If we could step into one of Murillo's paintings and join in the hurly-burly of life in Golden Age Spain, childbirth would be all around us: we would hear beggars peddling spells and prayers for a safe delivery; we would see a maid running to fetch a midwife and women carrying gifts to a neighbor in childbed; we would pass the door of the foundling home where newborns were deposited every night. And all too often we would hear the lamentations of mothers laying a prematurely deceased infant in its grave. The rhythm of life was set by pregnancies, births, and baptisms.

And if we asked people which sacred images they loved and venerated most, the likely answer would be those depicting Mary as a pregnant woman and as a mother. Childbirth demanded care and resources – as it does today – but it was also a foundational and a sacred moment in the life of a community.

The voices of the midwives, doctors, lawyers, playwrights, nuns, parents and grandparents gathered here, tell of a world in which the carrying, bearing and caring for infants was woven together with religion, culture and the rules governing family bonds.

A close study of childbirth, then, can add new colors to the painting of the past. It can help us better understand a time when the birth of one child was often a consolation for the loss of another, when every birth was an act of rebellion against the triumphs of death.

WWW.PRAESENS.AT

9 783706 912815

€ [A] 32,00
€ [D] 31,10

isbn 978-3-7069-1281-5

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Wiener philologisch-kulturwissenschaftliche Studien

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Hg. von der Philologisch-kulturwissenschaftlichen
Fakultät der Universität Wien

3

Wolfram Aichinger & Sabrina Grohsebner

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PRAESENS VERLAG

Alle Bände der Reihe *agora* durchlaufen ein Double Blind Peer Review Verfahren mit zwei Reviews und einer Umsetzungskontrolle durch die Leitung der Fakultät.

Die Publikation wurde im Rahmen des FWF-Projekts *The Interpretation of Childbirth in Early Modern Spain* (doi:10.55776/P32263) veröffentlicht.

Verlag und Druck: Praesens VerlagsgesmbH. Printed in EU.

Open Acces: DOI: 10.23783/9783706912815

ISBN: 978-3-7069-1281-5

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

To Larissa Aichinger (W.A.)

To my grandmothers Ilse und Helga (S.G.)

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1. Introduction

Around 2011, we became aware of how important birth was in the plays of Spain's greatest playwright, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, be it the most famous ones—*La vida es sueño* ('Life Is a Dream') or *La hija del aire* ('The Daughter of the Air')—or the supposedly lighter comedies such as *Las manos blancas no ofenden* ('White Hands Don't Offend'). Time and again, the life story of a hero or heroine is overshadowed and predetermined by the circumstances of birth. These stories might echo what Calderón experienced when, at the age of ten, his mother, Ana María de Henao, died in childbed after having brought forth a girl whose sojourn among the living was to be very short.[1]

These observations led to wider inquiries into what birth was like in Calderón de la Barca's time. What did chronicles, diaries, devotional texts or private letters say on the subject? How was it rendered in paintings, engravings, or statues? Which rituals and social acts mirrored the experience?

There was quite an amount of material to be gathered; in fact, once we started looking into the matter, we were surprised at how often we came across the motif in the manifold archives of the time, about how much procre-

ation and birth occupied the minds of early modern Spaniards. However, the topic has often been overlooked even in critical editions of the masterpieces of Spanish letters and not given the importance it deserves when the intentions, feelings and motivations of people of the time were assessed. This was partly due to a lack of attention to historical semantics (for example, few modern readers would guess that *mover infante* meant 'to miscarry') and partly to the fact that male scholarship preferred to remain outside a birthing chamber as much as a prospective father would do in an urban birthing ward of, say, the middle of the 20th century.

The basic aim of what is done before and after childbirth has not changed since the Spanish Golden Age, it is true, and a modern physician is as keen to promote a happy delivery as was a midwife or a helpful neighbor in early modern times. Both the obstetrician and the midwife deal and dealt with the peculiar way of birthing humans are heir to: forty weeks of gestation, a time during which a woman gets more protection and attention than others; a painful opening, a tight squeeze with complicated twists necessary to get the baby's head through the mother's pelvis; an afterbirth and an umbilical cord to be attended to; a bodily separation of the mother and the baby—tiny and most vulnerable—whose survival solely depends on its enormous capacity to arouse pity and tenderness; a bodily separation usually *cured* by the adoption into a caring community offering shelter and care through baths, clothes and a nurturing breast or bottle. Then and now, mothers and babies are—in most cases—assisted by birth professionals, by a family and a community. Today, as in the past, birth has strong effects on the progenitors and is linked

to a whole set of ideas about the conditions under which people should have children and how they should look after them.

