the Reichenauer Antidotarium and the Ivrea Fragment both clearly indicate that voluntary or intentional abortion must have happened - as usage of the word uelle indicates. Even though the evidence is scarce, these recipes prove that there were women who contemplated abortion, and that recipes and techniques for abortion must have been known in the oral tradition, even if they were not written down. Perhaps, as Soranus suggests, women knew that they could ‘do the opposite’, that is, use emmenagogues and purgatives to provoke an abortion.

CONCLUSION

My intention in examining a sample of recipes from early medieval recipe books was to find out what female complaints emmenagogues and purgatives were used for, and why menstruation was so important. A second question I asked myself was whether the recipes for the emmenagogues and purgatives that were prescribed to cure menstrual retention could also have been used as abortifacients. Some of the answers to these questions may seem disappointing, because very little can be deduced from the evidence that has come down to us. But some observations can be made.

In the first place we have very little evidence. Only relatively few early medieval recipe books have survived the ravages of time.147 Secondly, only a small percentage - between 6 and 10 per cent at the most - of these pre-Salernitan recipes are concerned with women’s diseases.148 Furthermore, women’s diseases are often ‘hidden’ in multi-purpose recipes with long lists of ingredients and indications, so that we have to read through a long text in order to find out whether the recipe also contains anything concerning women. However, there are also a few small texts with recipes for women’s complaints, and one text where the gynaecological recipes are in a separate section.149

Another complication is the fact that, even though there were female scribes and nun’s scriptoria, chances are that most of the recipe books were translated, written down, compiled and copied by male scribes in secular or

---

145 Soranus is referring to book 1.14.46: “What care should be given to pregnant women?”
147 Moreover the manuscripts of many recipe books have not yet been edited.
148 The recipes in Sigerist 1923, Jörnann 1925 and Stoll 1992 were counted.
ecclesiastical scriptoria.¹⁵⁰ Not everyone - including women - knew enough about women’s bodies and medical
to understand what female complaints the recipes for women’s diseases were supposed to cure. This
means that many different kinds of mistakes could have been made during the process of production and dis-
semination.

Our lack of knowledge about early medieval health care poses another problem. However, this problem is being
remedied. For instance, work in progress on health care in early medieval Italy by Clare Pillsworth reveals that
medicine was practised by lay men and women, and by members of the religious and secular clergy. Although
we now know that many of these practitioners were probably educated at medical schools, and that a corpus of
medical texts was available, we know next to nothing about the intended audience of the recipe books: the doc-
tors, midwives, herbalists, pharmacists and apothecaries, or how medicine was practised. Some of the medical
practitioners must have been literate or semi-literate, but there was probably also a large group of illiterate prac-
titioners - some perhaps knowledgeable about written medicine, and some not.

The recipes themselves constitute a further complication. Not only were they written in Latin, but the vulgar
Latin of the recipes that have come down to us is often corrupt and hardly intelligible.¹⁵¹ The ingredients, too,
might pose a problem.¹⁵² Besides this, the recipes do not always seem to be easy to prepare. Perhaps prescrip-
tions were filled by dispensing physicians, apothecaries, pharmacists, druggists and herbalists, and perhaps some
of the remedies were available as ‘over the counter’ medicine, sold in shops, at markets or by itinerant physi-
cians, herb sellers, pedlars, merchants etc. Perhaps monasteries also functioned as pharmacies and drugstores.
The unintelligibility of some of the recipes warrants the question whether these recipes were actually used or not
- even the question whether they could have been used. The textual instability of the recipes complicates the an-
swer to this question, and in itself poses an interesting problem. For instance, many different versions of the
antidotum hiera and the antidotum theodoritum were quoted in this paper. Both recipes have a core text and a
core list of ingredients that is more or less the same in each version, even though there are considerable textual
differences between the variant versions, and some versions are (or have become) almost completely unintelligi-
ble. The textual instability, but also the flexibility, of early medieval recipes, as illustrated by the many variant
versions of the antidotum theodoritum and the antidotum hiera, seems to point to usage, even though usage
seems to be inconsistent with the unintelligibility of some of the recipes.

