

# Ask the Midwives: A Hebrew Manual on Midwifery from Medieval Germany<sup>†</sup>

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**Summary.** This article focuses on a chapter in a manual on circumcision written in Worms in the thirteenth century by Jacob and Gershom *haGozrim* (the circumcisers). The third chapter of the manual contains medical instruction on how to attend to women in labour and other gynaecological conditions. Whereas the first two chapters of the manual were published in the late nineteenth century, the midwifery chapter has only been recently examined. This article is comprised of a translation of the midwifery text(s) along with an introduction to the text and the community practices it reflects. It outlines the cooperation between medical practitioners, male and female, Jewish and Christian, and discusses the medical remedies recommended and some practices current in thirteenth-century Germany.

**Keywords:** midwives; circumcisers; birth; physicians; gender; medieval; Jewish–Christian relations

In 1892, Abraham Jacob Glassberg, a Jew from Berlin and circumciser by profession, published an edition of a medieval circumcision manual, supplemented by several commentaries on the laws of circumcision, and a book of modern studies on select medical, cultural and literary aspects of circumcision.<sup>1</sup> Produced at the height of a decades-long controversy concerning circumcision that shook the German-Jewish community, these books were intended to validate a long tradition of Jewish circumcision.<sup>2</sup> Glassberg's edition was a partial version of the medieval original. This study focuses on a short section that he omitted: a manual on midwifery.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>†</sup>A prior version of this article, which includes the original Hebrew texts, was published nearly two decades ago—Elisheva Baumgarten, 'Thus Say the Wise Midwives: Midwives and Midwifery in Thirteenth-Century Ashkenaz', *Zion*, 2000, 65, 45–74 [Hebrew]. This current publication presents a revised understanding of this manuscript tradition in light of recent findings and an English translation.

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<sup>1</sup>Jacob b. Gershom haGoser, *Sichron B'rith Larishonim. Die rituelle Circumcision*, ed. A. J. Glassberg, (Berlin: Itzkowski Press, 1892) [Hebrew]; Jacob and Gershom haGozer, *Sefer Zikhron Brit laRishonim*, ed. Jacob Segel, 4 vols (Cracow: Fisher Press, 1892–1893) [Hebrew and German]. The book printed in Berlin is identical to the first two parts of the book printed in Cracow.

<sup>2</sup>Robin Judd, *Contested Rituals: Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843–1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007),

details this controversy and its developments. When Glassberg published his manual, the debate regarding circumcision seems primarily to have taken place within the Jewish community, whereas broader arguments in German culture focused on the practice of ritual slaughter (*shehitah*).

<sup>3</sup>I refer to this text as a 'manual' in the interest of brevity and convenience. This source is not a free-standing document but rather a chapter in a manual on circumcision.

This article is comprised of an essay that situates this medieval medical source in its historical, cultural and religious contexts, followed by an English translation of this text. I begin with a description of the full manual's authors and the extant manuscripts. I then discuss the professional ties that emerge between the circumcisers who wrote this text and the midwives who treated women prenatally, during childbirth and post-partum, and how these connections fostered the sharing of medical knowledge. Next, I locate this text and its recommended remedies within medical practice in Germany during the High Middle Ages. In sum, I posit that this text is unique as a source on daily medical practice as well as cooperation between medical practitioners within the Jewish community and with their Christian counterparts. I hope the English translation provided here will allow for broader discussion and analysis of its contents.

### The Manual, Authors and Manuscripts

The medieval manual, *Klalei haMilah* (*The Rules of Circumcision*), at the heart of this essay is attributed to Jacob haGozer and Gershom haGozer, a father and son who were both known by their profession<sup>4</sup> (*haGozer*, lit. 'the cutter'), who practised in Worms during the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> At this point in time, there is evidence of a robust and well-established Jewish community in Worms that had good relations with the local Christian authorities.<sup>6</sup> This is a guide for circumcisers, detailing the art of circumcision with both practical and traditional commentaries on the ceremony and the operation. Unnoticed by previous modern scholars, the manual includes a third chapter that is devoted to the practice of midwives when caring for women in labour and for other gynaecological conditions. The guide opens with two chapters that discuss the laws of circumcision, for weekdays and for the Sabbath and festivals, respectively. Each chapter reviews well established precedents from the Talmud and offers detailed guidance for complicated cases. Many of the issues associated with the midwifery manual that I discuss here are also pertaining to the chapters on circumcision. I note them in footnotes throughout this article, but a comprehensive, in-depth study of this manual remains a desideratum.

<sup>4</sup>This manual has been seen as a harbinger of Hebrew guides to professional practice that proliferated in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Germany. The later professional compositions specialise in a broad variety of topics, ranging from the laws of ritual slaughter to the laws of menstrual purity. See Israel Ta-Shma, *Ritual, Custom and Reality in Franco-Germany, 1000–1350* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), 94–111, esp. 96–98 [Hebrew].

<sup>5</sup>See p. 5 for further details regarding their identity. The abbreviation R. in this article indicates 'Rabbi'. Many learned men were referred to by this title even if they did not hold formal positions of authority. For a discussion of the use of honorifics in medieval Jewish communities, see Avraham (Rami) Reiner, "'A Tombstone Inscribed": Titles Used to Describe the Deceased in Tombstones from Würzburg between 1147–1148 and 1346', *Tarbiz*, 2009, 78, 123–52 [Hebrew] and for a

condensed version in English see *Idem*, 'The Role and the Significance of the Titles written on the Tombstones in the Würzburg Cemetery', in Karlheinz Müller *et al.*, eds, *The Role and Significance of the Titles written on the Tombstones in the Würzburg Cemetery*, *Die Grabsteine vom jüdischen Friedhof in Würzburg aus der Zeit vor dem Schwarzen Tod (1147–1346)* (Würzburg: Verlagsdruckerei Schmidt, 2011), 235–62, esp. 251–52.

<sup>6</sup>For a survey of the situation in Worms, see J. Jakobsohn, 'Worms', in I. Elbogen, A. Freimann and H. Tykocinski, eds, *Germania Judaica*, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck, 1963)) I: 437–74. It is during the early thirteenth century that the synagogue was expanded and rebuilt, a sign of prosperity within the community and cooperation with the urban authorities.

The manual is attributed to Jacob and Gershom, father and son, but was intensively reworked by later hands, including Gershom's son.<sup>7</sup> These circumcisers and anonymous editors were learned Jewish men who quoted from the eminent rabbis of their time.<sup>8</sup> Glassberg claimed that Jacob and his son Gershom each wrote one of the two chapters pertaining to circumcision.<sup>9</sup> Simcha Emanuel recently reviewed the six known manuscripts of this composition, and he argues that Gershom authored both of these chapters; however, he also followed a contemporaneous trend by attributing his writings to himself in the third-person reference and to others (such as his father) despite his actual role as compiler.<sup>10</sup> Emanuel bases this argument on the style of other books from that time. He provides further evidence from references to this circumcision manual by contemporary authors, who all ascribe it to Gershom.<sup>11</sup>

Although the authorship of this composition is important for a scholarly understanding of its contents and composition, it has less significance for the examination of the midwifery manual, which forms a subsection and is explicitly attributed to Gershom. An interesting question is what kind of authorship to attribute to the women who supplied the cures to Gershom. The evidence within the text is not plentiful enough to fully assess this question, but it would seem that this is another example of women's knowledge and authority that has yet to be discussed and of its reappropriation by men.<sup>12</sup> In comparison with the chapters that were reproduced by Glassberg, which Emanuel located in six manuscripts,<sup>13</sup> the manual on midwifery (whether partial or complete) is included in only three of them. Two convey nearly identical versions, whereas the third manuscript presents select material on midwifery from Gershom's manual with cures for circumcision and other related conditions.<sup>14</sup> The three manuscripts are:

- (1) MS Jerusalem, National Library 8°3182 from sixteenth century, northern Italy.<sup>15</sup> This manuscript contains a number of medieval German compositions, among them, this medical manual and a collection of stories, copied in a single Ashkenazic hand.<sup>16</sup> Material from the manual on circumcision appears throughout the manuscript; the longest section is on fols. 43v-77v. The manual on midwifery is included in a shorter section—on fols. 33r-36v—that opens with a (yet unpublished) segment entitled '(33r) Innovations (*hiddushim*) that came to R. Gershom the Circumciser and innovations that came to others, so future generations may learn from them'. On fol. 34v, the subject turns to midwifery:

<sup>7</sup>On editing, see n 10.

<sup>8</sup>The edition by Glassberg includes a list of these authorities. See *Sichron B'rith*, XIV–XVI.

<sup>9</sup>See *Sichron B'rith*, VIII.

<sup>10</sup>Simcha Emanuel, 'From First to Third Person: A Study in the Culture of Writing in Medieval Ashkenaz', *Tarbiz*, 2013, 81, 431–57 [Hebrew].

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 436–40.

<sup>12</sup>See Carmen Caballero Navas, 'The Care of Women's Health and Beauty: An Experience Shared by Medieval Jewish and Christian Women', *Journal of Medieval History*, 2008, 34, 149–51 and Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup>Glassberg knew of the existence of two manuscripts.

<sup>14</sup>I follow Emanuel in dating and describing these manuscripts, 'First Person', 436–38.

<sup>15</sup>See [http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/\\_MANUSCRIPTS000045574-1](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/_MANUSCRIPTS000045574-1).

<sup>16</sup>For an overview of this manuscript, see N. Brühl, 'Beiträge zur jüdischen Sagen- und Sprachkunde im Mittelalter', *Jahrbücher für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, 1889, 9, 1–45. Recently, Eli Yassif has discussed this manuscript in *Ninety-Nine Tales: the Jerusalem Manuscript Cycle of Legends in Medieval Jewish Folklore* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2013), 293–95 [Hebrew].

Since I have written about matters pertaining to circumcision, I will also write about the needs of the midwives (*tzorkhei hameyaldot*) and about things one can perform for women giving birth on the Sabbath and also cures that are beneficial for women who have trouble giving birth.

