

MEDICINE CHAPTER

FOR

STONE-AGE DIVAS & the Origins of Civilizations

Medicine

The very word '*medicine*' contains a mother syllable, 'me'. Because the primary syllable, 'ma', can be traced farthest back into Indo-European prehistory than almost any other word in our language, I have used it to trace female origins. (1) The word 'mamma' simply imitates the sound of an infant suckling at its mother's breast. In Latin, 'mammatis' means 'of the breast'; and nearly every language in the world contains a similar 'mother' word. The word for 'father' shows no such ancient lineage, telling us that paternity itself was not clearly understood for many millennia; and that, in fact, the concept of 'fatherhood' is a relative newcomer in terms of human evolutionary thinking.

Mother Syllable

Even after the development of complex, diverse languages, there was no standardized spelling for the simple reason that there was no reading or writing, as we know it today, until about 3000BC. When writing began, the words were written as the scribes heard them. Therefore, each word had many possible spellings depending on the dialect of the speaker; just as in our own country today, the same word will sound quite differently depending on where the speaker lives: New England, Philadelphia, Tennessee, New York, Oklahoma. The speakers might all sound differently although saying the exact same word.

The mother syllable can also sound differently in different areas of the world; and can be written (because it was used before standardization) as ma, me, mi, mo, mu. The German word for 'mother' is 'mutter'.

Women: The First Doctors

The word, 'medicine' then, comes from the mother syllable and the Latin 'medere' which means 'to heal'. The earliest healers and doctors were Mothers: Medicine Women, Wisewomen, Shamanesses, and Wiccans. They were the foragers, the 'gatherers' of the Paleolithic Age. Everything organic in the immediate environment came under their scrutinizing eyes. Through trial and error and by observing the animals' feeding behaviors they learned what was good to eat and what was poisonous. They learned which plants could heal and which could kill.

They also learned about hallucinogens: mushrooms, cacti, roots, and seeds that could produce a trance-like state when ingested. In a trance, they believed they could travel freely between worlds: animal, natural, supernatural. This is probably where the common image of a witch riding a broomstick originated. Moldy rye bread eaten in extreme hunger may have contained a hallucinogenic mold called 'ergot', which gave the psychedelic sensation of flying. Since white bread was as yet unknown in the Middle Ages, Martha Corey of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and millions of women like her, may have been

burned at the stake for merely eating moldy rye bread during the mass hysteria of the witch hunts.

As shamankas, or shamanesses, women in antiquity were responsible for re-opening the supposedly blocked energy channels of the sick person. My Chinese acupuncturist doctor uses this same principle today: she unlocks the vital 'chi' energy as it follows certain meridians (pathways) in my body. The meridians were charted thousands of years ago by sages who very well may have been women. There are no written records found from this period in China, although the Chinese were already using ideograms (symbolic writings) in Antiquity.

Many indigenous peoples have the belief in a cosmic energy that permeates the universe as well as each individual. Ancient Egyptians called it 'Heka', the strong spiritual force that was later deified by the invading Greeks and personified as the Goddess Hecate. Belief in the healing 'Hecate'- power spread to the Romans and northward to many Germanic tribes.

Because the letter 'C' had many pronunciations, such as k, sh, ch, s, or x, the powerful Goddess' name became 'Hexate' in Germany. The women (and men) doctors who healed in her name became known as 'hexers'. As a child, I lived near Germans who had settled in Pennsylvania and were called the Pennsylvania Dutch erroneously (a corruption of 'Deutsch' which meant German). They practiced the folk medicine of their foremothers and used 'hex' signs on their barns to protect their animals. These were highly stylized symbols used by the women healers of the Stone Age. The symbols of the Goddess Hecate were believed to contain potent healing magic; thus the name, "Hex" signs. The German settlers in Berks County, Pennsylvania were excellent herbalists and veterinarians.

This same healing energy (which pervaded the universe and was believed to be especially concentrated in certain plants) was known as 'huna' in Hawaii. Hindu yogis called it 'Kundalini'. Medicine women, priestesses, yogis, as well as later priests and shamans, all healed, transferred, and balanced the life force often transferring their more abundant supply to the sick person, whose life energy was believed to be depleted. In this type of healing, the tribal belief system (religion) and medicine were closely aligned for millennia. This is what today we call 'holistic' healing: that individuals and their mind, body and environment form a seamless whole or holistic system. This alignment of mind, emotions, beliefs, and body has made a comeback in recent years in the charismatic movements of many churches, as well as in the field of alternative medicine.

Another name for 'alternative medicine is holistic. This healing system utilizes natural plants and herbs, oils and massage, and many other ancient techniques from various cultures. So, in effect, medicine as come full circle returning to its prehistoric roots in the plant world at the very dawn of humanity in the Old Stone Age or Paleolithic phase c. 200,000BC and earlier.

By the time Homosapiens were living in Africa, Israel, Syria, China, Hungary, Spain, France, Algeria, England, Java, Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, these groups of early humans were nomadic; but seemed to stay (3) 'within a certain territory whose resources they knew intimately and thus could exploit with maximum effectiveness.'" These early humans were gatherers and hunters. The women left the campsite daily to search the surrounding area for edibles. There are still primitive hunters and (4) gatherers living this way today in Australia, Africa, Japan, Panama, Central America, the Andes, the South Seas, the Himalayas, the Arctic, the Philippine Islands, and Brazil, although their numbers are almost depleted. The plant world was always the domain of the women; and their tools were a sharpened stick or antlers for digging in hard soil and a sharpened

stone for cutting apart roots and tubers. In the course of their daily foraging expeditions, the women came to know the habitat, growing cycles and composition of every growing thing. So it is not surprising that they also discovered the medicinal, healing properties of the plants they handled every day and brought back to their hearth fires. Nothing escaped their scrutiny; as their observations and efficiency as providers of food and medicine determined whether or not they and their children survived. To women of the Stone Age knowledge of the difference between edible and non-edible vegetation meant life or death, as they and their children depended for survival upon the edibles they gathered in their daily foraging expeditions. They often traveled great distances in search of food, usually with an infant and toddler in tow. For even though the men spent a great deal of time planning and preparing for a hunt, there was never a guarantee that they would find an animal, or that the men would have the skill and the weapons needed to catch and to kill it. We don't even know for sure that the hunters carried their prey back to the campsite and shared it with the women, children, and elders. They may just as well have eaten it on the spot like most male animal carnivores do. Therefore, even in societies where hunting was believed to have been practiced, the women's food-gathering still provided as much as eighty percent of the clan's food in many cases. There would hardly have been any driving motivation for the men to feel responsible for the children and the women who birthed them; for there was no concept of paternity or knowledge of the male's role in impregnation.

Because the survival of the clan or tribe often depended on the women foragers' skills in seeking out the edibles in the local environment, the women had to memorize a great deal of oral knowledge passed down from mothers to daughters before the advent of writing. The women had to develop keen eyesight and accurate discriminatory abilities in choosing the plants they would carry back to the campsite while also carrying a child. Through close observation, experimentation, and an accumulated store of knowledge passed on orally down through the generations, female foragers also became familiar with the medicinal properties of the plants they knew so well as foods.