The recipes discussed above are clearly of Greco-Roman origin: their titles, the authorities named, and even
some of the ingredients used confirm this. The recipes do not seem to be concerned with ancient medical theory.
However, the references to suffocation and wandering womb are reminiscent of Greco-Roman medical theory,
and occasionally a word or phrase reminds us of the humoral theory, when, for instance, women are considered
to be ‘moist’. This shows us that the early medieval recipes were ultimately based on classical gynecological
theory. Ancient gynecology links menstruation, fertility and women’s health. Menstruation not only relieves
women of excess fluids - thus restoring their humoral balance - but a regularly menstruating woman will be able

scriptoria must also have existed in Italy. There were also secular scriptoria and chanceries where scribes and notaries wrote
and copied books, letters, charters, wills, legal documents, etc.; see also: note 14 above and Pilsworth, forthcoming.
¹⁵¹ See, for instance, the recipes in Table 2.
¹⁵² Many recipes require a great deal of ingredients, some of which must have been expensive, exotic or hard to obtain. How-
ever John Scarborough explained to me that many ingredients that we consider to be exotic, were often readily available in
the Mediterranean area in early medieval Europe, so that we must beware of regarding all ‘strange’ ingredients as ‘exotic’ or
‘unobtainable’. Herbs and other ingredients were sold by itinerant pedlars, herb sellers and merchants at markets and else-
to conceive. Retained or blocked menses cause a woman’s menstrual blood to accumulate and congest in her womb; this can result in complaints and diseases ranging from headaches and stomach-aches to uterine suffocation, hysteria or a wandering womb. Although hardly articulated explicitly, menstrual retention and humoral disbalance are in some form or another present in the early medieval recipes, thus indicating that these recipes are just as menstruation- and fertility-centered as classical gynecological theory.

As explained above, ‘menstrual retention’ refers to any kind of uterine bleeding, whether obstructed or ceased menses, or problems concerned with birth, miscarriage or abortion. The remedies prescribed to ‘provoke the menses’ are almost always some sort of emmenagogic purgative. Often recipes that restore the menses only mention the cure; the recipe simply states that it ‘purges women’ (mulieribus menstruis ducit) or ‘provokes the menses’ (ad menstrua prouocanda). Apparently, the reason for using an emmenagogue was obvious, and did not need to be mentioned. Other recipes tell us why emmenagogues or purgatives should be prescribed. Some cure ceased menses (purgans mulieribus, quibus purgatio non uenit) and scant menses (quibus purgatio stillatim fit), and others can be used for any kind of female disorder: [ad] mulierum causas; in passionibus mulieribus; ad mulierem uita. Purgatives can relieve pain in the womb or duritia, ‘hardness’ (ad matricem doloris; ad duritiam matricis), and they also cure complaints associated with premenstrual syndrome and blocked menses, such as fatigue and depression. The antidotum dianachardium describes depression as inbecillitatem totius corporis (...) ita ut de se disperent, ‘weakness that affects the whole body (…) in such a way that they themselves despair’. A version of the antidotum hiera puts it as follows: animi subductionem, quod frequenter mulieribus accidere solet, ‘a withdrawalness of the mind, that, as we know, often happens to women’. The antidotum dianachardium explicitly attributes fatigue, weakness and depression to nimietas, ‘superfluity’, and constrictio, ‘constriction’ or ‘congestion’. Here we have one of the clear references to ancient gynecological theory on the congestion (constrictio) of surplus blood (nimietas) in a woman’s body.

Besides curing physical problems, purgatives were also considered beneficial for mental disorders, such as suffocation (qui a matrice suffocantur), hysteria (que uocantur esterice), and wandering womb (ad matrice qui loco suo non habet) - all familiar concepts from ancient gynecology, and all due to menstrual retention and the accumulation of congested blood in the matrix. Two versions of the antidotum theodoritum quoted above explicitly explain the causal relationship between blocked menses and suffocatio: in passionibus mulieribus, quibus difficulatas purgationis obsistit, ex quibus autem matricis suffocationes uocatae, ‘for diseases of women for whom difficulties in purgation cause obstruction from which then suffocations of the womb are induced’. The early medieval recipes apparently wholeheartedly subscribe to the classical idea that the womb can wander about a woman’s body, causing all kinds of discomforts and diseases, including suffocation, madness and insanity.

Clogged-up blood in the body of a woman with ‘retained menses’ - whether ‘menstrual’ blood, a dead fetus, or waste matter from a miscarriage - is called ‘dead blood’ in the antidotum maurentius. These purgative recipes for dead blood purge and cleanse the body, expelling excess fluids and other congested matter - and show us that ‘menstrual retention’ also includes uterine bleeding that is related to birth and miscarriage.