The manual that follows appears on two full folia (34v-36v) and frequently refers to Gershom as the author who is transmitting information that he received from midwives.<sup>17</sup>

- (2) MS New York, Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), New York Mic. 8910 (1835). This nineteenth-century Karaite manuscript preserves the manual for circumcisers as an uninterrupted text (fols. 77r-136r) albeit in a different order from MS Jerusalem. The manual on midwifery appears as its concluding section (fols. 133v-136r). The remaining variants in the JTS manuscript are minor in nature: grammatical differences, such as the use of *yeled* (child) rather than *valad* (newborn) for describing the infant and inversions of word order that lack semantic significance, for example, 'and this matter is dangerous' is *vedavar ze mesukan* in MS Jerusalem but *veze hadavar hu mesukan* in MS JTS.<sup>18</sup> I have not noted these changes in the notes. The JTS manuscript is lacking two or three sentences that appear in the Jerusalem manuscript and the names of some of the *materia medica* in German, and I have noted these places.
- (3) *Sefer Asufot*, a fourteenth-century manuscript currently owned by David Feinberg of New York, was formerly held by the Montefiore Library (MS Montefiore 134).<sup>19</sup> This manuscript contains a miscellany of halakhic works that were written in medieval Germany. Glassberg based the second chapter of his edition, which he attributed to Gershom, (fols. 78v-89v) on this manuscript. A version of the midwifery manual immediately follows that material, within collection of cures (*refuot*; fols. 89d-90c). The section begins with cures for baby boys healing from circumcision that are also attributed to Gershom and appear in MS Jerusalem (fol. 33r), followed by various cures for parturients. However, the introduction to material on midwifery that appears in MSS Jerusalem and JTS is not included here (lines 1–4). So too, this copyist seems to have selected material from the circumciser's manual and interspersed cures from other sources. That is to say, the *Sefer Asufot* text apparently drew from a number of texts for this collection. He seems to have used Gershom's composition as the framework that he supplemented with material from other sources before him. This approach corresponds with his aggregation of material on circumcision, as Simcha Emanuel has noted.<sup>20</sup> Despite obvious parallels to MSS Jerusalem and JTS, the cures pertaining to women and midwifery here are fewer in number and considerably shorter.

The text published here follows MS Jerusalem. Although *Sefer Asufot* includes material from Gershom's text it cannot be considered the same text.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, I provide a translation of the midwifery and gynaecological cures in *Sefer Asufot* manuscript following the text from MS Jerusalem, with indicators of its parallels to Gershom's text.

<sup>17</sup>See line 19 in the translated text below.

<sup>18</sup>The meaning is identical.

<sup>19</sup>For an early description of this manuscript, see H. Gross, 'Das handschriftliche Werk Assufot.

Analekten', *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, 1883, 10, 67.

<sup>20</sup>Emanuel, 'First Person', 437–38.

<sup>21</sup>On the changes in my approach to this text, see my 'Thus Say the Wise Midwives'.

The Jerusalem and JTS manuscripts both attribute authorship to Gershom and refer to the local geography of Worms.<sup>22</sup> The two sentences that are unique to MS Jerusalem credit a midwife from Cologne with skill at making special protective belts for pregnant women.<sup>23</sup> That manuscript also specifies that R. Gershom consulted midwives to obtain certain information, explicitly acknowledging one source of his knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

### Circumcisers, Midwives and Other Medical Professionals

Little is known about Gershom and his father Jacob, beyond their profession as circumcisers and residence in Worms. Brühl suggested that they were relatives of Ephraim of Bonn who moved to Worms.<sup>25</sup> Emanuel has dated their period of professional activity to the first decades of the thirteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Current scholarship has devoted scant attention to the social status of circumcisers within medieval Jewish communities. Circumcisers are often mentioned with teachers of young children (*melamdim*). It is hard to know what their social status was.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the few medieval midwives known to scholars are remembered at most by name and vocation.<sup>28</sup> Our meagre knowledge of midwives and circumcisers comes from the identification of their professions on communal lists and tombstones.<sup>29</sup> Those records refer to a circumciser as *haGozer* or *haMohel* (circumciser) and *meyaledet* (midwife) or *isha hakhamah* (wise woman) in the case of a midwife,<sup>30</sup> much as the author of this composition was referred to as Gershom haGozer, and he cited opinions from *meyaldot hahakhamot* (wise midwives). In addition to rabbis and prayer leaders (of both genders, as women led other women in prayer),<sup>31</sup> these are the only other professions noted in epitaphs. The identification of these professionals alongside other communal functionaries is evidence of their importance for communal identity and religious distinction, as this is a common denominator of all the occupations noted on tombstones.<sup>32</sup>

Although a number of gravestones from the medieval Jewish community in Worms have survived, neither Jacob's nor Gershom's are among them. However, some relevant tombstones remain, marking the graves of two circumcisers and five midwives. The circumcisers are Abraham b. Menahem (d. Passover, 1266), who is described as a prayer leader (*shliah tzibbur*), circumciser and student (*talmid*)<sup>33</sup> and Shaltiel b. Moshe from Oppenheim, described as the son of a circumciser and as pure, honest and modest.<sup>34</sup> Like Gershom and Jacob, Shaltiel is an example of a man who shared his profession with his father. Since the midwives are mentioned as the daughters of their fathers (as is customary), we cannot know if their

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, lines 68, 93, 116.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, lines 92–93.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, see lines 18–19.

<sup>25</sup>Brühl, 'Beiträge', 12.

<sup>26</sup>Emanuel, 'First Person', 453.

<sup>27</sup>See Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education in Ashkenaz in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 1–13.

<sup>28</sup>Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 43–52, 64–65.

<sup>29</sup>See the lists of deceased in the *Nürnberg Memorbuch*, published by Siegmund Salfeld, *Das Martyrologium des Nürnberger Memorbuches*, Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland;

3.Bd (Berlin: L. Simon, 1898). For tombstones, see Epitad—The Database of Jewish Epigraphy: <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epitad>.

<sup>30</sup>Reiner, 'A Tombstone Inscribed', 252–53.

<sup>31</sup>For women prayer leaders, see Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Waltham Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 181–82.

<sup>32</sup>Reiner, 'A Tombstone Inscribed', 251–52.

<sup>33</sup>See <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epitad?id=worm-1066&lang=en>, last accessed on 10 March 2019.

<sup>34</sup>See <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epitad?id=worm-957&lang=en>, last accessed on 10 March 2019.

mothers were also midwives. Two of these women, Gutlin b. Benjamin (d. 1311)<sup>35</sup> and Hefa b. Ascher haLevi (d. 1333),<sup>36</sup> are described as elderly, in addition to pious,<sup>37</sup> respectable, pure and honest, much like the circumcisers. Three other midwives (whose deaths span nearly a century, from 1246 to 1341) are simply noted by their profession without further details.<sup>38</sup>

If the authors of this manual and evidence from the cemetery of medieval Worms are representative, it seems that circumcision was often a family profession, passed on from father to son. This was probably also true of midwifery as well, but we lack sufficient evidence for this argument. For example, the fact that two midwives in Worms belong to the haLevi family might indicate that training for this profession was a family tradition, but this is speculative. However, documentation of midwives in Christian society suggests that a similar training through apprenticeship was customary: younger women would accompany experienced midwives to learn the craft.<sup>39</sup> As Ron Barkai has documented for medieval Iberia,<sup>40</sup> Jewish registries of the deceased and tombstones record some midwives who lived long lives;<sup>41</sup> however, it is hard to determine when they began their training. Presumably, they only were able to fully enter this profession when their own children were no longer small, so they were available to care for pregnant and post-partum women.<sup>42</sup>

Circumcisers and midwives worked collaboratively in medieval Jewish communities, for treatment from both medical practitioners was vital during the first weeks of a male infant's life. This shared concern and occupation are most probably the reason for the additional chapter on midwifery in the circumcision manual before us. Hebrew sources from medieval Germany describe the attention provided by midwives throughout a woman's pregnancy, as well as advice regarding the prenatal choice of circumcisers. Although medieval families could not have anticipated whether a circumciser would be needed, fathers often promised the honour and task before the birth.<sup>43</sup> Midwives similarly competed for clientele. It seems that the expectant father was charged with this decision and, as a result, he would be courted by prospective practitioners.<sup>44</sup> An early modern source tells of circumcisers' wives who would try to convince expectant women of their husbands' skills, in the hopes that these women would influence their husbands to engage a certain circumciser.<sup>45</sup> Some rabbinic sources advise their community members to choose circumcisers and midwives based on their abilities rather than affection or social ties:

<sup>35</sup>See <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrm-551&lang=en>, last accessed on 10 March 2019.

<sup>36</sup>See <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrm-480&lang=en>, last accessed on 10 March 2019.

<sup>37</sup>Gutlin alone is described as 'pious'; all other adjectives appear on each midwife's tombstone.

<sup>38</sup>Hava b. Abraham haLevi, d. 1246, <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrm-1106&lang=en>; Leah b. Isaac, d. 1317, <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrm-41&lang=en>; Miriam b. Mordekhai, d. 1341/1342, <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrm-630&lang=en>.

<sup>39</sup>See Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, 126–29 where she describes the training of midwives and other medical professionals.

<sup>40</sup>Ron Barkai, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998); Ron Barkai and Michel Garel, *Les infortunes de Dinah: le livre de la génération: la gynécologie juive au Moyen Age*, Toledot-Judaïsmes (Paris: Cerf, 1991).

<sup>41</sup>Often, these women are called elderly (*hazekenah*); others are listed with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. See Salfeld, *Martyrologium*, 36, 43, 57, 75–76, 90 and my discussion of these women in Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children*, 43–45.

<sup>42</sup>See Baumgarten, *ibid*.

<sup>43</sup>R. Samson b. Tzadok, *Sefer Tashbetz* (Warsaw, 1901), #398 [Hebrew].

<sup>44</sup>See Rashi, Bava Kama 59a, s.v. 'nakhi haya'.

<sup>45</sup>Juspa Shamash, *Minhagim de Kehilat Kodesh Wormeisa*, ed. Binyamin Shelomo Hamburger, (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 1988–1992), #236.

One should be careful not to choose due to love for an individual. If someone has a son to circumcise, he should select a circumciser because he is a skilled master and an expert. And if he has a daughter, he should not choose a midwife based on affection; rather, she should be skilled (*omenet*).<sup>46</sup>

In small communities, like those of medieval Germany, few babies were born each year and, by definition, fewer than half required circumcision, for all girls and those boys who died close to birth would not undergo this ritual.<sup>47</sup> As such, it seems that there was greater demand for midwives than circumcisers.