Once again, it was the mothers who would have had the greatest incentive to find a way to lessen pain. The agony of childbirth was surely apparent to those early gatherers, hunters, and foragers. Screams of pain can go on for hours, even days, as is the case of problem births; and this most likely would have upset the equilibrium of the entire clan, making everyone tense and anxious. Women would have been highly motivated to experiment with pain relievers or hallucinogens available in the natural environment to overcome the pain of childbirth. This may have been how narcotic substances were first found and exploited. Relieving the pain of injured hunters would also have been a priority; as well as relieving the suffering caused by accidents and aging such as a broken leg, impacted tooth, burst appendix, arthritis, kidney stones, etc. We know that hallucinogens have been found and used by every indigenous tribe; and this may have been their first use; that is, relief from intractable pain. Substances like marijuana, pulque, peyote, hallucinogenic mushrooms, fermented beverages of all kinds (saliva was the first 'yeast') were the first drugs that induced a trance-like state or stupor in which pain was not present. Later, these hallucinogenic drugs became part of religious rituals, pointing to the early connection between healing (medicine) and religion.

The earliest known doctors were also the practitioners of religion. They were the priestesses of the (5) earliest known religion, the religion of the Bear Goddess. They were also the "witches" and wizards of Wicca, the ancient household religion of the Stone Age, and priestess-physicians of the old Fertility Cult religion of the Neolithic, the wisewomen and "cunning men" of Paganism. They include the Shamanka and Shamans of indigenous tribal religions, medicine women and medicine men of Native Americans. All functioned by combining religion and the healing ceremony in a single whole worldview. These medico-religious ceremonies are still to be found today in many indigenous cultures including

tribes in Africa, the Philippines, Chile, Brazil, and Siberia. To this day the dress donned by a male Siberian shaman for a healing ceremony includes attaching "ornamental, symbolic breasts" to the front of his robe, pointing to the female origins of medicine in Siberia, as elsewhere in the ancient world.

The medicine woman of the Mapuchi Indians of Chile is called a "machi", a mother-syllable word (as is their tribal name Mapuchi, in deference to their clan mother,) derived from the mammary glands of mothers, perhaps the very first doctors and nurses.

Medicine in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia

In ancient Mesopotamia (present-day Iran and Iraq), charms, religion, and magic were often part of a healing ritual. Because germs were unknown before the invention of the microscope, due to their invisibility to the naked eye, the cause of illness was often attributed to 'bad air' or malevolent spirits present in the home or village. The 'bad air' concept was amazingly perceptive five thousand years ago as we now know that many viruses are airborne and indeed make the air 'bad' for us to inhale.

Ancient Egypt provided a wealth of information about early medicine because the Egyptians kept meticulous records, many of which survived to this day. From the existing papyri we know that there were many female doctors in Egypt before 2000 BC. The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus (named for its' finder) contained magical incantations that were probably part of a much earlier oral tradition. The voice and the hands, as well as the mind, may have been the first medical 'tools'. Women, especially mothers, may very well have first practiced this type of ancient medicine. Surely each of us can recall an instance in our childhood when a mother or grandmother soothed our injury with her voice and hands and made the hurting stop; or at least lessened it a great deal. The healing hand was an important part of ancient medicine and survives today in jewelry as a stylized open hand worn as a pendant. I have one in my own vintage jewelry collection. It is a small gold filigree open hand made in the Middle East, possibly Iran or Iraq (ancient Mesopotamia). This type of hand 'fetish' or 'charm' is also called *the hand of Fatima* or *the hand of God*; and is meant to offer protective magic to the wearer. Biblical authors who described Jesus practicing it two thousand years ago in the Holy Land documented laying-on-of- hands, as this healing modality is known. Today we might call it massage or a 'healing touch'.

The voice was also used extensively as a healing 'tool' in Antiquity. In ancient Egypt, the voice of the priestess/priest, local wise woman/doctor, or magi/magician would be called upon to give a command to the patient in an authoritative voice. As 'magical' incantations, these verbal commands invoked powerful Goddesses and Gods to rid the patient of disease. Preventive medicine, c. 3200BC, was mainly magical. Ancient Egyptians believed 'bad air' or an 'evil wind' caused infection; and in a sense, they were right. Airborne viruses often cause pulmonary diseases. The magical spells used to counteract the ever present 'bad air' (viruses) were a combination of prayers, chants, blessings, affirmations, visualizations, role-playing, and invocations. All of these techniques invoked a supernatural deity; that is, the authoritative command (8) brought the deities "into existence and also controlled them" to provide, for instance, the cure of a stomachache. Egyptian healers/magicians/priestesses also used the homeopathic principle of fighting 'like with like'.

Scorpion Goddess, Sarget, means 'she who causes one to breathe'. She would thus be persuaded to use her good, or strong power against scorpion bites, which were an ever-present hazard and often fatal. But other, more practical remedies were available to the patient as well. The first line of defense most probably would have been the local wise

woman. She would have used all of her senses to make a diagnosis and determine which bodily organ or system was causing the problem. Touch: she would have taken the patient's pulse, and in the case of a wound, felt to see how hot it was and whether there was fever. Sight: the skin, eyes, tongue, nails would have been closely examined, as well as any obvious injury or discoloration. Hearing: by the sound of a baby's cry, a midwife would be able to tell if it would live or not. The cough or wheezing or the congested chest of a sick person, as well as the heartbeat, also give clues. Smell: Infections always have an identifiable smell to a trained nose. After a diagnosis the patient would then have had access to both practical medicines as well as magico-religious rituals; what we would call traditional medicine and alternative medicine.

Magic was only one part of the interrelated knowledge that a well-to-do Egyptian matron would have had in her library of scrolls, rolled up, and kept in jars. Egyptians saw everything as connected; and magic would have been connected to religion, as well as connected to medicine, nature, and animals. A 'Lady of the House' who could read, probably would have done the doctoring for her large household staff as well as for family, friends, and neighbors. The 'Lady of the Manor' in Medieval Europe did this as well. Those who could read and write were rare in pre-literate societies and were considered magical for their ability to understand the enigmatic markings that we know today as writing. (8) In her book, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, Geraldine Pinch wrote that "literate European housewives compiled household books on remedies for a wide variety of ailments" as well as recipes for cosmetics, from the early sixteenth to nineteenth century AD. It is probable that housewives in Egypt did the same.

Affirmations in Ancient Egypt

Affirmations were also used in ancient Egyptian healing rituals, just as they are today in holistic or alternative healing sessions. Three thousand years ago priestesses, nurses, and/or priest-physicians would affirm to the patient that the desired effect was already achieved, in a firm and convincing tone of voice, repeating the affirmation over and over to convince the deity as well as the patient.

The afficiant in magico-medical papyri of the earliest Egyptians was often identified with the Goddess Isis, which could point to women as the earliest physicians in Egypt. It is logical to assume that women doctors would have been the ones most likely to align themselves with the female deity, in this case, the Goddess Isis. Other deities frequently mentioned in later texts, as 'divine sponsors' were Rae, Horus, and (9) Thoth. The "ideal medical practitioner" had "the authority to speak in the name of the gods" and goddesses. The practitioner's magico-religious affirmations were probably used to impart authority and confidence to the patient taking medicine. Today, affirmations are still used as part of a holistic health regimen. "Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better" is one that I have used and found helpful. In the ancient Leiden Papyrus, the mother giving birth was identified with the Goddess Hathor and affirmed that it was Hathor herself giving birth. This affirmation "chanted over and over again, gave psychological support to the mother who may have been experiencing a particularly prolonged or difficult labor."