But if we look at the social and cultural side of birth, we can see significant differences as well. Just take questions like these: Where will the child be born? Who will be in charge? Who will be respected as an authority? Who will be present and give a helping hand? How will the family be involved? What rituals will be performed, thus giving symbolic meaning to times, places, objects, rhythms and gestures? How will be the community informed and involved? Under what circumstances will birth entail joy and celebration, or conversely, will it be fraught with distress and must be achieved in secrecy? What cultural models will be evoked to accompany different phases of gestation and birth? Which stories will turn possible scenarios into culturally acceptable ones? Which heavenly powers will be invoked for help? For all these questions, early modern Spanish culture provided a range of scripts and rules that much differed from the ones followed today. We wanted this to be a short book that would offer both a summary of recent scholarly endeavors and some new data that we have collected in our research. We have listened to the voices of physicians who wrote about childbirth in early modern Spain, and we have also gathered references to pregnancy, birth, and lying-in dispersed in letters, chronicles, lives of saints, parish registers, in the archives of foundling homes, and works of fiction. Moreover, we have been able to count on the help of all the scholars who have devoted considerable attention to the subject matter in recent years. The studies by María Cruz de Carlos Varona, Alessandra Foscati, Nadia Filippini,

María Jesús Fuente, Marie-France Morel, Dolores Ruiz-Berdún have provided essential guidelines for our own research.[2]

Our emphasis lies on typical scenarios and patterns at the core of Spanish society. This choice is due to the avatars of our research and to the biases of the testimonies. We simply do know much more about a queen's birthing career than about that of a Morisco woman in a community in Valencia. However much we have tried to outbalance an aristocratic and mainstream catholic bias, this will only be fully achieved in future publications. Besides, not all things a queen or an aristocratic lady did were exclusive to their social sphere—just think of the cult of the Virgin Mary or an object like the rose of Jericho, which was used both at court and among the commoners.

Moreover, where the birth of a Spanish princess was announced and celebrated by all the bells of Madrid, Seville and Lima, and the happy delivery of a Habsburg infant in Vienna obliged the ambassadors in Madrid to set up wine fountains in the streets,[3] the study of aristocratic birth also means studying collective feelings and early forms of mass culture. Thus, our focus is on the *Villa y Corte de Madrid*; most references date from the 16th and 17th centuries. Where it seemed appropriate, where we could surmise that some practice or way of thinking had crossed the boundaries of the age, however, we added examples from earlier or later centuries. Again, upcoming studies will endeavor to give a more detailed and nuanced account, to take a closer look at important changes that occurred between the Middle Ages and the 19th century, and to open a broader horizon on the situation in colonial Spain.

For all its brevity and limitations, this book aims to offer new perspectives on important issues: on the rhythms of conception, on gestation, on life and death, on happy deliveries and thwarted expectations, on maternal death and on the various ways in which the expectation and welcoming of a baby altered the social cosmos into which it was born.

A number of topics only mentioned in passing here are more fully developed in the journal *Avisos de Viena*, which is edited by our research team, and in other publications connected to our enterprise.

We are very grateful to the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) for its generous support of our research, the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna, and the project *The Interpretation of Childbirth in Early Modern Spain* for funding the publication of this book. Special thanks go to Tamara Hanus, Varvara Rytsk, Fernando Sanz-Lázaro, Valerie Worth, and John Wright for their editorial assistance and to all the other collaborators and colleagues who shared our interest in charting the widely unknown landscape of past maternities.

2. Life and birth

Early modern Spain was mesmerized and haunted by birth; while delivery itself was a very private and intimate affair, its signs and indexes, collateral events and actions, effects, and consequences were ubiquitous.

Spain ruled over an empire, and silver from the colonies and forced labor brought great prosperity, but contemporary writers wailed over a kingdom threatened by depopulation. The ruling dynasty of Austria, faced with impending extinction, was desperate to produce offspring, showering midwives with gifts and offering them excellent work conditions. Religious expressions revolved around birth. When vows were made to the Virgin, when people went on pilgrimage to the myriad shrines, altars, statues, and paintings that mark the cultural landscape of Spain, these acts were frequently related to birth: the desire to conceive, the hope for a fortunate gestation, the rescue from a difficult delivery, the pledge for the prosperity of the infant. Year after year, Saint Mary was celebrated in the role of a mother in the cycle of religious feasts—a mother who becomes aware of pregnancy (Annunciation), shares her joy with a close relative (Visitation), bears a child (Christmas), leaves childbed for Purification (Candlemas).[4]

In this Catholic setting, birth became a site where the majority marked differences from others, be they Jews, Muslims, Protestants, or Indians in the recently conquered colonies. By contrast, birth connected otherwise rivaling European dynasties. As ties of blood closely related to these, every child born to a ruling family triggered adjustments in the games of thrones. When a Spanish queen intervened in the choice of a midwife at the court of Vienna, she exercised diplomacy for the sake of birth and testified to birth as a key issue in international relations.

A great portion of Spanish women spent many years of their lifetime either in pregnancy, recovering from birth (or from a miscarriage), breastfeeding, or all too often, trying to overcome the death of a newborn baby. Midwives hurrying to a birthing place were a common sight on the streets of Seville, Toledo, or Madrid during the daytime and even more so at night. The moaning of a childbearing woman was part of the urban soundscape, as much as the whimpering of an infant abandoned at the doors of churches or foundling homes of pious confraternities. When the queen of Spain was expecting childbirth, all the Catholics prayed for a happy delivery, and boisterous celebrations after the birth of an infant were accompanied by the unending chiming of the bells of cathedrals, churches, and monasteries.[5] As soon as she had come of age, physicians had started to assess her fertility, monitor her menses, and broadcast it to allies all over Europe. Once married, tremendous pressure was put upon her to give succession to the kingdom.