Cooperative relationships between circumcisers and midwives as medical colleagues are evident throughout the manual. This is a unique relationship not documented in other texts. For example, Hebrew medical treatises from medieval Spain feature doctors telling the midwife what to do.<sup>48</sup> In our case, we have the circumcisers asking the midwives about treatment and conveying their wisdom. In the first chapters that focus on circumcision, Gershom reports that the circumciser should instruct the midwife how to ready a baby boy for the procedure. She was told to palpate the baby's penis for the first seven days of life, so his foreskin would be pliable on the day of circumcision.<sup>49</sup> These instructions also indicate the midwife's ongoing role by the parturient's side during the days following childbirth. Her presence is detailed further in the chapter on midwifery where the manual discusses the protocol for the woman to wash after giving birth. Gershom states that wise women instruct their patients to bathe four days post-partum, and he cautions that any midwife who expedites this timeframe by recommending that she bathe on the second or third day imperils the convalescing mother.<sup>50</sup>

These instructions highlight a fascinating feature of professional relationships articulated in this text: circumcisers served as mediators of medical knowledge for they, not the midwives, were expected to circulate these remedies and information by way of the text. Gershom had a twofold goal for this manual. He wanted to document the circumcisers' and midwives' practice and to communicate their wisdom to future generations, thereby facilitating the transmission of knowledge pertaining to midwifery from the midwives of his day to the circumcisers and by extension, to other midwives. This complex network reflects the practical realities of medieval Jewry and features of medieval literacy.<sup>51</sup> As men, circumcisers had a higher baseline of literacy, which explains their role as conduits of treatment instructions.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup>MS Darmstadt, Heb. 25, fol. 77a.

<sup>47</sup>We have no statistics concerning death, but one can assume that infant death was a regular occurrence. For discussions of infant mortality, Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 52–55.

<sup>48</sup>Barkai, *History*, 76–77.

<sup>49</sup>*Sichron B'rith*, 139–40 and see also 160, where Gershom mentions consulting a 'wise woman' for help treating an infant.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, lines 53–56.

<sup>51</sup>For a discussion of literacy among Jews, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, 'Prayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory in the Jewish Communities of Medieval Europe', in Ra'anana S. Boustan, Oran Kosansky and Marina

Rustow, eds, *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History; Authority, Diaspora, Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 250–70. For literacy and its role among medieval midwives, see Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Premodern Gynaecology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). This is an important theme throughout the book.

<sup>52</sup>For male involvement in female practice by way of rituals as well as medical treatment, see Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 2015, 89, 423–24. Other Hebrew texts similarly report what women



The manual also alerts us to additional similarities between midwives and circumcisers, as we have seen, accompanying experienced practitioners was the central form of training. As Gershom writes in his second chapter on circumcision:

Anyone who wants to learn the art of circumcision should study this book, which was written by R. Gershom the Circumciser (*haGozer*), according to his practice and his opinion and his wisdom, as received from his teachers and with their guidance.

This is what he said: Anyone who wants to learn the art of circumcision should frequent newborns before circumcision and see their genitalia. He will see they are not all alike because their dimensions are not all the same. How so? One infant may have a large pronounced foreskin and another has a small one, and sometimes the foreskin is soft, so it is easy to distinguish between skin and flesh, but sometimes it is tough, so it is hard to make that distinction. . .

This is why he (Gershom) cautioned circumcisers to always go visit all the boys a day or two before the circumcision to examine the foreskin and penis so that, if they see something unusual, they would know what to do . . . and he [an apprentice] should sit with circumcisers to become accustomed to the practice of carrying out this commandment so that, when he has the opportunity to perform it, he can [do so correctly] and he will also benefit from observing how they prepare to cut the foreskin. . .

For all these matters, it is beneficial for him to accompany circumcisers when they perform circumcisions, though he will not yet be fully qualified (lit. skilled for all circumstances; *oman kekhol hatzorekh*) until he also becomes proficient in the cures for circumcision and adept at bandaging the genitalia, for even if he knows how to perform a circumcision, he needs to know all of this. This is what R. Gershom the Circumciser learned from his father R. Jacob the Circumciser and from other wise men who knew the profession.<sup>53</sup>

This passage continues by stating that an apprentice should also accompany experienced circumcisers to the synagogue, describing the treatment for an infant immediately after the procedure at home and the proper method for washing and bandaging him.<sup>54</sup> Gershom remarks that his father Jacob was an expert circumciser (*oman muvhak*), indicating that practitioners had differing levels of expertise and, possibly, to bolster the credentials for his medical manual.

Gershom believed that his text would benefit his audience by expanding their practical knowledge. This intention is illustrated by his description of verbena to induce labour. He explains that this herb grows beside the river that flows through Worms, and both MSS Jerusalem and JTS feature an identical drawing of its roots to help readers to accurately forage for this plant (Figures 1 and 2).

said on matters of practice as part of male rabbis' accounts of everyday life. Yet these testimonies are relatively rare. See Leora Bar-Levav Elias, 'Minhag yafeh lanashim shelanu: Pesikat halakhah al pi

nashim beyemei habenayim', *Massekhet* 2007, 6, 47–85.

<sup>53</sup>*Sichron B'rith*, 136–37.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 137–43.



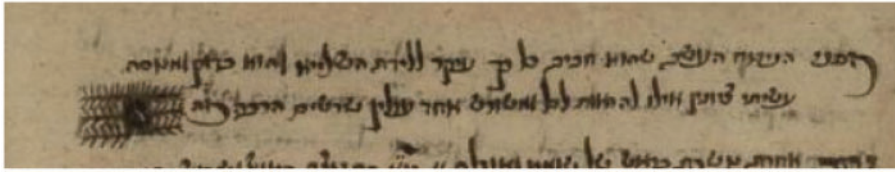


Fig. 1 A drawing of the roots of the verbena (MS Jerusalem, National Library 8° 3182, fol. 35v, detail)

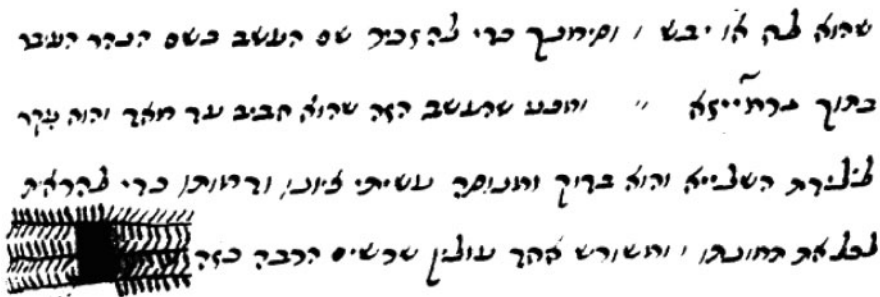


Fig. 2 The same sketch of the roots of verbena in a nineteenth century manuscript (JTS, MS 8910, fol. 155v, detail)

This manual also mentions other participants in the social organisation of birth. A non-Jewish servant is mentioned warming water on the Sabbath.<sup>55</sup> In the chapters on circumcision, a non-Jewish doctor is referenced as the source for a cure when a midwife's recommendation was ineffective.<sup>56</sup> The Jerusalem manuscript details a cure that was prescribed by Yiska, an eye doctor referred to as 'a wise woman for illuminating eyes' (*isha hakhamah leha'ir ma'or einayim*). This medical expert treats both men and women, rather than specialising in gynaecological cures. This figure supports the argument that Monica Green introduced three decades ago, concerning the presence of numerous female medical experts that did not focus on women's health.<sup>57</sup> On the whole, this text provides a fuller understanding of a medical network that included midwives and wise women, circumcisers and doctors, Jews and Christians.

### Content and Structure of the Midwifery Chapter

The manual on midwifery provides advice for multiple situations related to labour, pregnancy, breastfeeding and gynaecology. As with the sections on circumcision, this portion begins with reference to talmudic instructions for attending to parturients in labour on the Sabbath and festivals. The care for newborns is explained in relation to a verse from the book of Ezekiel. The remedies for specific medical conditions are then detailed. At first glance, this text may read as if it assumes extensive knowledge of biblical and

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, Lines 50–52.

<sup>56</sup>*Sichron B'rith*, 142–43.

<sup>57</sup>Monica Green, 'Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe', *Signs*, 1989, 14, 434–73.

rabbinic literature. However, a closer examination reveals cures whose presentations are straightforward and free from exegetical references. Indeed, this manual is largely composed of a list of 'tested and tried' (*baduk umenuseh*) remedies.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, while some of the cures prescribed have parallels in Latin manuals, it does not seem like there is any evidence of direct translation in the manual.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the halakhic framework, few of the remedies enumerated in this text are specifically Jewish, and rare are the formulae recited when applying the various cures that are recognizably Jewish. Among them, one of the texts incorporates a verse from the book of Ezekiel (lines 7–27), and another is attributed to a dignitary (*nasi*), R. Azaryahu of Babylonia, who visited Worms in 1228 (or 1248).<sup>60</sup> A third cure is quoted from the Book of Assaf the Physician, one of the only known medical treatises in circulation among Jews of medieval Germany.<sup>61</sup> Most of this medical advice is local, and R. Gershom's text primarily refers to herbs and minerals by their German names.<sup>62</sup> This signals the daily and professional language of these Jewish medical practitioners.

I have traced the *materia medica* in two works by Hildegard of Bingen: *Curae et causae*, which discusses illnesses and remedies and *Liber subtilitatum diversarum naturarum creaturarum*, an enumeration of substances, their characteristics and uses, organised by category (plants, rocks, trees, metals, etc.).<sup>63</sup> I chose Hildegard's writings owing to her temporal and geographic proximity to Jacob and Gershom. She lived fairly close to Worms, and, as a healer, she too treated local residents.<sup>64</sup> Nearly all of the herbs mentioned by Gershom have parallels in her writings and are found in the vicinity of Worms; often, they represent common household items. (I note the parallels in these treatments in the footnotes of the translation.) In addition to the aforementioned verbena growing beside the Rhine, Gershom recommends local flora and produce, such as myrtle, quince,

<sup>58</sup>This formula frequently appears in Hebrew and Latin medical texts, and see Barkai, *History*, 85–86 and in the various treatises he published, *Ibid.*, 105, 107, 189, 203, 204, 206, 208, 210. It is also commonly found in Latin manuscripts as Barkai notes.