Other 'magico-medical' aids used in Egypt were amulets made of special minerals, in special shapes, inscribed with special words. Many were found in children's graves indicating a special concern for their welfare and survival. There seems to have been great concern for the health of women as well; many of the medical texts recovered dealt with gynecology. Women also faced enormous risks in childbirth in the ancient world and would have been needed extra protection. The amulets signified medicine in the form of protection. The 'heka' (spiritual force personified by the Goddess Hecate that created and

protected life, was thought to reside in rare and unusual objects: shells from the Red Sea, river pebbles shaped like a pregnant woman, cowry shells shaped like the female vulva. A steatite figurine of a young girl wearing a cowry shell belt is believed to date from the eighteenth century BC in Egypt. Cowry shells that resemble vulvas were worn in many areas of the world in Antiquity, strung on cords and worn as girdles: possibly to promote fertility or ease menstrual cramps and the agony of childbirth. They are still worn today in parts of Sudan; and some even survive from Antiquity, strung on leather strips. Some amulets were made of semi-precious stones in the shape of the Goddess Taweret and other deities.

The most well-known of all Egyptian amulets is the scarab beetle which is still reproduced on jewelry today. My antique scarab bracelet of jasper, jade, lapis, amber, and turquoise is one of my most cherished pieces of jewelry. The scarab design represented the deity Khepri, the God of Becoming; and retained its popularity and power well into Roman times, circa AD 380. Actually, it has never gone out of fashion; it is still treasured and is one of the most widely identifiable symbols of the ancient world. Amulets also took the form of knots tied in linen or leather cords to bind up/stop negative energy (spirits). Cord has always been valuable to humans; making string or thread a sacred ritual object. Strings or cords were often depicted with Goddesses, symbolizing fate or human destiny to the Egyptians, Romans, Germans, and Greeks. Knotted cords are still worn by teenagers today as 'friendship' bracelets; perhaps in the same amulet, protective sense that they were worn thousands of years ago. Amulets in the shapes of eyes were also used to counteract the 'evil eye' of negative persons who tried to arm superstitious believers. Curved horns, pagan symbol of the Horned God, the male generative principle, is still used as a fetish or protective amulet in agricultural areas like rural Italy and Sicily. Belief in the 'evil eye' also persisted well into this century in rural (11) Europe and the Middle East. In Egypt, "the protective power of the fearsome goddess who was the Eye of Ra" was behind the wearing of eye amulets or pendants. Pendants were thought to serve as shields against evil spirits (germs). These were made of stone, carnelian, amethyst, jasper, limestone, faience, feldspar, gold, silver, turquoise, glass, linen, and papyrus. They were shaped as Goddesses, Gods, animals, fingers, hands, falcons, turtles, feet, faces, arms, pillars (phallus), ears of corn, pairs of eyes, and scarabs, as well as other shapes that were blessed in the temples. The ancient Egyptians loved symbols and invested them with much power and meaning. Perhaps the equivalent today would be religious medals blessed by a priest in church and rosaries worn by the sick or troubled. Religion seems to have been linked to medicine since time immemorial. The Egyptian deities most often appealed to, on behalf of the sick, were Amun-Ra, Thoth, and Goddess Hathor, 'who listens to prayers', as well as the all-powerful, beloved Goddess Isis. Catholics of today might pray to St. Jude (patron of hopeless cases), Our Lady of Lourdes, (reputed to perform miracle cures), Our Lady of Fatima, (another apparition of Mary), Our Lady of the Snows (Mary), Our Lady of Knock, Ireland, and St. Teresa.

Because the ancient Egyptians left a legacy of written records reaching far back into prehistory, I have used their civilization as an example of the types of services ancient doctors may have provided in the late Stone Age. Mothers may have been the first doctors because of the need for ways to make their babies well when they were sick. A crying, unhappy, uncomfortable infant in pain was certainly an effective incentive to cure the baby, just as it is today. The mothers would have needed substances to pacify a sleepless baby, to ease the pain and itching of insect bites and rashes, to reduce a fever, to halt diarrhea and vomiting, to kill body lice, mites, intestinal worms, and parasites, to cure constipation and colic, and the myriad other irritations that make babies cry to get our attention. The mothers' intimate knowledge of their own bodies during menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation; as well as their intimate knowledge of the bodies of their infants and children, and the plant world from which the first medicines derived, led

me to believe that women would have had the strongest motivation to discover and practice medicine.

Because I am writing of women's contributions to the human race, I will not include men's involvement in medicine, which has been well documented and highly respected. So well respected in fact, that physicians have attained god-like status in almost every society. This is well deserved; but the time frame of which I write did not include much of the scientific knowledge we have today, especially the knowledge of the male's role in reproduction.

It is quite possible that, in humanity's infancy, women were seen as god-like or even as Goddesses because of their ability to create new life, bleed at will (men weren't able to menstruate), and produce a life-sustaining beverage (milk) from their breasts. Mothers and their infants may have been central to the clan; having a baby was probably the most admirable feat that anyone (man or woman) could perform. Later, killing would come to be seen as the most incredibly brave act. But for millennia, women would have been held in awe for their magical ability to create new life and breast milk to sustain it. The mother-doctors would have known from information passed down to them orally from previous generations of mothers, how to survive the serious risks of childbirth. They could have transferred this inherited knowledge to the curing of men's illnesses as well. Today we refer to this instinctive female knowledge as 'old wives' tales' or folk medicine. Even though we may dismiss these old-fashioned remedies, from our lofty perch of 20th century science, it is well to remember that much of it worked, or we wouldn't be here today to question it. There was a hidden world of female magical, religious, and practical medicine that has not been well documented in standard literary texts because the medicines themselves did not survive, being organic; and because our ancient ancestresses did not leave written records. All societies were still pre-literate; but the women practitioners of the healing arts had their own system of memory aids (such as knots in string, beads, symbols, pebbles) to help them remember one herb from another and its use. Masks, female figurines, sustrums (tambourine drums), charms, amulets, textiles, pieces of knotted strings and cloths are found frequently in archaeological digs; but the written texts that would validate the medicinal use of such objects have not been found since there was no writing as we know it before the Bronze Age. However, we do know that someone was performing successful cranial surgery in the period preceding the Bronze Age, the Neolithic (farming) Age of 5100-4900BC. In the French region of Alsace, the skeleton of a fifty year old male was recovered showing the removal of a rectangle of bone from the top of the (10) cranium using "flint or metal blades by drilling a series of small holes, making intersecting incisions, or scraping through the bone." This operation is called 'trepanation' and is still performed today in certain African communities including western Kenya where it is done to relieve pressure from skull fractures. In the magical-religious context of the ancient world of medicine in which women played the central part, it would have been done to cure headaches, epilepsy, tumors, or mental illness.

Women may well have been surgeons seven thousand years ago. In removing babies through emergency cesarean operations, Neolithic midwives may have learned a great deal about surgical procedures. We know that the cranial surgery of at least one patient in the Neolithic Age was successful, because the skull showed evidence of long term healing, meaning the patient survived the ordeal, was cared for by other clan members, and lived several years longer.