Symbols and metaphors for birth permeated the language of early modern poets and Jesuit philosophers,

who were intrigued by subterranean worlds, by the inside of volcanoes and caves, perceiving them as the centers and powerhouses—the wombs indeed—of nature, which produced sources, metals, precious stones, which gave the world its creative impulse. On the other hand, the generation of human life was *just* an instance of life possibly emerging anywhere—from swamps, blood, water, dust, or dead flesh. Early modern Europe still adhered to Aristotle's theory of spontaneous generation (see Figure 1).[6] Pregnancy and birth were metaphors for all fraught with expectation, a cloud being pregnant (*preñada*) with a lightning bolt, or—for sudden, violent occurrences—a lightning bolt being the birth (*parto*) of this cloud.[7] Similarly, everyday language teemed with birth: *Madre* ('mother') was the common term for the uterus—*mal de madre*[8] signified an ailment of the womb—the term *comadre* was used for midwives, close acquaintances, and godparents;[9] moreover, depending on the context, *parto* could signify both the action of childbearing and its outcome, the term being used for delivery and for the newborn living being, for babies as much as for pearls.[10]

3. Fertility, conception, pregnancy

Marriage and children

Among commoners, a married woman had her first child around the age of twenty-five, two or two and a half years after marriage. The most likely moment of conception would be spring or winter, that is, in the so-called *estación del amor*—'the Season of Love,' starting at Easter and culminating in the Midsummer night—or when people were least occupied with agricultural work, in December and January. Babies were more likely to be born in late autumn or in spring than in other seasons of the year.[11] These statistical averages, of course, do no justice to individual biographies. And yet, whoever delves into the endless series of births and marriages recorded in early modern parish registers will be surprised at how many lives unfolded according to a shared and regular rhythm and the precise adjustment of the supreme moments of a life cycle to specific ages, even to religious festivities and times of the year.[12]

As to noble women, their weddings, and first births, the records unfold a wider spectrum of scenarios. Some princesses were married at a very young age, even before they had reached sexual maturity: Elisabeth of Valois (Isabel de Valois, 1546–1568), and Mariana of Austria

(1634–1696), both married before their fourteenth birthday, provide exemplary cases. Elisabeth conceived for the first time at the age of seventeen and miscarried before term at the age of eighteen.[13] Mariana went through a trying first delivery, with her life in danger, when she was sixteen and a half years old.[14] However, the idea of very young princesses mercilessly sacrificed to the interests of their Houses[15] deserves closer scrutiny. The ages of marriage and first conception were exceptionally low in the 17th century, it is true. Nevertheless, if all Spanish queens who gave birth between 1500 and 1800 are taken into consideration, the average age of first birth is above the age of eighteen.[16] Even in times of noticeably early marriages, some Habsburg mothers had their first child in their third or fourth decade of life. Empress Maria Anna of Spain (1606–1646) was twenty-seven when she had Ferdinand of Austria,[17] Anna Maria Mauricia of Spain (1601–1666), queen of France, gave birth to the future Louis XIV at the age of almost thirty-seven.[18]

The consummation of very young marriages was usually delayed until the spouses were deemed fit for it. Doctors and members of the clergy drew up wordy reports and memoranda in which they warned about the severe risks of juvenile maternity.[19] Nonetheless, at courts terrified by the idea of extinction, as were the branches of the Austrias in Madrid and Vienna, these warnings were sometimes cast to the wind.

Conception

As for the formation of a fetus in the womb, Spanish scholars turned to what philosophers and physicians

had tried to explain long before they themselves took up their pens in the 16th and 17th centuries. Some of the physicians adhered to the vision, attributed to Aristotle, that women were mere receptacles who facilitated the development of the male seed with their blood. Others followed Hippocrates and Galen, who had asserted that women actively participated in embryogenesis and produced and contributed their own *female seed*. This theory of dual conception can be found in Damián Carbón's seminal work *Libro del arte de las comadres* ('Book of the Art of Midwives') from 1541. It encountered another forceful and eloquent defender in Juan Alonso Ruices de Fontecha, who published his *Diez privilegios para mujeres preñadas* ('Ten Privileges for Pregnant Women') in 1606.

Any attempt to give a complete account of the efforts people made to encourage or hamper procreation would be futile. However, the following aspects distinguish early modern Spain and its people's dealing with fertility, conception, and contraception: first, informal knowledge, especially among women; second, (para)religious practices; third—and related to the second one,—the importance assigned to bodily rhythms.