<sup>59</sup>Compare to the findings of Carmen Caballero-Navas who has demonstrated that medical treatises written in Iberia indicate translations from the Trotula corpus, see Caballero-Navas, 'Care of Women's Health', 160–62.

<sup>60</sup>On this scholar, see S. Poznanski, *Babylonische Geonim im nachgaonischen Zeitalter. Nach handschriftlichen und gedruckten Quellen* (Berlin: Mayer und Muller Verlag, 1914), 119; Moshe Gil and David Strassler, *Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), according to index.

<sup>61</sup>About *Sefer Assaf haRofeh*, Assaf the physician, see Süßman Muntner, *The Book of Medicine by Asaph* (New York, 1957); Muntner published the text of *Sefer Assaf in Korot, 1965–1971*, vols. 3–8; Joseph Shatzmiller, 'Doctors and Medical Practices in Germany Around the Year 1200: The Evidence of Sefer Asaph', *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, 1983, 50, 149–64. See also Tamas Visi, 'Medieval Hebrew Uroscopic Texts: The Reception of Greek Uroscopic Texts in the Hebrew

Book of Remedies Attributed to Asaf', in Y. Tzvi Langermann and Robert G. Morrison, eds, *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 162–97 and in this collection.

<sup>62</sup>This does not mean that these were not common substances used by healers in all of Europe, beyond Germany. There are many similarities, as I indicate in the notes that follow to widely found herbs and foods and to cures in the Trotula corpus. For the Trotula, see Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>63</sup>In both, her *Liber subtilitatum diversarum naturarum creaturarum*, C. Daremberg and F.A. Reuss, eds, *Patrologia Latina*, 197: 1125–532 (hereafter, *LS*) and *Causae et Curae*, P. Kaiser, ed. (Leipzig: Tübnner, 1903). See the new edition of the latter composition, Hildegardis and Laurence Moulinier, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, *Harissima mediaevalia Opera latina 1* (Berlin: Akademie-Verl, 2003). I have noted the pages in Moulinier's new addition in brackets.

<sup>64</sup>For a survey of recent scholarship on Hildegard, see Beverly Mayne Kienzle, ed., *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen* (Boston: Brill, 2013).

rye, fennel and garlic.<sup>65</sup> By presenting the medical information in association with biblical verses, talmudic passages and references, and by writing in Hebrew—the Jewish ‘lingua franca’ (for written but not oral communication), these medical practices were effectively judaised.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the treatment itself was identical to that used by Christians, but the additional Hebrew or Jewish elements made the remedy a Jewish one by definition.

Some of the prescriptions in the text bear similarity to the Trotula corpus as well.<sup>67</sup> As noted earlier, it has been demonstrated that Jews living in medieval Iberia were familiar with this text and translated parts of it, especially from the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum* (Book on the Conditions of Women).<sup>68</sup> Gershom clearly was not familiar with this text, but it is evident that there are many shared herbs and in some cases, similar treatments that are recommended.

In addition to the different cures recorded in this chapter, the chapter also includes evidence concerning performative healing rituals.<sup>69</sup> Some of these are in Hebrew (Montefiore lines 34–35) but even in these cases are hardly comprehensible. Others are not in Hebrew and are indecipherable (MS Jerusalem, lines 145–146). They are reported together with the other prescriptions with little distinctions between the types of cures. The inclusion of all these different types of cures within the manual is typical of medical manuals written by contemporary Jews in medieval Iberia and those written by contemporary Christians.<sup>70</sup> Among these performative rituals, I would single out one that is indicative of religious difference. The chapter begins with an interpretation of the verse from Ezekiel:

**‘As for your birth, when you were born’ (Ezekiel 16: 4) – Thus we learn from this that a woman may be delivered on the Sabbath. ‘Your navel cord was not cut’ – Thus the umbilical cord is severed for the newborn (lit. child) on the Sabbath and it is tied on the Sabbath because its life depends on it. “You were not bathed in water to smooth you” – Thus the infant is washed in order to smooth its skin. “You were not rubbed with salt,” – Thus the infant is salted on the Sabbath.**<sup>71</sup>

This explanation and biblical interpretation accompany the cutting of the umbilical cord. It seems that this was a moment with religious significance as Trotula’s *De curis mulierum* (On Treatments for Women) includes an interesting parallel:

#217 When the umbilical cord of the child is cut, you should say as follows, holding the stump extended: Jesus Christ is dead, he was pierced by the lance and he took no thought of any ointment or of his pain or of any unguent.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>65</sup>See n 62. Many of the herbs that appeared here are present in similar cures in the Trotula as I document in the notes.

<sup>66</sup>For this process of Judaizing aspects majority culture, see Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); see also Elisheva Baumgarten, ‘Appropriation and Differentiation: Jewish Identity in Medieval Ashkenaz’, *AJS Review*, 2018, 42, 39–63.

<sup>67</sup>About these texts see Green, *Trotula*, 17–45.

<sup>68</sup>Caballero-Navas, ‘Care of Women’s Health’, 160–61.

<sup>69</sup>About these rituals, see Murray and Olsan, ‘Performative Rituals’, 408–10 and their comments about the fact that such cures are commonly found within medical tractates. See also Lea T. Olsan, ‘Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice’, *Social History of Medicine*, 2002, 16, 343–66; Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2006).

<sup>70</sup>See Caballero Navas, ‘Care of Women’s Health’; Green, *Trotula*; Barkai, *History*.

<sup>71</sup>See below lines 10–16.

<sup>72</sup>Green, *Trotula*, 154–55, #217.

The passage then explains how to make a charm out of the umbilical cord. Despite the differences between the passages, and it is quite evident that Jews were not familiar with this Christian text, it seems likely they were familiar with a ritual like the one described here and similarly constructed a religious ritual of the cutting of the umbilical cord.

### The Significance of R. Gershom's Manual on Midwifery

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the uniqueness of this text: for the information that it imparts concerning the care of women; for the cooperation between midwives and circumcisers that it details and for its indication of how Jews were integrated into the network of local medical practice and techniques.<sup>73</sup> This source also beautifully illustrates the distinctiveness of Jewish culture from both medical and cultural perspectives. By framing contemporaneous medical advice within quotations from the Talmud and other Jewish texts, the author(s) created a Jewish medical manual. By including the advice to the midwives with guidelines related to circumcision, the Jewishness of the text was underscored as circumcision was a Jewish ritual par excellence.

Although Jews and their neighbours often employed the same techniques, Jewish practitioners framed these approaches within their tradition, which reflected their cultural and religious understandings. Christians were often suspicious of Jewish doctors, and, in parallel, Jews did not readily turn to Christian medical practitioners.<sup>74</sup> Despite significant evidence for the cross-religious practice of medicine, it was often accompanied by accusations and hesitations.<sup>75</sup> This text does not reflect these suspicions, rather it underlines the cooperation between medical practitioners. It showcases four different types of medical experts: Christian doctors, midwives, eye doctors and circumcisers. The latter are not usually included in lists of medical practitioners as they are culturally specific to Jewish (or Muslim) society. But their central role in composing this text and within it indicates their medical standing.

Finally, this text features an unusually close view of intimate aspects of daily life. It details everyday cures, using common materials that were easily found in the location where they were composed. This is an unprecedented wealth of information on how medieval women and men tried address the ailments and conditions that were presumably constants in their lives. These practical details are absent from most medieval Hebrew writings from northern Europe. If we assume that medieval Christian women treated gynaecological and obstetric conditions much as their Jewish counterparts did and shared some of these prescriptions and practices, this text records knowledge held by its Jewish authors not only for their readership but also for their Christian neighbours.

<sup>73</sup>On Jewish medicine, see Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society: Joseph Shatzmiller* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Despite great scholarly interest in medieval Jewish medicine, most studies focus on Southern Europe, where medical texts are abundant, in contrast with comparatively little work on Northern Europe.

<sup>74</sup>For a well-researched case, see Monica H. Green and Daniel Lord Smail, 'The Trial of Floreta d'Ays (1403):

Jews, Christians, and Obstetrics in Later Medieval Marseille', *Journal of Medieval History*, 2008, 34, 185–211.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*; Caballero Navas, 'Care of Women', 162; See also Josep Hernando and Ibáñez, 'El procés contra el convers Nicolau Sanxo, ciutadà de Barcelona, acusat d'haver circumdat el seu Fill (1437–1438)', *Acta històrica et arqueològica mediævalia*, 1992, 13, 79–83.

MS Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, Heb. 8° 3182<sup>76</sup>

(34v) [1] NOW that I have written about issues relating to circumcision, in a similar  
 [2] fashion, I will write about the needs of midwives and the treatments that may be  
 [3] performed for women in labour<sup>77</sup> (*hayot*; sing. *haya*) on the Sabbath. And also  
 [4] treatments and remedies that are salutary for women who experience difficulties  
 when giving birth.<sup>78</sup>

[5] **RULINGS AND TREATMENTS<sup>79</sup> THAT ARE PERMITTED FOR WOMEN IN**  
 [6] **LABOUR ON THE SABBATH<sup>80</sup>**

[7] **R. Nahman said in the name of Rabbah b. Abbuha (who spoke) in the name of**  
 [8] **Rav:<sup>81</sup> Everything that is enumerated in the Chapter of Rebuke<sup>82</sup> in the Book of**  
 [9] **Ezekiel may be done for women in labour on the Sabbath;** these may even be per-  
 [10] formed intentionally since her life is endangered, **as it is said [in Scripture]: ‘As for**  
 [11] **your birth, when you were born<sup>83</sup>—Thus, we learn from this that a woman<sup>84</sup>**  
 [12] **may be delivered on the Sabbath. ‘Your navel cord was not cut’—Thus the umbil-**  
 [13] **ical cord is severed** for the newborn (lit. child) **on the Sabbath,** and it is tied on the  
 [14] Sabbath because its life depends on it.<sup>85</sup> **“You were not bathed in water to smooth**  
 [15] **you” – Thus the infant is washed** in order to smooth its skin.<sup>86</sup> **‘You were not**  
 [16] **rubbed with salt<sup>87</sup>,’—Thus the infant is salted on the Sabbath.** And R. Joseph  
 [17] explained that the child is really salted to toughen its skin.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>76</sup>Each heading presented here appears as a heading in the original. For greater clarity: Hebrew terms and all non-Hebrew terms are italicised; verbatim quotations from the Talmud are in boldface; and, biblical translations within talmudic citations appear in bold italics. As noted earlier, most of the variations in the JTS manuscript are grammatical in nature. I do not note such minor distinctions but I do remark on changes in content, such as the omission of a remedy.