Medieval Medicine

In this chapter I will attempt to list some of the natural remedies that were recorded in the medieval period, c. AD 1400, and which were probably used centuries earlier. Peasant women in Medieval Europe, besides tending the fields, weaving the textiles, caring for the

animals, and bearing children, had the added responsibility of caring for the sick. A widow might (12) be hired as a nurse, "to gather herbs, brew them, and care for a sick wife." Women were the pharmacists, nurses, and physicians for their families. They "used the plants savin and rue to sweeten the air and to keep away the fleas and lice that plagued the family during the long winter months when they could not bathe. Peasant women knew how to mix the juice of the houseleek and sage with the water to ease the itching and pain of the insect bites." While they did not have access to diagnostic tests, they knew which diseases to treat by the presence of certain symptoms": that is, fever, cough, cloudy eyes, headaches, abdominal pain, swelling bleeding, discharges, rashes. They relied on intuition and knowledge passed from generation to generation. They could, like the women in thirteenth century France, call on the services of the village wisewoman, an elder acknowledged to have special skill with herbs, who knew rituals and prayers that could cure." Medical wisewomen (also called 'witches') were respected for their vast knowledge of plants, herbs and palliatives. *Before there were drugs people turned to nature to cure every ailment.* Healing was a specialized art, and the wisewoman 'doctor' had to have a wide range of practical solutions to every physical (and often spiritual or psychological) problem. Of course, the archetypal feminine therapies of tender care, gentle healing touch, massage, and empathy were useful as well. Midwives were especially valued for their specialized knowledge of childbirth with its attendant hazards. Midwives and wisewomen healers were usually paid using the barter system before money came into common use among the peasantry. A blanket, length of woven fabric, eggs, cheese, wine, a metal pot, anything metal such as a tool might have been the method of payment. Sometimes an animal would be given in payment for medical services. Sometimes the services were gratis as the peasant population worldwide often existed at the barest subsistence level. But all of this changed drastically when the universities began educating men in the science of medicine and its practice became financially rewarding. By denying women access to the universities and by forbidding anyone but university-trained physicians to practice medicine, the wisewomen were effectively barred from servicing their country folk and even their animals.

For the medicine-women, 'witches', and 'hexers' were the earliest veterinarians, serving animals as well as people in their ancient, time-honored ways. Animals were essential to human survival; as they were killed and eaten in the long winter months when there were no crops and farmers had limited resources for preserving food. In Western Europe, November was known as 'Blodmonath' or 'Blood Month' when the household animals were slaughtered so that they wouldn't die of starvation in winter (before it was known that cattle could survive on hay and other dried grasses). The tradition of feasting in November, which we call 'Thanksgiving' comes from this ancient ritual; as there would have been plenty of fresh meat available for neighbors and kin when an animal was butchered.

Midwifery and doctoring was essential for the animals' health; for it would have meant that the family would survive as well. The ironic twist of fate is that these same 'witches' (wisewomen, midwives, medicine-women, hexers) were forbidden to practice the very science they had discovered and shared freely (by writing manuals of their (13) herbal remedies and techniques). Trotula, a physician from Salerno, Italy wrote the first published European medical guide, *Concerning the Disorders of Women*, which was widely used in both manuscript and printed version into the sixteenth century. She had very good advice for women, like sewing tears in the vagina with silk thread and using poultices for breast abscesses. But having written such excellent texts, midwives had given over their last advantage."

The 'new' medical specialty of gynecology was created (14) which excluded women by effectively barring them from the 'guilds, academies, university degrees, patronage, and licensing." Church and state, working hand in hand "systematically excluded women from

all but the least prestigious areas of practice. Only in the late nineteenth century would women again be admitted to the practice of medicine."

The Church, during the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, decided that the 'witches' or medicine-women who had inherited the art of making 'simples' (herbal remedies) from the Stone Age, were 'heretics' and no longer qualified to practice their ancient skills. With the cooperation of the rulers of Western Europe, the British Isles, Ireland, and Scandinavia, medicine became an exclusive brotherhood; and an extremely profitable profession.

Midwives especially were the targets of the wrath of the Medieval Inquisitors. Because of their knowledge of reproduction midwives were able to help women regulate the size of their families by the use of contraceptive Herb's, spermicides, and cervical barriers. As a last resort, they could perform abortions.(15) Peasant women in Europe used "douches, purges, spermicides like salt, honey, oil, tar, mint juice, cabbage seed, some abortifacients like lead and ergot (moldy rye grain) were effective but dangerous. With enough lead ingested, a woman became permanently sterile."

As Anderson and Zinsser write in *A History of Their Own*, desperate pregnant women also tried "douches or teas of rosemary, myrtle, coriander, willow leaves, balsam, myrrh, clover seeds, parsley, and animal urine." It is doubtful if any of these substances succeeded in dislodging the fetus; but one can get a feeling of the level of desperation in peasant women of the Middle Ages whose meager two acre land allotment could not possibly support many children and also pay the wealthy landowner's taxes. Vaginal barriers such as beeswax and linen rags were hardly more effective. Many actions to prevent impregnation were also tried: jumping up and down after intercourse, drinking cold liquids, boiling herbs and letting the hot steam enter the cervix, opening the cervix with a spindle, drinking vinegar, and also massaging the abdomen strenuously.

Contraception in Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome

The oldest records (15) of contraceptive techniques are found in the medical papyri of nineteenth to eleventh centuries BC. There were vaginal barriers in use (tampons) that were used to prevent the sperm from entering; and "when the tampon was saturated with acacia gum, honey, or crocodile feces", it was believed to kill the sperm. Greco-Roman women relied on many contraceptive potions. One recipe (all prescriptions were originally women's recipes, prepared at their hearths) called for "a concoction of rue, (a widely used abortifacient), attar of roses and aloe." This was certainly an improvement over crocodile feces: but it may not have been as effective. Another mixture called for "panax juice, rue seed, and cyrenaican juice blended with wax and served in wine." Still another recipe/prescription consisted of "wallflower seed, myrtle, myrrh, and white pepper dissolved in wine, to be drunk for three days." Another mixture called for "sour honey with gilly flower seeds and cow parsnip". All were used both to prevent conception and to induce abortions. They were said to "lead to severe irritations in the head and digestive tract as well as to vomiting".

While these recipe prescriptions may seem ridiculous from our twentieth century vantage point, we can plainly see that the women of 330 BC in Rome and Greece, women of 1800 BC in Egypt and Mesopotamia (present day Iran and Iraq), as well as women of AD 1400 in Europe, had the same concerns as women of today: how to control conception so that the children brought forth would be welcome and able to survive in a frightening world full of hazards: infant mortality, starvation, fatal insect bites (scorpions and spiders in Egypt), pestilence and plagues (before antibiotics). Unfortunately, many of these early contraceptives and abortifacients did not work, and infants were born to single mothers as

well as to married women who were forbidden to keep their newborns as in parts of China today. Infanticide, the last resort, was practiced from earliest recorded history. It wasn't called "infanticide", it went under the euphemism of "exposure". The newborn was placed on a raft of rushes and floated on water, which was believed to transport it to the local divinity in Egypt and Middle East and Ireland in prehistoric ages. In areas with no rivers or streams nearby, the infant was abandoned on a hillside and could be rescued by infertile couples.