Informal knowledge: In the vast cosmos of early modern Spanish women's communication and interaction, procreation plays a major role. Be it the letters Estefanía de Requesens, a 16th-century noblewoman from Catalonia, wrote to her mother Hipólita,[20] the missives Queen Mariana of Austria directed to the Countesses Harrach,[21] or the comforting words the nun Mary of Jesus of Ágreda (María de Jesús de Ágreda) directed to the King of Spain Philip IV[22] regarding his adolescent spouse's menarche or after he had reported a difficult birth: When moth-

ers exchanged letters with their daughters, when queens wrote to aristocratic friends, or when nuns addressed members of the social elite, they touched upon all aspects related to conception, birth, and earliest infancy. In their writing, they not only offered emotional support but shared all the knowledge and advice they had to offer for specific cases and problems. It would be hard to draw a clear line between knowledge adopted from doctors and books, on the one hand, and the recipes of female quacks, folk practitioners, and experts in herbs and plants, on the other hand.[23] When Elisabeth of Valois, queen consort of Spain, was under the strongest pressure to bear a child to the Casa de Austria, her mother, Catherine de' Medici, advised the preparation of a special dish based on eggs to encourage conception. When Elisabeth finally got pregnant, the then French queen regent and prospective grandmother very much insisted on sending two good catholic midwives down to Madrid.[24] Women's advice, whether acquired professionally or drawn from personal experience, was heard and respected inside and outside early modern Spanish birthing rooms.

Religion: Holy shrines, altars, chapels, and pilgrimage sites were often visited with the hope that a baby might be born soon after. Special devotion was given to biblical figures who had been blessed with late maternity, such as Mary's cousin Elizabeth (Isabel), or saints, such as Saint Casilda, who had themselves suffered from gynecological ailments. The most prominent role model for childbirth, however, was the Virgin Mary whose powers echoed in numerous advocations: Nuestra Señora de los Llanos (Hontoba, Guadalajara), Nuestra Señora de las Ermitas (between Viana del Bollo and Rúa,

Orense), Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Guadalupe, Cáceres), Nuestra Señora de la Peña de Francia (El Cabaco, Salamanca), Nuestra Señora del Pilar (Saragossa).[25] Likewise, there was extraordinary trust in holy words and what might be labeled a *conjuring* of the future, also through dreams and visions. The early picaresque masterpiece, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, for instance, depicts a shrewd and purposeful blind singer who earns his money by praying for others; a good portion of his prayers are offered to women in the hope of healthy offspring.[26]

Bodily Rhythms: It was widely believed that conception could be assisted by regulating the menstrual cycle. This was not only a question of having intercourse on the right day.[27] Menstrual blood was considered a source of life, that is, the nourishment of the fetus once the menstrual cycle ceased after conception and blood conducted inwards into the uterus.[28] Baths and mineral waters were understood to regulate and strengthen the flow of menstrual blood. Likewise, iron powder dissolved in liquid was deemed to effectively invigorate the menses. According to Nicolas Monardes' *Diálogo de las grandezas del hierro* ('Dialogue on the Greatness of Iron'), published in 1580 in Seville, iron "desopila, hace venir bien los meses do no vienen bien, limpia la madre, disponela para engendrar" ('clears away obstructions, makes the months come where they do not come well, cleans the uterus, prepares it for conception'). Many a grateful mother had asked him, the proud physician adds, to function as godfather after his recommended cure had proven successful in the birth of her child.[29] Places blessed with mineral waters attracted a lot of social attention, and the fact that early modern doctors and

authors drew up inventories of Spain's most beneficial sources seems very much related to fertility. The Spanish doctor Alfonso Limón Montero carried out such a project in the last decades of the 17th century. His *Espejo cristalino de las aguas de España* ('Crystalline Mirror of Spain's Waters'), rich in references to gynecology, ailments of the uterus, and childbirth,[30] is considered the first modern work of medical hydrology. Some of these salutary places also gained a high reputation at court. When Maria Anna of Neuburg (1667–1740), queen consort of King Charles II of Spain, failed to conceive, ferrous waters from the Fuente Agria in Puertollano (Ciudad Real) were prescribed to her as a cure.[31]

As contraception was related to secret affairs, prostitution, and relations before and outside marriage, it is more difficult to gain some idea about its extension and the tolerance with which the practice was met. One of the methods women undertook was the suppression of the menstrual cycle, for instance, by means of eating clay (*comer barro*), a peculiar fashion said to be popular among Spanish women at the time. Poets did not fail to maliciously comment on the *opiladas*, as these women addicted to clay were called.[32] A case in point is Félix Lope de Vega Carpio's comedy *El acero de Madrid* ('The Steel of Madrid'), composed around 1608. Lope de Vega, under the surface of a conventional story of premarital love against the parents' wishes for a convenient match, provides a synopsis of what eating clay, subsequent amenorrhea, and the consequential drinking of ferrous water could mean in his social world.[33]