<sup>77</sup>The Hebrew word *haya* refers to a woman in labour, from the onset of contractions until the birthing process is finished; in some cases, this term also denotes a midwife. This word originates in the Hebrew Bible; in the Talmud and other rabbinic sources, it is commonly used as a synonym for *yoledet*, which also means ‘a woman in labour’.

<sup>78</sup>This manuscript includes two lines, which refer to the prior section, concerning ways to stop bleeding after the circumcision; this material does not appear in the JTS manuscript. It appears that the copyist wrote the title for this chapter, then realised that this material needed inclusion.

<sup>79</sup>The Hebrew term *devarim* (lit. ‘things’ or ‘issues’) is translated here as ‘treatments’ since it is the most accurate rendering in this context.

<sup>80</sup>This section is based on BT Shabbat 128b. The subject of permissible care for a woman in labour during the Sabbath is complex because many of standard treatments incorporate activities that are forbidden on the Sabbath (e.g. lighting a fire, cutting cloth, heating water). This passage from the Talmud cites

Mishnah Shabbat 18: 3: ‘We May deliver a woman on the Sabbath, summon a midwife for her from place to place, desecrate the Sabbath on her account and tie up the navel string. R. Jose says one may cut it too. And all the requirements of circumcision may be done on Shabbat’.

<sup>81</sup>BT Shabbat 129b incorporates the discussion from the Mishnah.

<sup>82</sup>Ezekiel 16 is known as the Chapter of Rebuke, in reference to its severe admonishment of the Israelites.

<sup>83</sup>Ezekiel 16:4: ‘As for your birth: When you were born your navel cord was not cut, and you were not bathed in water to smooth you; you were not rubbed with salt, nor were you swaddled’. (New JPS translation)

<sup>84</sup>BT Shabbat 129b says ‘an infant’, but this is not a significant change since the Mishnah discusses labour and delivery, and both sources are clearly discussing the process of childbirth.

<sup>85</sup>This is an addendum to the talmudic explanation for the necessity of tying the umbilical cord. See Rashi, ad loc, s.v. ‘vekoshrin hatabur’ states that, given its length, the umbilical cord must be tied lest it become tangled or caught on something and, in turn, injure the infant’s internal organs.

<sup>86</sup>This addition is based on Rashi, who comments, s.v. ‘lemish’i’: to smooth his skin.

<sup>87</sup>This quotation from Ezekiel is imprecise.

<sup>88</sup>This explanation is also given by Rashi, s.v. ‘shemolhin’. I have not been able to ascertain the identity of this R. Joseph.

[18] And R. Gershom the Circumciser, of blessed memory, explained that when he questioned  
 [19] the midwives (about this practice), they said that they do not salt the child at all; God forbid,  
 [20] for how could he tolerate any salt? However, they salt the placenta, and they also pour (lit.  
 [21] put) wine on it, and [moreover], she [one of the midwives] says that it (wine) is good for the  
 [22] mother of the child<sup>89</sup> for it will season her food.<sup>90</sup> **'Nor were you swaddled'—Thus, the**  
 [23] **infant is swaddled on the Sabbath.** 'Swaddled': meaning they bind the child in cloth rags  
 [24] that fix him and straighten his limbs. As we have said here (lit. now), **Everything that is enu-**  
 [25] **merated in the Chapter of Rebuke may be done for women in labour on the**  
 [26] **Sabbath.**<sup>91</sup> Thus, the infant would be endangered if we did not carry out all that is men-  
 [27] tioned in this chapter; therefore, these (actions) are permitted on the Sabbath without sin<sup>92</sup>  
 (lit. even when premeditated).<sup>93</sup>

[28] **THE LAW OF ASSISTING AND DELIVERING A WOMAN**

[29] Assisting and delivering a woman: 'Assisting' means the women hold the [delivering]  
 [30] woman by her arms <35r> so she won't injure (lit. bruise) herself, for hurting her body  
 [31] delays the birth. 'Delivering' means the women teach her how to conduct herself accord-  
 [32] ing to the practice of other women who give birth at night, because there are some  
 [33] women who do not know how to conduct themselves in the way of women, and they  
 [34] extend the labour and delay their birth. Therefore, the wise women who accompany (lit.  
 [35] sit by) her urge her to endure her lot<sup>94</sup> and, on the Sabbath, they are permitted to assist  
 [36] and deliver (lit. to do).

[37] **THE LAW OF SUMMONING A WISE WOMAN**<sup>95</sup>

[38] **And they summon her from one place to another** (lit. place to place)<sup>96</sup>—  
 [39] meaning even from outside their boundaries<sup>97</sup> since her life is endangered (lit. this is a

<sup>89</sup>Medieval texts often mention the medicinal attributes of wine for post-partum mothers; for example, during the circumcision ceremony. See *Seder rav Amram Gaon*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt (Jerusalem, 1972), 180 and many medieval descriptions of circumcision that follow his instructions, for example, *Mahzor Vitry*, ed. S. Horowitz (Nürnberg: Mekize Nirdamim, 1898), #504.

<sup>90</sup>This seems to imply that wine improves the quality of mother's milk.

<sup>91</sup>The author returns to a quotation from Talmud, BT Shabbat 129a, cited at the beginning of this discussion.

<sup>92</sup>The passage that begins 'Swaddled: meaning...' presents materials that closely resemble Rashi's commentary on this passage in the Talmud, Rashi, BT Shabbat 129 b, s.v. 'umelapefin' as well as his commentary on BT Shabbat 66b. In both texts, he describes the infant being swaddled in cloth and bound in a wide belt that supports the formation of his limbs. Rashi explains the necessity of this procedure since babies' limbs are soft and need to be shaped. He uses the French word 'enmaltoyer', (a precursor of 'mailloler' in current French), meaning 'to swaddle'; see: Arstème Darmsteter et D. S.

Blondheim, *Le glosses françaises dans les commentaires talmudiques de Raschi*, Paris, 1929, 45, #344. On swaddling practices, see Danièle Alexandre-Bidon et Monique Closson, *L'enfant à l'ombre des cathédrales* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon; Paris: CNRS, 1985). Also, see the disagreement between Rashi and Rabbenu Tam about whether a baby's limbs may be 'shaped' this way on the Sabbath, BT Shabbat 123a, s.v. 'Asubei yenuka' and Rashi, BT Sotah 11b, s.v. 'meshaper': Rashi, following the Talmud, seems to imply that swaddling and intentionally directing the contours of a baby's limbs are permissible at any time, whereas the Tosafists argue that, on the Sabbath, a baby may be swaddled but medically directing the shape of its limbs is not allowed.

<sup>93</sup>Throughout this text, I translate the word *lekhatila* as 'intentionally' or 'deliberately', following the Soncino translation.

<sup>94</sup>As a woman who is destined to bear children.

<sup>95</sup>The text uses the terms 'midwife' and 'wise woman' interchangeably. See p. 5 above.

<sup>96</sup>Mishnah Shabbat 18:3; BT Shabbat 128b.

<sup>97</sup>The Hebrew term *t'hum* pertains to an aspect of Sabbath observance that limits travel to a small,

[40] life-threatening situation). **They make a fire for her on the Sabbath**<sup>98</sup>—meaning a  
 [41] woman who sits on the birthing stool becomes chilled throughout her body, and they  
 [42] must warm her because this chill poses a danger for the fetus and for her: therefore, it is  
 [43] permissible on the Sabbath; and they also warm hot (water) on the Sabbath for the new-  
 [44] born delivered on that day, as it says in the chapter ‘These things on Passover’:<sup>99</sup> Rabbah  
 [45] said, **‘They allow hot (water) for the parturient, the sick and the infant (lit. minor)  
 [46] whether as a beverage (lit. to drink) or as a remedy (lit. to cure)’**; thus for an infant  
 [47] (lit. minor) born to his mother. And they (may) intentionally light (a fire) on Sabbath eves  
 [48] and fulfill all of her needs (lit. and they do for her all her needs) when she is in labour,<sup>100</sup>  
 [49] and one who acts swiftly is considered (lit. this is) praiseworthy.<sup>101</sup>

[50] If there is a gentile woman present who [regularly] tends the fire, kindles the lights or  
 [51] prepares her food, she would do the same in this circumstance (lit. the gentile woman  
 does this before the woman gives birth).<sup>102</sup>

[52] They wash her on the fourth day after birth, for as (lit. and this is what) the wise mid-  
 [53] wives say, it is better for the [post-partum] woman to be (lit. when she is) washed longer  
 [54] after the birth as this is a remedy for her. And she who rushes to wash [the parturient] on  
 [55] the second or third day (after birth) endangers her soul.

[56] Why does a post-partum woman bring a sacrifice? To repent for the vows that she  
 [57] made at the height of labour while sitting on the birthing stool during the crowning,  
 [58] when she forswore going near her husband for years; therefore, she is obligated to bring  
 [59] a sacrifice to atone for her vow, as it says [in Scripture]: ‘On the completion of her  
 [60] period of purification for either son or daughter, she shall bring to the priest . . . a lamb’  
 (Lev. 12: 6).<sup>103</sup>

#### [61] **THE TREATMENT OF THE PLACENTA**<sup>104</sup>

[62] A parturient who had trouble with the infant during birth, they treat her, whether on a  
 [63] weekday or on the Sabbath, and it is permissible to intentionally use treatments [that  
 [64] would otherwise be prohibited] on the Sabbath since she is in peril. They feed her a herb  
 [65] known as *yseña*<sup>105</sup> in Ashkenaz;<sup>106</sup> it is unrivaled and invaluable (lit. and there is none  
 [66] like it and there is none of its worth), equal to gold and silver, and effective (lit. good)  
 [67] [whether] damp or dry. And they mention the name of the grass together with the name  
 [68] of the river that goes through Worms. <35v> The fragrance of this herb is extremely

defined distance; an exception is made for a parturi-  
 ent who needs medical attention.