In China, it was said that midwives prepared a box of ashes to be placed (16) next to the birthing bed. If the newborn was female, she was placed face down in the ashes. In many countries, females were less desirable than boys because of economic conditions. Girls would eventually require marriage dowries, which could bankrupt a poor family living on the edge of survival.

Another drastic measure taken in the Middle Ages in England and Europe, was to pay a wet nurse in the country to breast feed the newborn; and then stop the payments. In this way, the birth parents were removed from the death and the loss was less profoundly felt. Unwanted pregnancies have plagued women from the beginning of time. It is only recently (in evolutionary times) that medicine has been able to offer a foolproof (almost) contraceptive, as in the pill. Perhaps if women's experimentation with herbal spermicides had not been rudely interrupted by the "Witches' Holocaust" of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries AD in the western world when almost every woman with medical knowledge was killed, women today would have much healthier alternatives for their reproductive choices and would not have had to resort to hotly debated abortions which are always done as a last resort and with a very heavy heart.

The Book of Simple Medicine

(19) In Medieval Europe, AD 1151, the abbess of a convent in Bingen, Germany, an "extraordinarily gifted Catholic nun, Hildegard, wrote treatises on medicine and natural science. In her *Book of Simple Medicine* she listed almost three hundred herbs that were useful for healing, telling when to pick them, and giving their medicinal uses", writes Anderson and Zinsser in *A History of Their Own*. "She described animals, plants, and rocks in her natural science book. In the *Book of Simple Medicine* she catalogued forty seven different diseases speculating on their causes and possible cures."

Although German was her native tongue, she wrote in Latin, the universal language of the Roman Catholic Church. She used ancient as well as twelfth century AD texts as her sources, explaining that "disease came from disruptions to the body's equilibrium, and suggested insightful remedies "centuries ahead of her time, including the circulation of the blood, the ties between sugar and diabetes, nerve action to the brain, and contagion". Her medical treatises were in addition to songs, symphonies, poetry, and "illuminated manuscripts describing her visions of the harmony of the universe, including the inter-relationships and interactions between human beings and the cosmos". She was widely acclaimed and traveled long distances to lecture to nuns, monks, priests, popes, and emperors.

But clerical attitudes to women in the Catholic Church became more rigid and repressive by the twelfth century and religious women were advised to keep silence and remain cloistered behind convent walls, according to Anderson and Zinsser. So, one of the few avenues of learning and accomplishment open to Medieval women; the abbeys, priories, and convents of the Catholic world, effectively shut them up for hundreds of years until

the sixteenth century when once again, educated religious sisters would be awarded the title "Doctor of Letters", but not the power that went along with it.

Nature's Medicine Chest

Women whose domain was always the plant world since the beginning of time, learned to exploit every organic substance in their environment for its healing, curing and pain killing potential. Women were highly valued for their medical expertise in ancient societies before medicine became a highly paid male specialization. Women used nature's own medicine chest, the natural world all around them. Even insects were used if they could be of help in treating disease. Leeches are walking chemical factories that are still used today to eat infectious blood in a wound that is resistant to antibiotics and penicillin. In days of yore, people would go into streams barelegged and let the leeches cover their legs, then knock them off into containers and sell them to patients, physicians, midwives, etc. Tree fungi was used as an antibiotic for treating bladder ailments and tuberculosis. Pieces of birch fungus threaded on fur strips were found with the remarkable preserved body of the "Iceman", who lived during the Copper Age, 3300BC, and whose body was found in the Alps several years ago. He is believed by scientists to have been a traveler or hunter caught in a blizzard in the Alps fifty three hundred years ago, carrying the fungus strip in case of injury. His body was incased in ice for over five thousand years, and has provided researchers with a wealth of information. Fungus Mycelium is a leather-like layer under the bark of certain dead trees. It was also used by the aboriginal Ainu of Japan as an antibiotic after surgery.

Sphagnum moss has also long been noted for its healing properties. The Inuit of Alaska and other Native American tribes used it. Native Eskimo/Inuit religious healers of today (17) use a falsetto voice, high pitched like a woman's, to reach the realm of the supernatural, perhaps in imitation of earlier times when their women evoked the Goddess of Sea Mammals who alone had the power to ease human suffering.

In England, bathing in peat bogs was believed to alleviate rheumatism. Warm springs were used by Native American warriors who bathed in them to heal their wounds hundreds of years ago. Warm Springs, Georgia, was thought to cure polio and many patients went there to bathe in the curative springs, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

One of the best known medicines, aspirin, is derived from the bark of the willow tree, which was probably chewed for pain relief in Antiquity, although there has been some evidence that ancient medicine women knew how to make pills and rolled them by hand. Today the willow bark is chemically reproduced in laboratories as aspirin, a substance with many beneficial uses. We know that Neolithic people chewed gum made from the sap of the birch tree, c. 4000BC. Pieces of gum with tooth marks were found in an alpine community on Lake Zurich, Switzerland, where a Neolithic village prospered. Digitalis, a heart regulator, was derived from foxglove, a common garden flower; and belladonna provided hyoscyamine, both still in use today. The sap of the aloe plant, a succulent, was known to relieve burns and I still use it today on skin rashes or burns. I keep an aloe plant on my windowsill in the kitchen and I can have instant pain relief by snipping off a piece of leaf and letting the juice soothe my burn. Marigolds are still used in lotions to soothe the skin. The well-known drug Valium derives from the root of the valerian flower. Ancient women knew that it paralyzed the nervous system and could be used in small doses to ease the pain of childbirth. They also knew that in small doses it had a tranquilizing effect, the purpose for which valium is used today. St. John's Wort is another common garden weed used for centuries by healers. Today it is used to treat depression and anxiety in .3% extract sold in drugstore. Researchers are also looking into its possibilities for postponing

Alzheimer's disease. Its Latin botanical name is 'hypericum'. One-fourth of all drugs manufactured today comes from the plant world and long term studies are beginning in the United States to test the efficacy of many more plant derivatives.

"Twentieth century scientists are gaining respect for the peasant women's knowledge of when to pick, where to cut, and how to preserve the (18) many herbs, roots, and blossoms that she used. Changes in temperature and light from day to night, from season to season, alter the chemical properties of many plants" write Anderson and Zinsser, "for example, the yield of poppies is four times greater at nine AM than at nine PM". For every ache or illness there was a remedy to be found in nature, before the Age of Science. Childhood illnesses were especially threatening because infant mortality was very high and the children who survived infancy needed to live. A cough, fever, sore throat, or congestion were very serious and mothers or the village wisewomen needed to know what worked. Calamine tea, saltwater gargles, lemon juice mixed (19) with honey, even "inhaling the smoke of burning coltsfoot leaves" might be used as the first line of defense. Ginger or mint might be used for stomachaches.

My mother used to make a nasty preparation of a hot mustard plaster applied to my little girl's chest with a warm flannel cover. While the medicine was disagreeable, her loving ministrations were the 'healing touch' that always worked. The very fact that I am here today is a tribute to her tender, loving care and knowledge of natural remedies.

Oil of cloves would be soothingly applied to a throbbing tooth, warm camphor oil to a painful ear. A whiff of ammonia stopped a dizzy spell or faintness. In a pinch, lavender would also work. Gentian blue, derived from flowers, or wormwood killed pinworms when we played in the dirt and forgot to wash out hands then ate the tiny parasites which took up lodging in our intestines and itched unmercifully during the night.