Rules and privileges for pregnant women

Ten privileges should be granted to pregnant women, the Castilian doctor Juan Alonso Ruices de Fontecha asserts in his famous treatise *Diez privilegios para mujeres preñadas* from 1606.[34] In this elaborate defense of female worth and dignity, Fontecha declares pregnancy a privileged state in which women should be granted special rights: First, they should be allowed to satisfy their cravings for special dishes.[35] Second, when a pregnant woman was let the vein, it was to be done in a way that implied no danger of child loss. Third, pregnant women should be purged only in exceptional cases and in a particular fashion. Fourth, they should only fast in specific phases of gestation. Fifth, they should be allowed to carry all kinds of girdles, bodices, stones, or amulets that had the virtue of preventing miscarriage. The sixth privilege deals with the kind of exercise appropriate during gestation, and the seventh with a pregnant woman's right to choose the location where the climate and air are most propitious for her birthing. Privilege eight grants the childbearing woman the choice of the midwife she deems best, whereas the ninth deals with the selection and obligations of a wet nurse. Finally, the tenth privilege treats the peril of the evil eye and how such villainy could be averted. Fontecha's book, a copy of which also was acquired by the court of Vienna, was clearly designed for noble women. Large passages rather read like a catalog of rules to be followed and as a series of moral considerations, including a condemnation of induced abortion. In any case, it grants valuable insights into the main concerns related to birth and largely comments on its main actors, such as doctors, surgeons, midwives, wet nurses, and old women. Fon-

techa's *Ten Privileges* allows for a sense of the tensions between what women did and what birth professionals wanted them to do. Above all, they testify to the special status of women with child, them being granted special care while advocating a far-ranging change of their habits and attitudes.[36]

Back then, some women spent a considerable proportion of their lifetime in the state of pregnancy. So, what did it mean to be pregnant? How did the thorough transformation of the body alter thoughts and emotions, and how did society monitor this alteration? Most importantly, gestation was not experienced as a continuous flow of time, as a steady evolution and progression. There were landmarks and turning points, moments that signaled a change of gear, tonality, and attitude.

Annunciation

It is surprising how these landmarks were expressed by religious imagery: A woman's conception would find resonance in The Annunciation of Mary (March 25), the first of these images, with the Virgin—somewhat incredulous and "greatly troubled"—being visited by the angel.[37] Margaret of Austria (1584–1611) commissioned the motif to the court painter Juan Pantoja de la Cruz in 1604. What this project meant to her can be deduced from the desired fusion of her present situation with the biblical scenery: The artist was asked to represent Mary with the traits of Margaret, and the visiting angel should resemble her firstborn daughter, Ana.[38]

Women kept a precise record of their bodily cycles and endeavored to read them correctly. In the case of pregnancy, they were trusted to assess the moment of birth

accurately. Not always did they succeed: "Bien cuenta la madre, mejor cuenta el infante"[39] ('The mother counts well, the infant even better'), went the saying.

First hopes and suspicions were the kick-off for an intense exchange of news and letter-writing concerning the matter,[40] and of opinions as to the pertinence of bodily signs: swelling of breasts, nausea, craving for special kinds of food, and above all, the absence of menstruation. Countess Johanna of Harrach (1639–1716) offers an example: Having reportedly gone through nine pregnancies, she wrote to her husband in the fall of 1676 in the middle of a long and burdensome journey from Madrid to Vienna with her children and servants. In an initial message, she communicates an unexpected delay in her period. Adopting a playful and intimate tone, she brings up the memory of their last intimacy, which had occurred on the day before she left Madrid, not silencing the fact that this had been the last day of her last menstrual bleeding. (Either there was no strict taboo concerning this practice, or it was broken on the occasion of farewell.) In the same message to her husband, she shows herself somewhat preoccupied by the delay. What is a "small fear" in the first letter turns into terror and fantasies of death in the childbed in the next. After two months without her period, the countess once again mentions the fact that intercourse during menstruation should not have entailed conception. Finally, in another letter, she communicates with great relief and joy that her cycle has resumed (see Figure 2).[41]

At court, spouses were involved and informed from the very beginning.[42] King Philip IV, when writing to the saintly woman Mary of Jesus of Ágreda on July 2, 1653, mentions the "first beginnings of hope" for succession

in his letter.[43] His hopes conclude in disillusion. On September 3, 1653, Philip again writes to his confidante, informing her that the queen miscarried on the day of the Assumption of Mary (August 15). As "it" was "of very short time," he continues in his letter, it could not be found out whether the fetus was male or female. He adds a final comment concerning his considerable grief and the good recuperation of the queen.[44]

A change of habit was recommended already in this early stage of pregnancy. "Estando para ir los Reyes al río el día de San Bartolomé," the court chronicler Jerónimo de Barrionuevo refers, "no lo hicieron, por decir los médicos y comadres estaba la Reina en falta de ocho días, y que con la moción del coche se descuajaría el requesón del preñado soñado, aunque a la mano de Dios todo es posible"[45] ('Although the royals were about to go to the river on Saint Bartholomew's day, eventually they did not do so, as the doctors and midwives said that the queen was eight days overdue and that with the motion of the coach, the *coagulum* would dissolve, although, to the hand of God, everything is possible'). It should be noted in passing that, again, both the assessment of doctors and midwives were heard and followed.