<sup>98</sup>BT Eruvin 79b.

<sup>99</sup>See BT Pesahim 69a for a discussion of the activities that may be performed for an infant on Shabbat. However, this talmudic passage does not include all of the information mentioned here. Following the discussion on caring for infants on 69a, the focus shifts to attending to the aged and infirm on 69b. Parturients are not mentioned in this material; however, elsewhere in the Talmud, these three categories—children, the aged and parturients—are regularly discussed as a group.

<sup>100</sup>BT Shabbat 129b; BT Eruvin 79b.

<sup>101</sup>This statement seems to laud prompt action for all of the listed activities, but that broad application is not entirely made explicit.

<sup>102</sup>This is consistent with the laws that govern employing gentiles to perform tasks that Jews are not permitted to perform on the Sabbath. See Jacob Katz, *The Sabbath Gentile* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1983) [Hebrew].

<sup>103</sup>Based on BT Niddah 31b, minor rewording.

<sup>104</sup>The *Sefer Asufot* manuscript begins at this point.

<sup>105</sup>This is *de yseña*, *verbena officinalis*, vervain, see Hildegard, LS, I, CLIV, 1190; *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum* recommends the use of vervain for a difficult birth rather than for the placenta, See Green, *Trotula*, 101, #96.

<sup>106</sup>Ashkenaz is the medieval Jewish term for Germany.



- [69] pleasant, and it is vital to the release (lit. birthing) of the placenta. And it has been tested  
 [70] and tried.  
 [71] I made these notations to demonstrate to all that that from one root, many roots  
 [72] grow.



- [73] And another (remedy): She bites into a clove of garlic<sup>107</sup> and eats [it]. And another:  
 [74] Take a feather of a bird, burn it in a pot and direct the smoke towards her face. Another  
 [75] one: They prepare a dish for her with rye flour in a skillet;<sup>108</sup> they then position (lit. seat)  
 [76] the woman on a perforated seat<sup>109</sup> and cushion (lit. surround) the chair with clothes so  
 [77] that warmth will rise; when the woman is warmed from below, the placenta will be ex-  
 [78] pelled. Another one, from the *Sefer (the book of) Assaf the Physician*:<sup>110</sup> Take felt that is  
 [79] called *filz* in the language of Ashkenaz, burn it and place it near her face so the smoke  
 [80] will enter her nostrils, causing her to (lit. and she will) sneeze and the placenta will be  
 [81] expelled.<sup>111</sup>  
 [82] Another one: Collect water from a crossroads, and let her drink (it).

[83] **TO PREVENT A PREGNANT WOMAN FROM MISCARRYING**

- [84] To prevent a woman from miscarrying as a result of an illness that she contracted be-  
 [85] cause of encountering something harmful,<sup>112</sup> hang a stone pendant—known as, *ankun-*  
 [86] *tra*<sup>113</sup> in *la'az*<sup>114</sup>—on her neck: This round stone—which looks like glass, is hollow in the  
 [87] middle, has the weight of an egg but is half its size—can be found in field; its value is in-  
 [88] comparable (lit. there is none of its worth).<sup>115</sup> Another one: If she doesn't have that  
 [89] stone, [instead] hang the heart of a female rabbit<sup>116</sup> that has been taken from its body  
 [90] while it was still alive on her neck; behold it is very effective, whether moist or dry.<sup>117</sup>  
 [91] Another one: Take the strap that her husband ties around his calves and she shall gird  
 [92] herself with this day and night. Another one: There is a woman in Cologne who knows  
 [93] how to craft a belt with the name of the woman, as I continue to investigate. Another

<sup>107</sup>Garlic was a common remedy. See Hildegard, LS, I, LXXIX, 1162, de alio, *allium ascalonicum*. Hildegard prescribes garlic for numerous medical ailments as does Trotula, but they are not identical to this recommendation. See Green, *Trotula*, p. 79, #28.

<sup>108</sup>I have not found a parallel for this cure.

<sup>109</sup>This may be a specific type of birthing stool.

<sup>110</sup>About *Sefer Assaf*, see above, n 61.

<sup>111</sup>This technique of fumigation is also commonly used in labour. See Green, *Trotula*, 103 #112.

<sup>112</sup>The Hebrew word '*paga*', translated here as 'encounters', has a negative connotation; as such, she undoubtedly had contact with something harmful.

<sup>113</sup>This stone is also mentioned by Rashi, BT Shabbat 66b, s.v. 'even tekuma'. It is an amulet worn by women to avert miscarriages. Rashi states that it is

called 'kutana' in Old French; this term may be traced to the term 'contiene' also Old French), which may mean 'to help a woman carry to term'.

<sup>114</sup>This Hebrew acronym idiomatically means 'vernacular'.

<sup>115</sup>The author is emphasising that this stone is very helpful and, perhaps, also very valuable.

<sup>116</sup>The *Sefer Asufot* manuscript mentions a specific kind of rabbit. Hildegard also notes that rabbits are beneficial during pregnancy. See Hildegard, LS VII, XVIII, 1326.

<sup>117</sup>Using a hare or rabbit for fertility can be found in Green, *Trotula*, 94–95, #76, but in our case, this is a cure to preventing miscarriage, whereas other parts of the hare are used to enhance conception in the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*.

[94] one: She should eat either fennel seeds or fennel roots<sup>118</sup> often if she feels any pain; she  
 [95] should eat them (fennel) immediately, and it has been tested and tried and is vital.  
 [96] Another one: They give her the remains found on a butcher's knife to drink.

[97] **THE LAW FOR A WOMAN WHO DOES NOT MENSTRUATE (LIT. DOES NOT SEE MENSTRUAL BLOOD)**

[98] There are women who do not see menstrual blood after birth because its source<sup>119</sup> is  
 [99] blocked. This poses a danger for the woman, lest her stomach burst and her heart will  
 [100] become stricken with sorrow<sup>120</sup> owing to the blood that does not flow from her [as it  
 [101] should]. They make a dish for her with a herb known as *priesloch*<sup>121</sup> that is cooked thor-  
 [102] oughly with fatty meat;<sup>122</sup> when you feed this to her, her womb (lit. the source) will  
 [103] open, and it will aid (her).

[104] **TO STOP MENSTRUAL BLEEDING**

[105] <36r> To stop the blood of menstruation for a woman who bleeds frequently: Take the  
 [106] fruit of a myrtle,<sup>123</sup> grind it with salt that is mined from the mountain, [be sure they are]  
 [107] ground well and stir in olive oil; afterwards, blanch it with myrtle leaves, and once it is  
 [108] cooked, dip unlaundered white wool in it and place it on the opening of the uterus. This  
 [109] will aid [her].<sup>124</sup> Another one: For a woman who constantly bleeds (lit. always sits in her  
 [110] menstruation),<sup>125</sup> have her drink [a mixture that includes] ash from bread ovens—known  
 [111] as 'oven lime' in the language of Ashkenaz—for three [consecutive] mornings; it will help  
 [112] [her].<sup>126</sup> Eating quince—known as *quitten*<sup>127</sup> in the language of Ashkenaz—after birth is  
 [113] beneficial for reducing pain. And another: Take cinnamon,<sup>128</sup> grind it and cook it in a  
 [114] good wine<sup>129</sup> and let her drink, and it is beneficial. Another tested and tried remedy for a  
 [115] woman who is having a difficult labour, which I heard from the Nasi<sup>130</sup> when he visited

<sup>118</sup>Hildegard also mentions that fennel is beneficial for women in childbirth. See LS, I, LXVI, 1156–58 and *Curae et causae*, 188 (liber IV, 395), 232–33. In this case, it is used to prevent miscarriages. Compare Barkai, *History*. According to the index, see also Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1939), 133.

<sup>119</sup>*Makor* (lit. source) appears as a euphemism for 'uterus' throughout rabbinic literature.

<sup>120</sup>The understanding of why this is dangerous is shared with *Liber de sinthonatibus mulierum* but the prescriptions advised are not. See Green, *Trotula*, 74–80.

<sup>121</sup>The Hebrew text contains the term 'prislog'. I thank Laurence Moliner for suggesting that this might be chives *prieslauch/priseloch* (allium schoenoprasium L.), a herb mentioned by Hildegard, 'de Lauch' LS, I, LXXXII, PL 197, 1163.

<sup>122</sup>Hildegard also recommends a similar cure: *Causae et Curae*, 'Item de menstrui retentione', 185–87 (liber IV 394), 232.

<sup>123</sup>Although Hildegard enumerates the healing properties of myrtle, this is not amongst them, see: 'de mirtelbaum, *myrtus communis*, LS III, XLII, PL 197,

1240–1241; Myrtle is recommended for many gynaecological cures in the Trotula. See Green, *Trotula*, that recommends myrtle for the retention of menses, 74–75, #11 and also, as in our case, for excessive menses, 80–84, #33.

<sup>124</sup>This cure appears in Assaf haRofo, Muntner, *Sefer Assaf*, #686. Unlaundered white wool also appears in other Jewish German gynaecological treatments, for example, MS Parma 2342, fol. 263, #50 that describes putting wool on the opening of the vagina during birth, but in that case, the wool is dipped in boiled leek leaves, and the treatment is intended to immediately induce birth.

<sup>125</sup>In other words, who bleeds incessantly.

<sup>126</sup>Compare to Green, *Trotula*, p. 118–19, #136.

<sup>127</sup>See Hildegard, de quittenbaum, *pyrus cydonia*, LS, III, IV, 1220.

<sup>128</sup>Cinammon is recommended for other types of uncontrollable bleeding as well. See Hildegard, *Causae et Curae*, 'de fluxu sanguinis', 201 (liber IV, 397), 233–35; Green, *Trotula*, 158–59, #227, 228.