For diarrhea, tansy leaf tea might offer relief from painful cramps. For menstrual cramps, a thimble full of rum or brandy was the preferred remedy before Lydia Pinkham's "Little Pills" for women's monthly problems appeared on druggists' shelves.

Of course many 'cures' were silly and may have worked simply by the power of suggestion. For instance, the day I rubbed a raw potato on the warts on my hand and then buried it. I swear it worked when I was twelve. And so did many other folk remedies. Though we may chuckle at them today from the lofty perch of superior scientific knowledge, we need to remember humans and animals were kept alive and their sufferings eased for millennia by medicinals or 'simples' prepared and administered by housewives. Without their knowledge and skill none of us would be here today. For this at least we owe them a wholehearted - Thank You!

It is with a sense of delight that I scan the shelves of "nature's remedies" now filling more and more shelves in the pharmacy and food store. It seems we are coming full circle (to use the metaphor of an ancient female womb symbol); back to an awareness of the potential health benefits of the plant world, an area our foremothers knew extremely well and used to full advantage for their families and communities. Their kitchen gardens were the first pharmacies, their recipes were the first prescriptions, their kitchen stoves (or earlier hearth fires) were the first research laboratories, the women themselves were the first doctors, chemists, scientists, veterinarians, herbalists, pharmacists, naturopaths, midwives, and surgeons.

Contemporary Curandera

Illustration: Contemporary Curandera in Peruvian Andes with her pharmacopoeia

Source: "Heart of the High Andes", McIntyre, Loren,
National Geographic, 1988



Women who became nuns in the Catholic Church of Europe, c. AD 900, may have opened the first hospitals. Hotel Dieu, (House of God), was begun by nuns in Paris AD 1240. Nuns often set aside rooms in their convents to house the sick, the homeless, the orphaned, and the elderly. From the thirteenth century on, in Italy and France, nuns received permission from the Pope to serve in public hospitals for the poor. Nurses are still called 'Sisters' in England even though they are not members of religious orders; probably a carryover from early times when priestesses were also physicians and religion and medicine were one.

In AD 1600, the Sisters of Charity had seventy convents in France and Poland; and were the principal nursing and charitable order of France. They nursed in hospitals as well as on the battlefields. Europe was constantly at war in the Middle Ages as independent principalities fought over territory and resources. Women of the French court c, AD 1616 sometimes used their own manor houses as orphanages and as centers for feeding the poor, much like our soup kitchens of today. Noblewomen founded monasteries and homes for the poor. Sometimes they used their fortunes to found a religious order, as did the Baroness de Chantal, Foundress of the Order of the Visitation, AD 1622. By the time of her death in 1641, she had founded eighty-eight convents throughout Europe, dedicated to nursing the sick and to teaching. (23)

In AD 1151, Abbess Hildegarde of Bingen, an extraordinarily gifted Catholic nun, wrote treatises on medicine and natural science as well as hymns, music, a symphony, poetry and many illuminated manuscripts on metaphysics based on insights received in her visions. In *Physics: Book of Simple Medicine* (23) she listed almost three hundred herbs telling when to pick them and giving their medicinal uses. In *Causae et Curae: Book of Medicine Carefully Arranged*, she catalogued forty-seven separate diseases and speculated on their causes and possible cures, explaining that disease came from disruptions to the body's equilibrium and suggested physiological insights centuries ahead of her time. She wrote about the circulation of the blood, the ties between sugar and diabetes, nerve action to the brain, and contagion. In my personal music collection, I have tapes of Hildegarde's music as interpreted by Richard Souther and sung by soprano Emily Van Evera at St. Andrews Church, Toddington, England. The tapes, "Vision" and "Feather on the Breath of God" have a haunting spirituality and other-worldly feeling that is communicated to the listener. In her own words, Hildegarde wrote, "Underneath all the texts, all the sacred psalms and canticles, these watery varieties of sounds and silences, terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating gently must somehow be felt in the pulse, ebb, and flow of the music that sings in me." (24) To listen to Hildegarde von Bingen's music is to have a profoundly healing experience.

Hildegarde's intelligence and mystical insights were recognized in her own time; and she traveled great distances to lecture to nuns, monks, priests, bishops, cardinals, popes, and emperors. By the thirteenth century, however, the Catholic hierarchy became more repressive towards women and the Pope wanted nuns to be completely sequestered in their cloisters. They were forbidden to travel long distances, as they sometimes did in order to make religious pilgrimages to sacred sites in the Holy Land and elsewhere. They were not allowed to teach boys, and were forbidden to attend the universities. Since physicians were by this time required to be university trained, Catholic women were effectively precluded from practicing medicine, even midwifery which had naturally been a specialty of women. However, wealthy noblewomen still continued to join the convents, abbeys, and priories. (25) The repressive attitude of some Church fathers towards women, and their efforts to force them out of the practice of medicine, even midwifery, would escalate through the centuries and become known as the Inquisition. With it came the witch hunts, and a horrendous persecution of the women who dared to help their villages with their knowledge of herbal folk medicine and birth control.

Women of Europe's royal families continued to found monasteries, convents, poorhouses, and hospitals. "They were Margaret of Bourgogne, Blanche of Castille, Queen of France, Elizabeth of Aragon, Queen of Portugal, Isabella, Queen of Spain, and Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII." (26)

By AD 1850, over one hundred thousand sisters nursed in prisons, military hospitals, and their own Catholic hospitals as well as public hospitals. Noble women and Catholic nuns may well have started the first infirmaries, clinics, hospitals, orphanages, old age homes, hospices, and abused women's shelters, homeless shelters, sanctuaries for political refugees, and schools.

Women as Surgeons

Although 'surgeon' had a quite different meaning in the Middle Ages, as 'one who specialized in bloodletting', it was definitely a very skilled specialty. Surgeons' guilds (unions) were open to women in France, Italy, England, and Germany from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. Female surgeons removed tumors, amputated limbs, and removed fetuses that had died during labor and were stuck in the birth canal. In Paris, by AD1292, women were listed as 'barber surgeons', (barbers sometimes performed medical functions as well). The French government allowed widows to perform as barber surgeons if this had been their husband's profession and they had been assistants. When the London Parliament licensed surgeons in AD 1511, there were thirty- seven English women listed as surgeons. During and up to this timeframe, thirteenth to seventeenth centuries AD, women practiced more than one medical specialty. Contemporaries called such women 'doctors'. "Some were trained by their university degreed husbands to set bones, act as midwives, and serve as physician's assistants. (27) In the seventeenth century Lady Anna Halkett acted as surgeon, midwife, and doctor to the King of Scotland". But as the universities graduated more men, guilds established regulations, and cities required licensing of doctors and women were eventually excluded from professional certification. The women doctors found themselves marginalized, even though they had much practical experiences of the vast knowledge of the curative powers of plants, and first hand knowledge of gynecology and obstetrics. Their cures were attested by the townspeople, palliative hands-on treatments of poultices, purges, and salves, and practices built their own reputations as healers. "To be a physician, to receive the degree of *Doctor of Physick* would eventually become an impossible dream for European women who had always taken primary responsibility for the medical care of their families" as well as caring for the soldiers injured in wars and tending to the sick of the villages. Housewives consulted their books of 'physick' or the village wisewomen. Eventually even the wisewomen were eliminated. They were called 'witches' and burned at the stake and their knowledge of medicine burned with them. The Papal edict that outlawed Wicca as heresy also outlawed surgery. This may be why surgeons called themselves 'barbers'.