Where pregnancy was desired and welcomed by the community, women's conspicuous change of habits could be accompanied by a change of clothes, motivated by comfort and the dresses' signaling function. Women adapted their dresses to the growth of the belly with buttons and pleats so that pregnancy was noted by how they were worn, open, and without a tight fastening. *Descinta* ('without girdle') instead of *encinta* ('with girdle') would be the more appropriate adjective for pregnant women, lexicographer Sebastián de Covarrubias states, aggre-

gating that some ladies tried to keep their bellies straight by planks (*tablones*), with the effect of bearing hump-backed babies.[46] For a full exploration of this topic, a considerable variety of opinions and changing fashions over decades and centuries would have to be taken into account. What can be said, however, is that in contrast to common conceptions of Counter-Reformist principles,[47] an urging of women to conceal their pregnancy by means of corsets and restrictive clothes does not seem to apply to Spain. Spanish women did not shy away from exhibiting their immanent motherhood—numerous portraits of noble women, just as well as paintings or statues of the Virgin proudly exhibiting their exceptional pregnant bellies, bear witness to this observation (see Figure 3).

In any case, there was no disagreement as to the strong impact of clothes and textiles on the body and health of both mother and fetus. The womb, not tightened by belts anymore, was now supported and comforted by poultices. Such practices, mainly aimed at the prevention of miscarriage but probably understood to favor the healthy growth of the fetus, were deemed of the highest importance in court. Jerónimo de Barrionuevo reports the application of a poultice (*bizma*) by Queen Mariana of Austria.[48] Beyond clothing, food was deemed to influence the balance of humors and thus the woman's general health and well-being.

Visitation

The second big moment in the *Bible* and Christian maternal calendar was the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin (Visitación de la Virgen),[49] celebrated on July 2: Mary enters the house of her cousin and greets her, where-

upon Elizabeth's child—the unborn Saint John, in an early proof of his saintly capacity of foreboding future events—leaps with joy in her womb.[50] It is most telling that early modern religious authors did not reiterate the story without immediately projecting it onto the actions they deemed fit for pregnant women: An ordinary woman would not undertake a trying journey such as Mary's, Pedro de Ribadeneyra states. Mary did not fear pregnancy loss or malpresentation. Touched by grace, she moved beyond such human concerns.[51]

It is no wonder, then, that Spanish female elites ardently promoted convents and charitable institutions consecrated to Saint Elizabeth and the imagery of holy pregnancy, which their walls and altars were adorned with. The favors granted by Queen Margaret of Austria to the Colegio de Niños Desamparados de Santa Isabel la Real (Saint Isabel School for Abandoned Children, first built 1592–1610) is just one example among many.[52]

On a human scale, the Visitation of Mary highlights and celebrates the movements of the infant in the womb and the bonding of two mothers-to-be as together they stand at the threshold of a new phase. The engraving on the cover of Carbón's *Libro del arte de las comadres* shows Mary greeting and embracing Elizabeth[53]—it renders a sublime example of the close relation between this biblical story and mutual assistance among women, which encompassed the entire process from conception to churching. Multiple evidence suggests that once pregnant, a woman moved away from marital life and her husband's authority and intimacy[54] into a sphere of female cooperation and assistance. Maria Sophia of Dietrichstein (1652–1711), a lady closely related to Spain's high aristocracy, was married to the Austrian ambas-

sador Pötting and assisted in Madrid by a midwife called Leonarda. The spouse, Pötting, gives some glimpses of the interaction of the two women, initiated at an early stage of pregnancy. On April 20, 1664, Ambassador Pötting puts down that the *comadre de Sevilla* (midwife from Seville) had come to see his wife attending to her "desengaño de [...] embarazo"[55] ('deluded hopes of pregnancy'). Clearly, midwives had a part in the earliest assessment of and care around gestation; they closely interacted with childbearing women, and their authority in the field weighed at least as much as that of doctors.

Equally important is the second aspect featured by the Visitation, the vision of the fetus as a human being that acquires its own contours, personality, and voice, a voice that can be interpreted by its mother yet distinguished from her own.[56] At court, fetal movements were carefully registered and assessed for their meaning. Jerónimo de Barrionuevo reported the first leaps of a baby to be born to Mariana of Austria and King Philip IV on July 24, 1655, together with the prevailing reading at the Alcázar de Madrid: As the queen had noticed these movements very early, the baby was said to be a boy.[57] It seems Aristotle's theory of deferred female animation[58] lingered on and even shaped these speculations related to perceived signs of life. Common folk were not indifferent to prenatal expressions either, at least this is what some passages in early modern theater suggest: Tirso de Molina, for example, stages a heated debate between two villagers arguing over what future profession—priest, notary, scribe—could be deduced from the fetal somersaults in the amniotic fluid.[59] In a similar act of projecting a future role onto the first baby she carried, Empress Margaret Maria Theresa of Spain (1651–1673) of-

fered her husband a special gift on the occasion of her birthday when she was seven months pregnant. It was a letter in which she adopted the voice of a supposedly male future child who paid his respects and, as an obedient son, greeted his father from the *albergue* ('shelter') of his mother's womb (see Figure 4).[60]