<sup>129</sup>For a similar cure, see Hildegard, *Causae et Curae*, 186 and n 129.

<sup>130</sup>The Montifiore manuscript retains the name of this Nasi, see lines \*15–\*16 of the translated text, below.

[116] this kingdom: Burn frankincense—known as *weihrauch* in the language of Ashkenaz—  
 [117] while positioning the woman so she either stands over the smoke or sits on the perforated  
 [118] birthing chair (lit. chair with holes), so the smoke will rise into her body, and she will imme-  
 [119] diately give birth.<sup>131</sup> Another one: Take the herb known as *biboz* in the language of  
 [120] Ashkenaz<sup>132</sup> and tie it under her left foot, and she will give birth quickly [this treatment] is  
 [121] tested—and be sure to remove it once she gives birth because it is dangerous.

[122] **FOR A PREGNANT WOMAN WHO BLEEDS (LIT. WHO SEES BLOOD)**

[123] They hang a gold coin (dinar) around her neck, and this will be beneficial. A tested and  
 [124] tried treatment for a pregnant woman who is past her ninth month, whose time to give  
 [125] birth has come but whose labour is difficult: Scrape an elephant<sup>133</sup> bone for her to eat or  
 [126] drink; she will then give birth quickly. Another cure: For a woman having a difficult la-  
 [127] bour, take the dung of a female ass<sup>134</sup> and warm it by the fire in a clay vessel; once it is  
 [128] hot, have the woman sit on it, and she will give birth immediately. Another one: For she  
 [129] who is having a difficult delivery, burn frankincense and rub it with vinegar<sup>135</sup> on the  
 [130] womb, and it will aid her. This [procedure] is beneficial if the fetus has died, but it is dan-  
 [131] gerous if the fetus is still living (lit. and these are dangerous to do if the pregnancy is alive,  
 [132] but if the pregnancy is dead, it is good). Another one: Take the seeds of *hommo* or *hop-*  
 [133] *pho*<sup>136</sup> that are regularly used for making spirits, and once she eats them, she will give  
 [134] birth immediately. Another one: Inscribe these signs on a shard of unfired pottery and  
 [135] place it on her stomach; she will go into labour immediately. But when she begins to give  
 [136] birth, remove it right away, lest her intestines be expelled. These are the words: *ma'avar*  
 [137] *rav sus ve-ayn ve-gibor* (lit. many horses pass but none are brave).<sup>137</sup> Another one: Take  
 [138] the herb known as *polphyr*,<sup>138</sup> including its roots, place [it] on her feet and it (the fetus)  
 [139] will come out, [whether] dead or alive.

[140] **FOR A PREGNANT WOMAN WHOSE BREASTS ARE AFFLICTED**

[141] Take red earth—known as 'lime'<sup>139</sup> in the language of Ashkenaz—and make it into a  
 [142] paste with water; apply [this salve] to the [afflicted] breast at all times. [This] will be  
 [143] beneficial.

<sup>131</sup>Frankincense (*olibanum*) is recommended many times in the *Trotula* but not for childbirth. On the technique of fumigation, see n 111.

<sup>132</sup>*Biboz* is *artemisia vulgaris*, widely recommended for warming the body. See Hildegard, LS, I, CVII, 1171–72 and compare with, 190. See also Green, *Trotula*, 76–77, #13 where the same process is recommended for the retention of the menses as well as for birth if the fetus is dead, 100–01, #94; although in this case, it is not fumigated.

<sup>133</sup>On the use of elephant bones (or, perhaps, tusks), see Hildegard, de elephant, LS VII, 1313 and compare Barkai, *History*, 132.

<sup>134</sup>On jennies (female asses) and donkeys in general, see Hildegard, LS, IX, 1320, de asino and compare Barkai, *History*, 204.

<sup>135</sup>Vinegar too was a commonly used remedy, particularly in connection to pregnancy and birth, see

Hildegard, *Causae et Curae*, 211; Green, *Trotula*, 82–83, #34; 96–97, #80; 148–49, #200 in pregnancy and breastfeeding-related matters. As a cure for a difficult delivery similar but not identical to the cure in the Hebrew text, see *ibid.*, 100–01, #96; or to stop blood flow after birth 124–25, #148, 160–61, #232.

<sup>136</sup>This is hops, *de humelus lupulus*, a, a plant 'that can 'make people joyous' according to Hildegard, see LS I, L, 1149.

<sup>137</sup>Similar sayings are included in the other writings of Judah b. Samuel (d. 1217 in Regensburg), but I have not found this specific phrase elsewhere. Perhaps its message is that none is as brave as God, see, for example, commentaries on Psalms 24:8.

<sup>138</sup>I have been unable to identify this plant.

<sup>139</sup>For a discussion of red earth and fertility, see Hildegard, LS II, 'de terra', PL 197, 1214. The

[144] <36v> FOR a woman having difficulties giving birth: Whisper 'Kur, kur, kur, kur, kur,  
 [145] kur' in her ear and the infant (lit. it) will come out immediately. But if the fetus is dead  
 [146] within her belly (lit. intestines), give her dung from a male donkey<sup>140</sup> to drink, and it will  
 [147] come out. Another one: Whisper 'Quickly the crouching one is freed. He is not cut down  
 [148] and slain and he shall not want for food' (Isaiah 51: 14) in her ear.

[149] IN order to know whether a [pregnant] woman is carrying a boy or a girl [watch her  
 [150] gait]: if her first stride is with her right foot, then she is carrying a male; and if not, she is  
 [151] carrying a female.<sup>141</sup> While I am on this subject (lit. writing these cures), I will also record  
 [152] an exceptionally good powder that is to be rubbed around the eye; it is also effective for  
 [153] [treating] red eye. [This remedy is] accredited to (lit. in the name of) Marat Yiscah, a wise  
 [154] woman for reviving light to the eyes.<sup>142</sup> Take five or six pieces from half a *zazuk* (weight  
 [155] measure) of *calimna*,<sup>143</sup> which looks like a white stone, fire them and remove them  
 [156] (from the fire) with tongs and dip them nine times in a dish of strong vinegar so the *cal-*  
 [157] *imna* softens. Afterwards, thoroughly grind the *calimna* in a mortar until it becomes a  
 [158] fine powder. Sprinkle that powder into a swatch of fine cloth. Each night, shake a little in  
 [159] [the patient's] hand and mix it with a little wine or saliva [forming a salve that] should be  
 [160] applied around [the affected] eye when going to sleep, thus enabling the eye to see (lit.  
 [161] be lighted). This is tested and tried.<sup>144</sup>

[162] FOR a woman having a difficult labour, write the following on an unused piece of pot-  
 [163] tery: *hos hok hadash yebum*.<sup>145</sup> Place this shard on the belly of the parturient in distress;  
 [164] however, once the infant emerges, remove the shard immediately, lest her intestines  
 [165] [also] be discharged. This has been tested and tried.<sup>146</sup>

[166] Thus concludes the amendments to [the laws of] circumcision.

[167] Praised be God, who placed [these] words in my mouth.<sup>147</sup>

[168] Our father, our king, send a full recovery to the ill [members] of your people.<sup>148</sup>

Trotula mentions medicinal earth (*bolum*) and we use it to make a paste, for example, for lesions or burns. See Green, *Trotula*, 134–35, #166.

<sup>140</sup>See n 134.

<sup>141</sup>This passage, from lines 149–151 appears twice in both the Jerusalem and JTS manuscripts, on fol. 5r and fol. 75v, respectively. The material from lines 151–58 only appears in the Jerusalem manuscript.

<sup>142</sup>This seems to indicate that she is an eye doctor. Interestingly, the phrase 'wise woman' appears together with this medical specialty. For a discussion of titles for female medical practitioners, see Green, 'Women's Medical Practice'.

<sup>143</sup>Hildegard, LS II, XII, 1214 'de calamino'.

<sup>144</sup>Compare this with Hildegard, *Causae et Curae*, 171: 'Qui oculos habet similes nubi, in qua iris apparet, et in eis caliginem aut alium dolorem patitur, calimum accipiat et puro ac albino vino imponat et ad noctem cum dormitum vadit, calimino ablato eodem vino cilia oculorum suorum exterius illiniat, precavens ne oculos tangat ne acumine calimini

ledantur et maiorem caliginem incurrant'. This passage does not appear in the Moulinier edition. But see liber v, 489, 284.

<sup>145</sup>These are Hebrew words, but as in line 144, they make little sense in this sequence.

<sup>146</sup>The text in the JTS manuscript concludes here. The remaining lines (166–68) only appear in the Jerusalem manuscript.

<sup>147</sup>This phrase alludes to 2 Kings 2:20–21, where Elisha the prophet cures 'bad' water with salt: 'He responded: "Bring me a new dish and put salt in it . . . he went to the spring and threw the salt into it and he said: Thus said the Lord, I heal this water; no longer shall death and bereavement come from it"'.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>148</sup>This sentence echoes a line from *avinu malkenu* (our father, our king), a central prayer in the High Holiday liturgy, and from the weekday petition that God may bring healing to the sick. This prayer was well known and regularly recited in medieval Germany.

## Sefer Asufot (formerly Ms Montifiore 134)

## \*1 (88d) CURES FOR WOMEN HAVING TROUBLE DURING DELIVERY

\*2 A woman who gave birth to an infant and she had trouble delivering the placenta, it is  
 \*3 permitted to help her on Shabbat intentionally. And he who is swift should be praised.  
 \*4 Since she is in the state of danger, and what is her cure? They feed her the leaves of the  
 \*5 plant that is called *ysena* in Ashkenaz, and it is good damp or dry. And it is tested and  
 \*6 tried. Another one: She bites garlic heads and it (the placenta) will come out. Another  
 \*7 one: Take the feathers of birds and burn them in a pot and the smoke will rise against  
 \*8 her face and it will come out. Another one: They prepare her a dish from rye flour and  
 \*9 the woman sits on the birthing stool (chair with holes) and they surround the chair with  
 \*10 clothes so that it will be warm and when she is warm, it (the placenta) will come out at  
 \*11 once. Another one from *The book of Assaf the Physician*: Take felt that is called *Filz* and  
 \*12 burn it and put it near her face and the smoke will enter her nostrils and she will sneeze  
 \*13 and the placenta will come out. Another one: Take from the water that is at a crossroads  
 \*14 and let her drink [it].