"Not until the nineteenth century would women of even the highest rank have less hazardous experiences of childbearing." Queens and commoners alike, along with their infants, would begin to die in unprecedented numbers in childbirth and its complications. The chain of knowledge, forged in the Stone Age, and passed on from mother-to-daughter for millennia, had finally been broken and silenced by the patriarchs.

Goddesses of Medicine

Aja

She is the African Goddess of Health of the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. She is "a benevolent forest goddess who teaches her followers how to use medicinal herbs." The Goddess Oshun is also revered by Yorubans as a bestower of health on her devotees. As a water Goddess, "she cures the sick and imparts fertility with her sweet water." Healing waters have a long association with health. Today we call healing by water, 'hydrotherapy'. (28)

Anna Perenna

This Roman Goddess of Health and Medicine was known as the "Giver of Life, Health, and Abundance".(29) Her name, 'Anna', contained the sacred syllable 'an' which always signified 'abundance'. 'Anna' is also the feminine of 'annus', or year, from which the word 'annual' is derived. As 'Perenna', she personified the 'past year', or the 'perennial'. She was the bringer of health through an abundance of good food and herbs. She was already ancient in Roman times, and may have been an indigenous Etruscan deity. The Goddess Anna Purna or Anapurna of India has an identical legend, suggesting ancient contacts between India and Indo-Europeans.

Bona Dea

Her name means "Good Goddess" and she was the Goddess of Healing in the religion of the Roman women who were the only ones allowed to perform her rituals. However, men were able to receive healing from her through the efforts of the women in their lives.(30) As was typical of Earth Mother Goddesses, the serpent was her symbol. It is indicative of medicine's long female associations that the serpent, that ancient guardian of the women's grain fields, is still used today as the symbol of medicine, the Caduceus.

Corn Mother

Many Native American corn-growing tribes personified the corn as a woman; probably because women, the good-gatherers, also became the food-planters or farmers.

It was believed by the Cheyenne, Pawnee, Hidatsa, and Plains Indians, that the Corn Mother Goddess taught her people many things. She taught them how to plant corn, how to study the sky, and how to make medicine bundles. The study of the movements of the sun, moon, and stars was of crucial importance to farmers; and the one who was able to compute these cycles mathematically, achieved high status in the tribe. This person would have been an astrologer-priestess, or "medicine-woman". She would also have known which herbs to carry in her "doctor kit" or "medicine bundle", as it was called by Native Americans.

The legend of the Corn Mother clearly points to female origins of agriculture, astrology, math, and medicine in these cultures.

Corn Mother was also known as Cherokee Maize (corn) Mother, Creek Maize Mother, Natchez, Maize Mother, and Tewa Corn Mother. To the Hopi, Kachina Mana is the Corn Maiden who gave them white corn, which is the 'most sacred of the corns'.(31) In the Greco-Roman world, Goddess Demeter was the Corn Mother.

Demeter

'Meter' - the Greek word for 'mother' is also a root word for 'medicine'. We can deduce that mothers in the dawn of humanity were the ones most likely to administer medicine or health (in its widest sense) to their infants and children. Mothers would also have been the ones most likely to have intimate knowledge of the physical body because of the close observation of their own bodily processes: menstruation, copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation.

Because of the women's food gathering skills they would also have been familiar with everything growing in their environment; and would most likely have been motivated to use plants medicinally in the care of a mother in labor pain, a sick infant or other clan member (injured hunter or elderly person), The Greek Goddess Demeter, 'the Mother', is thus associated with the entire life cycle, from birth, through time, to death, and back to life again in the typical agricultural life-death-life cycle.

In 600BC, Goddess Demeter in a Homeric hymn, was portrayed as nurse of the Queen's son, an indication that women were known as caretakers and healers of the sick in classical Greek culture and earlier. (32) (Homer drew on earlier oral sources for much of his writings.)

Drude

(Druide)

This Germanic Goddess of Northern Europe was associated with trees that were believed to have their own individual souls or spirits. These spirits, called 'dryads' by the Greeks, were believed to be female in most cultures. They were thought to be incarnated in a bark body, and the bark of trees was known to have many healing properties.(33) Aspirin was derived from the bark of the willow tree originally. It is now chemically reproduced in laboratories. There are many scientists at work with computers today, trying to artificially duplicate the chemical compositions of plants and trees. The Druidesses and Druids were the highly respected medical practitioners, mathematicians, and astrologers of the Celtic tribes of Europe, British Isles, and Ireland.

Eastre

or Eostre

Eostre was the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring and new beginnings; and also the Greek Goddess of Dawn.(34) She gave her name to the direction from which the sun begins each new day (East), as well as the spring festival of rebirth known as Easter. She was an agricultural Goddess of health whose name survives in the Jewish Passover as 'Esther'. The northern Germanic tribes of Antiquity knew of the strong influence of the sun on

health and wellbeing. Thus Eastre, she-who-brought-back-the-sun-each-morning was associated with health, that is, the healing power of herbs and sun. Goddess Eostre/Esther also gave her name to the springtime mating cycle of female animals, estrus, and to the female hormone 'estrogen'.

Erzuli

A Caribbean Moon Goddess who was brought to Haiti by slaves from West Africa. She was revered as a bestower of health and beauty. She sometimes showed herself as a water snake, as symbolized on the universal symbol of medicine, the Caduceus. Erzuli was mistress of the waters of health of the Yorubans of West Africa. (35)

Ganga

To Hindus, this Goddess was the personification of the beloved River Ganges which flows through India. She was probably an ancient animating spirit of water.(36) The tributary at Benares is the most sacred spot of the Ganges River. Indians still make pilgrimages to her there, as 'Mother' Ganges has promised to wash away all sins of devout Hindus who immerse themselves in her purifying, healing waters. Women bathe daily in her waters, fully dressed, for health benefits as well as religious - as freedom from suffering.

Hexe

The name of this Germanic Goddess was also used as a nickname for 'hexers' (healers) who were able to use herbal remedies as well as affirmations and incantations to restore health and "nullify spells of enemies". Professional hex practitioners of Germany and Pennsylvania used very ancient formulas probably derived from Egypt originally, as was their name, which was taken from the Goddess Hecate. The 'hexers' were also very highly regarded as the earliest veterinarians. (37)

Hygeia

Hygeia was the Grecian Goddess of health and healing, from whom we derived the word 'hygiene'. Medicine was closely aligned to religion in the ancient world. Even our English word, 'health', derives from a German word, 'heiliq', meaning holy. Hallow, hale, heal, health, and holy are words derived from this German root. In prehistoric times to be 'heiliq' meant to be 'without impairment'. (38)

Isis

Goddess Isis of Egypt, 'the Savior', was closely associated with medicine. There was a hidden world of female magic, religion, and medicine that was not well-documented in the standard literary texts of ancient Egypt. Many artifacts found in burials and archaeological digs, such as masks, statuettes of dancers, sistrums (tambourines), enigmatic amulets, pieces of knotted string, and cloth have not been associated with any written documents; but may very well have been used by women doctors, especially midwives and temple priestesses. Goddesses Hathor and Isis were most frequently called upon by women. Seventeen hundred years after her worship was supposed to have died out, "Hathor, Lady of Dendera, retained her reputation for helping women with fertility problems". (39) Goddess Isis, frequently depicted as nursing her 'holy child' Horus, was the protectress of birth and nursing. Just as today, women in ancient Egypt risked death when giving birth. Some of the hazards of childbirth were: miscarriage, a deformed child, stillbirth, difficult prolonged labor, hemorrhage, multiple births, birth canal trauma, sickness, injury, and/or death. It is small wonder that incantations, amulets, charms, and spells were invoked by nurses, midwives, priestesses, doctors in the birthing chambers.