All these cultural manifestations testify to a strong, emotional, and attentive bonding with the unborn, a bonding that increased as pregnancy took its course. This close attention is rooted in a longstanding tradition of myths, legends, and stories revolving around mothers foreseeing the destiny of their unborn in dreams or interpreting fetal signs as prophecies. The tradition of Saint Dominic's mother's dreams about her unborn son's future was still very much alive in early modern Spain, its tale appearing in the hagiography of the time. Dreaming about a dog with a torch in his mouth—that is, *Domini canes*, the dogs of the Lord—the saint's mother foretells Dominic's vocation on earth: to offer astute and daring preaching.[61] In early modern Spain, a mother's imagination was deemed fit to anticipate the great future of her unborn child. It was further understood to predict doom: In the most famous play of Spanish literature, *La vida es sueño*, Prince Segismundo's troublesome fate is foreboded by his pregnant mother's apocalyptic nightmares.[62] The perception of the baby triggered imagination in the historical moment, and vice versa; imagination could strongly affect the development and future life of a child. This belief was cast into the story of a mother who, so impressed by the picture of a Moor at the moment of conception, herself bore a dark-skinned baby. Her story was very popular,[63] and even Sebastián de Covarrubias adopted it into his Spanish language dic-

tionary, significantly at the point where he discourses over the power of fantasies.[64] However exaggerated such figments of imagination may seem today, they reveal a strong care and preoccupation for what went on in a childbearing woman's mind and the strong didactic purpose of stories on pregnancy. An expectant mother should watch over her body and senses, over what entered through her gates of perception. Pious images, images that glorify the happy, even painless, delivery of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Saint John, or Saint Francis, were the appropriate ones to be imprinted on a future mother's mind so that she, in turn, might imprint the desired shape on her baby's body and character.[65] Only in the light of such theories of perception and imagination can the importance of the visual, particularly the Catholic cult of images, be grasped.

In short, pregnancy was perceived to inform on and, no less, influence the future. The 17th-century physician Iván Sorapán de Rieros best sums up this keen interest directed towards unborn life when he states that gestation is a condensed representation of a fetus' entire future existence. In his work, *Medicina española contenida en proverbios vulgares de nuestra lengua* ('Spanish Medicine Contained in Proverbs of Our Language'), the scholar fits the different phases of intrauterine evolution into a numerical system that mirrors the cosmical order and is guided by stable proportions. By this means, he states, it is possible to deduce the moment of birth from the moment a fetus first moves in the womb. For another, the months of gestation inform on the distinct ages that constitute the human life cycle.[66]

Following this belief—the trust in the information a pregnant woman's body could provide—at court, everybody's

eyes and ears converged toward the queen's bodily processes. The progression of gestation was calculated according to her cycle, a calendar that became common knowledge among the members of her entourage, and thus paced social life. Again, chronicler Barrionuevo proves an attentive witness. On November 7, 1657, about a month before the long-awaited Prince Philip Prospero was born to the Spanish crown, he notes that the queen "entered into nine months."[67]

Expectation

While Annunciation and Visitation offered scripts for the onset and the confirmation of pregnancy, a third advocation exalted the idea that soon would be revealed what had been long expected. It was on the high day of the *Virgen de la Expectación del parto* ('Virgin of the Expectation of Birth'), observed on December 18, that people revered Mary's joy for Christ's advent. In doing so, they provided form to a mother's excitement over her child's impending birth. The holiday was celebrated with such devotion that Pötting reports it as an outstanding custom, distinguishing the Spanish from others.[68]

The icons and statues worshiped on this day, Virgins of the Expectation, in no way hide the bodily signs of their maternity. Some even allow a look inside their womb, displaying Baby Jesus. Found all over Spain, they are a testimony of women's unwillingness to abandon artistic expressions so much related to their deepest concerns. The palm of their hand placed on top of their belly, they protect and bless the unborn. The *Virgin of the Expectation*, adorning the Ourense Cathedral since the end of the 16th century (see Figure 5), would be a good example. Aristocratic women like Margaret of Austria or Em-

press Maria Leopoldina of Austria stood model for court painters in a very similar pose, showcasing their state with great solemnity and the same gestures of endearment towards the fetus.[69]

The Virgin of the Expectation was also known as the *Virgen de la O* ('Virgin of the O'), as on the days between the Feasts of the Expectation and Nativity, antiphons were sung in liturgy that all started with the vowel O.[70] Accordingly, in religious imagery—altarpieces would be an example—the Virgin is represented with a circle or disc on her womb (see Figure 6).

The O was meant to be an exclamation of hope, joy, marvel, and bewilderment at what was soon to come. But whatever the theological exegesis, popular devotion (which was by no way alienated from Spanish social elites) gladly adopted a symbol and advocation that both visually and audibly conveyed the culmination of gestation and the travail of opening and release, anticipating the euphoria of an accomplished birthing. The Virgin excelled over all other women and, at the same time, was put into relation with them. They could cling to her as a model. Perceived to overflow with emotions, she set the paragon for maternal feelings. Here is how a prominent Catholic writer describes her anticipation of birth:

> ¿Qué desmayos, y latidos, y sentimientos de amor padecía su corazón, con la breve esperanza de su sagrado parto? Porque no temía los dolores, ni el mal suceso, ni las otras miserias, que las otras mujeres preñadas temen en sus partos. […] Esta es la fiesta de la Expectación del parto de la Virgen, que hoy celebra la Iglesia, y nosotros debemos celebrar con especial devoción, y alegría.[71]