Emmenagogues and purgatives can also be given when there are complications in childbirth, or when a woman is having a miscarriage. They can help bring on labor and contractions (ut mulier se a partu mundetur), expel a dead fetus (ut partum mortuum excuciatur) or the afterbirth (secundas mulierum educti), induce the lochial discharge (et ad mulieris qui post partum non purgant), and relieve pain after giving birth (et dolore matricis siue post partum conpescit et omnem dolore matricis). Many of the recipes associated with the birthing process
are multi-functional. They often cure the whole range of female disorders associated with ‘menstrual retention’. There seems to be no difference between emmenagogic purgatives for menstrual retention, matrix pain, physical and mental problems associated with menstrual retention, and those prescribed for complaints that have to do with birth and miscarriage, because they all involve the same kinds of ingredients. The link with fertility is implicit, but it is there.

Because abortifacients are usually also purgatives, the question arises whether these remedies were also used as abortifacients. This question is difficult to answer. In the first place, the main meaning of the word aborsus in the early medieval recipes is ‘miscarriage’. In a number of recipes it is possible to interpret this ambiguous word as ‘miscarriage’ and/or ‘abortion’, but in almost every case the interpretation ‘abortion’ or ‘self-induced miscarriage’ can be disputed. In the second place, there are very few early medieval recipes for abortifacients and contraceptives: five contraceptives were found and three abortifacients. In most cases we cannot be certain whether these recipes are emmenagogic purgatives or not, because the recipes are made up of strange or secret ingredients. Four of the contraceptives contain animal ingredients, such as hare’s vulva, and the fifth is magical. The ingredients of the abortifacient called potio denoncupata are not named, because they are a secret (herba maleficia, ‘magical/poisonous herb[s]’). There is only one real recipe for abortion that can actually be prepared, and even this recipe, the pentadeos antidotus uel tyriaca, was not originally devised as an abortifacient, because the indication for abortion is a later addition. But, as to be expected, the recipe is a purgative with ingredients known for their abortive qualities. This recipe and the recipe fragment in the Ivrea manuscript both employ the verb uelle, and thus prove that we are dealing with intentional abortion by the mother.

An explanation for the lack of abortifacient recipes could be that there was no need or interest in abortive drugs. This does not seem to be very likely in view of the secular and church laws that prohibit abortion. The question remains whether purgatives for ‘menstrual retention’ in the widest sense of the word could have been used as abortives, that is, whether ‘to provoke the menses’ could be a euphemism for ‘to bring on an abortion’, and whether ‘to expel a dead fetus’ could also be read as ‘to expel a living fetus’. The question is: were these emmenagogues and purgatives also ‘verschleierte Abortivmittel’? The answer could be ‘yes’, but the fact remains that there is only one recipe for intentional abortion that actually says that it can be used for abortion: si conceptum excutere volueris, ‘if you want to expel the conceptus’, plus a fragmentary recipe title: ad avorsus qui sibi facere voluerit, ‘for an abortion that she wants to do to herself’. None of the other recipes so much as hint that they could also be used as abortives. A reason for the lack of straightforward recipes for abortion could also be that certain recipes or parts of recipes were consciously edited out by the lay, clerical or monastic scribes and scholars who translated and copied the recipes. This is a realistic possibility, because, when comparing early medieval gynecological recipes to their probable classical sources, we know for sure that certain recipes were ‘tampered with’, because some Arzneiformen are hardly ever used. This means that recipes considered unacceptable, or legally or morally reprehensible, such as antifertility drugs, could also have been changed or left out of the early medieval recipe books.

This brings us back to the ‘verschleierte Abortivmittel’ as an important option for women who were desperate enough to seek an abortion. And by ‘desperate’ I do not only mean that they were desperate in the sense that

---

153 Sigerist says they were: “Naturally sind ein großer Teil der Emenagoga nichts anderes als verschleierte Abortivmittel. Man verwendet dazu Weinraute, Wacholder u.a.” (Sigerist 1923, p. 180).

154 For instance, there are hardly any early medieval recipes for fumigations and relatively few recipes for pessaries, Arzneiformen that were very popular in Hippocratic gynecology - the ultimate source of many of the recipes discussed here.
they were coping with an unwanted pregnancy, I also mean desperate in the sense that women who took abortives were risking their lives.\(^\text{155}\) Using an emmenagogue or purgative as an abortifacient was dangerous, because many of the ingredients involved were known to be toxic and potentially lethal, and because the dosage might have to be increased in order to bring about an abortion. In short, these recipes could be dangerous, even lethal. Classical medical texts and herbals warn against the abortive effects of certain plants during pregnancy, but the recipe books issue no such warnings. This lack of cautionary advice again seems to point to conscious editing. On the other hand, it seems rather cruel not to warn women that the emmenagogues and purgatives they may naïvely be taking for their health might also cause them to unintentionally abort. There are, however, warnings in other early medieval medical texts, and both Roman and Germanic abortion laws were issued primarily to protect the life of the mother-to-be, that is, to warn against the potentially lethal poisons that were used as abortifacients. In conclusion, the evidence of the recipe books, although scarce, indicates that abortion happened, and it seems realistic to assume that some of the emmenagogues and purgatives found in these recipes were also read as and used as ‘verschleierte Abortivmittel’.