Ix-Chel

The Mayan (Mexican) Goddess of Magic, Health, Healing, Love, and Sexuality was Ix-Chel. "In her benevolent aspect she was the Goddess of weaving, curing, childbirth, and sexual relations". In art she was sometimes "depicted with eagle claws and crowned with feathers". (40) In the ancient Mayan belief system, however, good and bad were not clearly separated; but were intertwined in every person as well as in deities. In her malevolent form, Goddess Ix-Chel could also cause destruction with water, as well as healing.

Kwan Yin

She is the Buddhist deity who is much loved wherever Buddhism has flourished, especially India, Japan, and China. As China's most powerful Holy Mother of Compassion, she hears those who cry out to her in pain. The Goddess of mercy, education, and knowledge, she protects the health of women and children especially by giving them the knowledge of healing herbs. (41)

Macha

This Goddess was known as the ancestral Mother Goddess of Family and Tribes in Celtic Ireland. Many non-Christian deities were three-fold or trinities (three persons in one). Reciting facts in sets of three was a time-honored device to help pre-literate societies remember their oral histories.

Goddess Macha was warrior, queen, and deity. As a legendary athlete/warrior, she was said to have been able to outrun all the kings' horses. As a deity, she was credited with bringing the healing arts to women. As Macha of the Red Tresses (a red-haired Queen) she was said to have been "the seventy-sixth monarch of Ireland who built the first hospital in Ireland four-hundred years before the first hospital in Rome". (42) The beloved Irish Goddess Brigid was also credited with medicine from the plant world. She was usually shown holding a cauldron in which she prepared the 'magical' recipes (prescriptions) which cured all human ills.

Masai Moon Goddess

She is the Goddess of Health and Healing of the Masai Tribe of eastern Africa. In prehistory, the moon was known as a benevolent female energy source that lit up the night for lovemaking. Thus was the long-held notion that the moon herself caused pregnancy, before knowledge of the male's role in reproduction. Pregnant women of the Masai throw a stone at the new moon to "request an easy birth" and a long life. (43)

Meditrina

Our word for 'medicine' comes from the Roman Goddess of Healing, Meditrina. All the English 'medical' words have their root in the Latin 'medere', to heal. Roman Goddess Meditrina was said to make use of herbs, wine, and magic formulas (prescriptions) in the form of recipes. (44)

Mesuk

This Goddess' name literally means 'Our Grandmother' to the Cree, Algonquin, and Ottawa Native American tribes. (45) She is the primal ancestral grandmother who taught her people the knowledge of medicinal plants. When medicinal roots are removed from the earth, she is given a symbolic offering of thanks for her 'giveaway', the plants needed to heal illnesses.

Momoy

She is the patroness of Health and Healing of the Chumash of California. She was also credited with bringing education and all knowledge to her people. It is believed she gave the hallucinogenic Datura plant to humans to ease the pain of suffering. "She has medicine that can cure the sick and revive the dead. It is said that if you drink water that

she has bathed in, you will avoid death". (46) This is very similar to the Hindu belief in the healing waters of "Mother Ganges", the river that flows through India.

Salus

She is the Roman Goddess of Health and Healing who corresponds to the Greek Goddess Hygeia. 'Salt' may have been named after her; as women who found layers of salt in their environments probably first used it for medicinal purposes. Salt has a salutary effect on wounds and infections. A salt-water gargle is still my first line of defense against a sore throat. When we make a toast and say "Salute! to your good health!", we are invoking the Roman Goddess of Health and Healing, Salus. (47)

Sekhmet

Goddess Sekhmet, the lion-headed deity of ancient Egypt was associated with stopping epidemics that were called 'plagues' in Antiquity. These epidemics could take the form of pulmonary (lung) infections and were thought to have been caused by an 'evil wind' or 'bad air'. Tuberculosis, pneumonia, and other viral infections are indeed airborne and are caused by invisible droplets of infected mucous in the air. Thus the ancients were quite correct in supposing that contagious "air" was "bad" for you. The priestesses and priests of the fierce and powerful Lion-Goddess recited prayers to her during patients' treatments; and they were as integral to the healing as were the physical treatments performed by physicians. The Eber Papyrus (medical text) of ancient Egypt attributed specialized knowledge of the heart to Goddess Sekhmet's priestesses and priests. (48)

Sunna

This Scandinavian and Northern Teutonic Sun Goddess was believed to have given women the secret knowledge of how to heal others. We know now that the body usually heals itself under ideal circumstances; but in Antiquity, the medicinal herbs administered by the first female doctors may indeed have seemed "magical".

Goddess Sunna's namesake is the sun, whose health-giving benefits were acknowledged by ancient peoples. In Norse mythology, stones were sacred to Sunna and "her worshipers carved deep stone circles across the Scandinavian landscape as part of her sacred (healing) rites. Stones painted with their Goddess' magical symbols were carried as healing-stones, talismans, or amulets by almost all indigenous people." Sick animals have also been known to rub themselves against large stones in the countryside.

In England she was known as Sulis, the ancient British Goddess of Healing Waters. Her health spa was located at Bath, England, where I saw her hot spring still bubbling up from the earth's core. I drank a toast to her under the name the Romans had carved in stone two-thousand years ago, "Medica Minerva Sulis".

'Sulis' also means 'eye'; the spirals carved in stone by the ancients may have honored her also as an Eye Goddess, the sun being her all-seeing eye. The modern version of Goddess Sunna's name is Sonja.

Spider Woman/Thought Woman

In some Native American societies the creatress was female. Some of her names were Spider Woman, Thought Woman, Changing Woman (Navajo), and White Buffalo Woman. Just as the Lord of the biblical Genesis story spoke the world into existence with his Word; so the Thought Woman of the Keres tribe sang the world into existence and brought into being "the firmament, the lands and seas, the people, the deities, plants, animals, minerals, language, writing, mathematics, architecture, the kachinas, the pueblo social system", and everything else. In these old Pueblo texts, female power is not confined only to maternity; but is recognized as a creative process that can bring great advancements to civilization including medicine and the knowledge of healing plants, herbs, flowers, roots, and barks that can be carried in a medicine woman's sacred bundle.(50)

Tlazolteotl

The Huastec Goddess of Health and Healing in ancient Mexico was portrayed in the glyph writings of the Aztecs with spindle whorls in her hair, pointing to the female roots of weaving textiles, as well as health and curing remedies. Mesoamerican medicine-women are called 'curanderas'; and the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mary, has replaced Tlazolteotl as their patroness. To the Huastecs, descendants of the ancient Mayans, Goddess Tlazolteotl was the transforming agent who heard their confessions, forgave their transgressions, and allowed them to be "born again", healed and holy. (51)

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