\*15 FOR A WOMAN HAVING TROUBLE IN DELIVERY from the Nasi, R. Azaryahu of  
 \*16 Babylon and in the year 1228 (or 1248) (89a) he was in this kingdom. And he said: Take  
 \*17 frankincense that is called *weihrauch* in Ashkenaz<sup>149</sup> and burn it in a new pottery vessel  
 \*18 and stand the woman above it so the smoke will rise on her and she will immediately  
 \*19 give birth. And also to extract the placenta from a woman: Seat the woman on the birthing  
 \*20 stool and the smoke will rise into her and it will come out. And this is tested and tried.  
 \*21 Another one: Take a plant called *biboz*<sup>150</sup> and tie it under her left foot and she will give  
 \*22 birth quickly and it is tested, and be careful to remove it from her immediately when she  
 \*23 gives birth because it is dangerous. Another one for a woman having difficulty: Take the  
 \*24 bone of an elephant and scrape it a little and give it to the woman to eat or to drink and  
 \*25 she will give birth quickly. Another one: Take the dung of a donkey and heat it by the fire  
 \*26 in a clay dish and the woman shall sit on it when it is hot and she will give birth quickly.  
 \*27 AND THESE MATTERS ARE DANGEROUS IF THE PREGNANCY IS ALIVE BUT IF THE  
 \*28 PREGNANCY IS DEAD THEN THEY ARE BENEFICIAL Another one: Take the seeds of  
 \*29 *hoppo*, that are used for making spirits, and she will eat them and give birth. Another  
 \*30 one: Take a new piece of pottery and write on it these signs: *ma'avar rav sus veayn vegi-*  
 \*31 *bor* (lit.: many horses pass and there is no brave one)<sup>151</sup> and put it on her stomach and  
 \*32 she will give birth immediately, only remove them immediately when she gives birth so  
 \*33 that her intestines do not come out. Another one for a woman having difficulties (deliver-  
 \*34 ing): Whisper in her ear three times 'kur, kur, kur, kur, kur, kur' and it will come out im-  
 \*35 mediately. And if the infant is dead in her stomach (lit. intestines), give her donkey's  
 \*36 dung to drink and it will come out. Another one: Whisper in her ear this verse: 'Quickly  
 \*37 the crouching one is freed. He is not cut down and slain and he shall not want for food'  
 \*38 (Isaiah 51: 14). Another one, tested and tried: Let her sip breast milk (lit. a woman's milk)  
 \*39 from a spoon and she will give birth immediately. FOR A WOMAN WHOSE PLACENTA IS  
 \*40 DELAYED FROM COMING OUT Let her drink soup made with a herb known as

<sup>149</sup>Frankincense was used medically from biblical times.

<sup>150</sup>See n 132

<sup>151</sup>See n 137.

\*41 *scharleya*<sup>152</sup> and it (the placenta) will come out. AN EXCELLENT AND TRIED REMEDY TO  
 \*42 ENSURE SOUND SLEEP On a small sheet of parchment, write eight verses [beginning  
 \*43 with], 'Your hands made me ... etc'.<sup>153</sup> In these verses, the name of God should be  
 \*44 spelled out (lit. written) in full with (the Hebrew letters): yod-heh-vav-heh. Then hang  
 \*45 [this parchment] around the sick person's neck and he will surely sleep [well]. Be careful  
 \*46 not to interrupt [the patient's sleep] until he wakes up independently. Another one for  
 \*47 sleep: Write on the white blade of a knife, 'Pir, prish, rish, prish, shir prish prish pir prish  
 \*48 pirsh prish rish (89b) prish rish prish, provide sleep for the life of Ploni, son of Plonit'.  
 \*49 Another one: For she who has trouble delivering an infant or the placenta, from the kab-  
 \*50 balah of R. Judah the Pious, write the following on parchment, *yidmeh panas, ehayah*  
 \*51 *asher ehayah*.<sup>154</sup> Place the parchment on her stomach and, with God's help, she will give  
 \*52 birth immediately. For the birth of the placenta: Have her drink a little olive oil from a  
 \*53 spoon. Another one: Have her eat garlic. TO STOP THE BLOOD OF MENSTRUATION FOR  
 \*54 A WOMAN WHO BLEEDS FREQUENTLY: Take the fruit of a myrtle,<sup>155</sup> grind it with salt  
 \*55 that is mined from the mountain, [be sure they are] ground well and stir in olive oil; after-  
 \*56 ward blanch it with myrtle leaves and, once it is cooked, dip unlaundered white wool in  
 \*57 it and place it on the opening of the uterus. This will aid [her].<sup>156</sup> ANOTHER ONE FOR A  
 \*58 WOMAN WHO CONSTANTLY BLEEDS (LIT. ALWAYS SITS IN HER MENSTRUATION):<sup>157</sup>  
 \*59 have her drink [a mixture that includes] ash from bread ovens – known as 'oven lime' in  
 \*60 the language of Ashkenaz – for three [consecutive] mornings; it will help [her]. FOR A  
 \*61 WOMAN WHOSE MENSTRUAL BLEEDING CEASED: Take cinnamon<sup>158</sup> and grind it and  
 \*62 cook it in a good wine and let her drink and it is beneficial. And another: Eating quince –  
 \*63 known as *quitten* in the language of Ashkenaz – after birth is beneficial for reducing  
 \*64 pain. FOR A WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BLEED AFTER BIRTH AND THIS POSES A DANGER  
 \*65 FOR THE WOMAN, LEST HER STOMACH BURST AND HER HEART WILL BECOME  
 \*66 STRICKEN WITH SORROW DUE TO THE BLOCKING OF HER UTERUS: Make a dish for her  
 \*67 with a herb known as '*priesloch*',<sup>159</sup> that is cooked thoroughly with fatty meat,<sup>160</sup> when  
 \*68 you feed this to her, her womb (lit. the source) will open and it will aid [her]. FOR A  
 \*69 PREGNANT WOMAN SO SHE WON'T MISCARRY BECAUSE OF AN ILLNESS THAT SHE  
 \*70 CONTRACTS OR BECAUSE OF ANYTHING THAT HARMS HER: One hangs on her neck a  
 \*71 stone that is called *ankuntra* in *la"az* and it is hollow in the middle and it is round and it is  
 \*72 the size of a medium egg and the weight of an egg and it looks like glass. And this stone  
 \*73 is found in the field and there it is not worth more than gold or silver. And it is tried and  
 \*74 tested. Another one: Take the heart of a rabbit called *konglin*, taken from its body while

<sup>152</sup>*Scharleya*, sage, *salvia sclarea* is mentioned by Hildegard, LS, I CLXI, PL 197, 1191 as by other contemporaneous Jewish sources. In *Sefer Hasidim*, #234, this broth is recommended for those near death. And see Moritz Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden, während des Mittelalters und der neueren Zeit* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1966), 1: 172, notes 5 and 6.

<sup>153</sup>Psalms 119: 73–80.

<sup>154</sup>*Yidmeh* means 'shall resemble', and *panas* is 'a light', but I have not found this phrase elsewhere. The concluding three words constitute one of God's

names: 'I will be who I am' (Exod 3:14). R. Judah the Pious frequently included these words in his formulae, see, for example, MS Oxford, Bodleian Library Or. 1531, fol. 115–86 presents many cures that incorporate this phrase.

<sup>155</sup>See n 123.

<sup>156</sup>See n 124.

<sup>157</sup>See n 125.

<sup>158</sup>See n 128.

<sup>159</sup>See n 121.

<sup>160</sup>Hildegard recommends a similar cure: *Causae et Curae*, 'Item de menstrui retentione', 185–87 (liber iv, 393), 228

\*75 it is still alive, and hang it on her neck and it will help. And it is good whether damp or  
 \*76 dry. Another one: Take the strap from her husband that he ties his hips with (i.e. belt)  
 \*77 and she shall belt herself with this day and night. Another one: She should eat fennel –  
 \*78 the inner leaves or from the seed – immediately when she feels any sickness with the  
 \*79 child. She needs to eat this for it has been tried a number of times and it is vital. Another  
 \*80 one: They give her the debris that is found on the butcher’s knife (89c) to drink.  
 \*81 FOR A PREGNANT WOMAN WHO ALWAYS BLEEDS: Hang a gold dinar around her  
 \*82 neck and it will help (89C). FOR A WOMAN WHO HAS CONCEIVED BUT HAS NOT  
 \*83 PREVIOUSLY GIVEN BIRTH: Take the stomach of a rabbit and . . . of a bear, grind *amo-*  
 \*84 *nico*<sup>161</sup> and myrrh<sup>162</sup> well, and mix them [together] with butter and put it in water when  
 \*85 washing before eating and prepare this cure for her for two consecutive days. FOR  
 \*86 WHITENESS IN THE EYE: Grind two pomegranate seeds with a little nutmeg,<sup>163</sup> mix them  
 \*87 with breast milk and apply [this mixture] on the eye, and it will be cured. FOR A WOMAN  
 \*88 WHOSE MILK HAS DRIED UP: Write ‘*abkusia*’ and ‘*absusia*’ on her right breast and ‘And  
 \*89 the famine was great in the land’ (Gen 12: 1)<sup>164</sup> on the left one. FOR A HEADACHE:  
 \*90 Place *bran* in strong vinegar and then cook them together, place the whole mixture on  
 \*91 the patient’s head until his head sweats underneath it. This will help him, God willing.  
 \*92 FOR STICKS [sic] IN THE EYE: Take sap from the *silwurtz*<sup>165</sup> plant, as it is known in  
 \*93 Ashkenaz, place [drops of it] in his eye. This will help.

<sup>161</sup>Unidentified.

<sup>162</sup>For medical uses of myrrh, see Hildegard, *de myrrha* LS, I, CLXXVI, 1197.

<sup>163</sup>On the use of nutmeg, *de nuce muscata*, see Hildegard, LS, I, XXI, 1139.

<sup>164</sup>Unidentified terminology. The quotation is actually from Gen. 33:1.

<sup>165</sup>Güdemann, *Geschichte*, refers to this cure as well, I:172.