The recipes for emmenagogues and purgatives give us a glimpse – albeit vague – of early medieval female pathology. They were prescribed for women in order to maintain or regain their health. Regular menstruation meant that a woman was healthy and fertile. Purgatives cure (menstrual) retention and cleanse a woman’s body, so that she will start menstruating again, and it will be easier for her to conceive. Perhaps the lack of explicit contraceptive and abortifacient recipes also underscores the importance of fertility. The gynecological recipes in the early medieval recipe books are menstruation-centered - perhaps we should even say womb-centered or fertility-centered. Emmenagogues and purgatives were considered beneficial to a woman’s health (mulieribus sanat, mulieribus salubris), because a menstruating woman was considered to be a healthy woman. A whole range of disorders caused by menstrual retention can be remedied by taking an emmenagogue or purgative, including complications in childbirth and miscarriage, and it is likely that these medicines were also used as abortifacients. The slogan proicit, purgat et sanat, ‘it expels, purges and cures’ neatly summarizes early medieval gynecology and what was left of ancient medical theory.\(^\text{156}\)

\(^{155}\) See, for instance, Elsakkers, *Reading Between the Lines*, chapter 4 and passim.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Recipes for miscarriage and a dead fetus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liber de muliebria causa (Egert II)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 37. Remedium, cui infans in utero morietur, ut celerius eum proiciat: ruta mascula, erba artemisia simul cuntundis et ius eorum ciatus tres bibat, statim liberatur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 70. Item rutam, artemissiam, oppopanice, absencium ter(iscum ce)ra et oleo remissa uino .......... et super pectinem inponis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 39. Item absencium, artemisia, piper simul trita ex aqua aut ex uino bibat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 40. item fenogreco, artemisia, absentio, puleio, ruta, olei eusici, malva pariter uehementissime (?) decoquitur, eaque aqua missa in cupa, quae aut purgare aut abortu liberare uoluerit, lauationem facis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 41. Ut partum mortuum excuciatur; erba saretra in cibo sumta uel cum uino potata mortuum expellit; erba ueruino suces cum aqua frigida dabis, statim liberatur.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

157 ‘**Vademecum**’ [18]. Wenn eine Frau eine Fehlgeburt hat und nicht rein wird. Mache ihr aus Birnenwein, Eisenkrautsaft, Rautensaft, Eberrautensaft und wenig Öl eine Pille und es wird geboren (Köpp 1980, pp. 107-108). On the word *pirarium* Köpp says that it ‘ist eine fehlerhafte Abschrift von *piratium*, -i = ‘Birnenwein’. However, the variant versions in Egert II and Egert III shed a different light on Köpp’s translation, and prove that *pirarium* should be read as *pessarium*.  


160 ‘**Vademecum**’ [25]. Ebenso zerreibe Wermut, Beifuss und Pfeffer und ...... oder sie soll es in Wasser trinken (Köpp 1980, p. 108). The repetition of *cum* may be a hiatus in the manuscript.
Table 2: Recipes for dead blood and miscarriage

A. Four versions of the *antidotum hiera* on menstrual purgation, miscarriage and (postpartum) pain, cf. the section on ‘difficult birth and miscarriage’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURGATION</th>
<th>EXPELS A (DEAD) FETUS</th>
<th>MISCELLANEOUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) ad purgationes femine</td>
<td>petus mortuum</td>
<td>excluidis et per aborsum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) purgacionem faciunt femina</td>
<td>si pecus mortuum</td>
<td>excluidit per aborsum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) purgationem feminae</td>
<td>Pecus</td>
<td>excluidit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) datur etiam mulieri qui non purgat</td>
<td>mouet etiam pecus in utero</td>
<td>ferentibus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SAFE DELIVERY**

| (1) sine periculum lapus | facit fisis dolorem | Reichenauer Antidotarium 63 |
| (2) sine periculo lapso | facientibus fixis dolores | Glasgower Antidotarium 48 |
| (3) sine periculo lapsum | Facientibus fistulis dolores sedat | Miscellanea Tironiana |
| (4) sine ullo labore | | Vademecum |

**SOOTHE PAIN**

B. Three more versions of the *antidotum hiera* on menstrual purgation, miscarriage, the prevention of miscarriage (?), and womb pain, cf. the section on ‘difficult birth and miscarriage’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURGATION</th>
<th>EXPELS A DEAD FETUS</th>
<th>MISCELLANEOUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(5) menstrua mouet</td>
<td>mortuum pecus expellit</td>
<td>abortum uel purgatum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) menstrua mouit</td>
<td>mortuum pecus expellit</td>
<td>abortum partum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) ad menstrua mouenda</td>
<td>ad mortuum pecus</td>
<td>et qui non purgant uel ad partum uel aborsum leduntur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONFIRMS CONCEPTION**

| (5) sicut supra dat | concepto confirmat, | dolorem matricis sedat, | Berliner Antidotarium 2 |
| (6) si quis supradat | conceptum ne sublatur confirmat, | dolorem matricis sedat | Reichenauer Antidotarium 37 |
| (7) ad conceptum servandum | ad alentum | ad dolore matricis | Bamberger Antidotarium 25 |

**SOOTHE WOMB PAIN**

| (5) sicut supra dat | concepto confirmat, | dolorem matricis sedat, | Berliner Antidotarium 2 |
| (6) si quis supradat | conceptum ne sublatur confirmat, | dolorem matricis sedat | Reichenauer Antidotarium 37 |
| (7) ad conceptum servandum | ad alentum | ad dolore matricis | Bamberger Antidotarium 25 |

C. Three versions of the *antidotarium maurentius* on menstrual purgation, ‘dead blood’, miscarriage and (postpartum) pain, cf. the section on ‘dead blood’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURGATION</th>
<th>EXPELS DEAD BLOOD</th>
<th>MISCELLANEOUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sed et mulieribus, quae non purgantur</td>
<td>commouet emmortuum</td>
<td>sanguinem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sed et mulieribus qui non purgantur et mulieribus qui non pregnant</td>
<td>et commouet et mortuum sanguinem</td>
<td>abortium uro ---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SAFE DELIVERY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURGES AFTER MISCARRIAGE</th>
<th>RELIEVES PAIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sine aliquo periculo productit</td>
<td>sed et post auersum data purgat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sine aliquo periculo productit Sed et post auorsum datum purgat</td>
<td>et statim compescit dolorem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sine aliquo periculo productit</td>
<td>et post aborsum data purgat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BECCARIA, Augusto, I codici di medicina del periodo presalermitano (secolo IX, X e XI), Roma: Storia e letteratura, 1956 (Storia e letteratura, raccolta di studi e testi, 53).


ELSAKKERS, Marianne, Reading Between the Lines, forthcoming.

FERCKEL, Christoph, “Medizinische Marginalien aus dem Cod. Trevirens nr. 40.” Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin 7 (1914), pp.129-143.


GREEN Monica Helen (ed. and transl.), The Trotula; a Medieval Compendium of Woman’s Medicine Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001 (The Middle Ages series).


GREEN, Monica Helen, The Transmission of Ancient Theories of Female Physiology and Disease through the Early Middle Ages, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1985 (PhD. Diss. Princeton University, 1985).


HIippocrates, Hippocrates’ Diseases of Women, Book I - Greek Text with English Translation and Footnotes, transl. by Kathy Whiteley, Pretoria : s.n., 2003 (MA theses, University of South Africa-Pretoria,
2003).
JÖRIMANN, Julius, Frühmittelalterliche Rezeptarien, Zürich: Verlag Carl Hönn, 1925.
KING, Helen. King H., Stuttgart: Deutscher Apotheker Verlag, 1988
KÖPP, Peter (Hrsg.), Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes; die gefaltete lateinische Handschrift medizinischen Inhalts im Codex 217 und der der Fragmentensammlung 1396 der Stiftsbibliothek in St. Gallen, Aarau etc.: Verlag Carl Hönn, 1925. [rpr. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1982]
KÖPP, Peter (Hrsg.), Vademecum eines frühmittelalterlichen Arztes; die gefaltete lateinische Handschrift medizinischen Inhalts im Codex 217 und der der Fragmentensammlung 1396 der Stiftsbibliothek in St. Gallen, Aarau etc.: Verlag Carl Hönn, 1925. [rpr. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1982]