> *What fainting spells and heartbeats and feelings of love suffered her heart with the brief anticipation of her sacred birth? For she feared neither the pangs, nor a bad incident, nor the other miseries that the other women fear in their deliveries. […] This is the Feast of the Expectation of the Delivery of the Virgen, which the Church celebrates today and which we have to celebrate with special devotion and joy.*

It might be indicative of a slow but profound change of attitudes towards birth that the feast was taken off the Catholic calendar in 1741 by Benedict XIV.[72] In the 17th century, the *Virgen de la Expectación* still enjoyed a privileged position in the private rooms of Spanish queens,[73] who most likely turned to her when the release of the baby was no longer feared but became desirable. The language of the time had an expression for this state of imminence: According to Covarrubias, "ser sin días" ('to be without days') or "ser sin tiempo" ('to be without time') meant that the pregnant woman was "en días de parir" ('in the days of giving birth').[74] Chronicler Barrionuevo took note of this final stage when, on November 14, 1657, he informed on the comadre de Granada (midwife from Granada) sleeping in a chamber adjacent to the queen's bedroom: "Ya han llevado a Palacio a la comadre de Granada para que de día ni de noche no se aparte del lado de la Reina […]. Dios la alumbre con bien" ('They already took the midwife from Granada to the palace so that day and night she would not leave the side of the queen […] May God give her a happy delivery'). The prince was born on November 28.[75] Again, this final turning point—birth—was precisely determined: It was the day of the ninth absence of menstrual blood. Where it occurred earlier, it could take people maybe not by surprise, but without all the necessary preparations finished.[76] Ac-

cording to doctors, it was the weight of the baby that triggered delivery, and the onset of birth could be encouraged by odiferous plants, substances like ergot, or a full moon. When labor set in or the waters broke, parturition started.[77]

Length of pregnancy

Thus far we have discussed a pregnancy that was brought to term according to a rhythm and timing shared by most women. It should be noted here that there was a more complicated juridical side to the length of gestation: What if a husband returned from war after ten months and found a child in the cradle? Should he become suspicious of his wife? Or could a child born some eleven months after his purported father's death be heir to his titles and estates? In a time when a full life cycle was much less to be counted on than today, such questions got considerable attention from experts in the law[78] who then were to ascertain the starting point of human life. As to the length of pregnancy, they mostly settled for a maximum of ten months but did not discard the possibility of eleven, twelve, and even thirteen months' gestation in very special cases or when witchcraft came into play. Opinions on the question given by the authorities of the Bible or Greek philosophy added to the confusion. The reason is that they followed a lunar calendar of twenty-nine or thirty days in length, which was employment they had in common with contemporary women who calculated the time of their gestation (see Figure 7).[79]

Married women were expected to account for any delay in their cycles, especially when they spent longer peri-

ods separated from their husbands. The letters from Johanna of Harrach to her husband, mentioned above, bear telling testimony to this. It is most illustrating that the countess even brings up their last coitus, if only, as she frankly excuses herself, for the purpose that her beloved husband might not think she had laid down beside a French coachman. What was a joke, in her case, could turn into a point of honor and a drama of jealousy and violence in others. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, in the early years of his career as a playwright, weaved the motif into a play of strong baroque colors and contrasts titled *La devoción de la Cruz*.[80]

Besides the juridical one, the length of pregnancy had its symbolic dimension, with every month being associated with a planet and the traits imprinted on the ones born under its sign. A child born within seven months of gestation belonged to the Moon, while eight months were governed by the sinister Saturn, so births taking place in his shadow were judged to be the riskiest ones. Finally, infants born after nine months were endowed with the strength and health associated with Jupiter.[81]

Since time immemorial, calendars and birth have enjoyed a close relationship, and such was the case in Golden Age Spain. For one, the cyclical celebration of Marian festivities culturally channeled emotions, marking its progression towards delivery. For another, in the vision of the time, ancient goddesses or gods conferred their qualities upon the instant in which a child appeared in the visible world. There seems to reside a major difference between today and the past: In 16th and 17th-century Spain, pregnancy was fraught with interpretation and symbols; it was considered as perilous and decisive as parturition itself. It was both a time

of expectation and, somewhat paradoxically, because it made up so much of female life and because so often the goal was not reached, it became a time with its own social and cultural significance. It was interpreted as a summary and foreboding of a whole life to be lived (see Figure 8).

Pregnancy not brought to term

When Damián Carbón wrote his famous treatise on the art of midwifery, the first reader he sought to inform and comfort was a nobleman whose wife had suffered several miscarriages.[82] Pregnancy was perceived as a time of great risks and dangers, and people were well aware that a great portion of them was not carried to term.[83] The phenomenon will be briefly sketched, relying on the information given by contemporary testimonies.[84] The great majority of reports on pregnancy not brought to completion stem from aristocratic circles. As for commoners, we have to rely on judicial records, hagiographies or mentions in fictional texts.

The number of miscarriages suffered during the childbearing years of one specific woman could be deduced from birth intervals signaled in parish registers. For Spain, no such study seems to have been undertaken so far on a larger scale.[85] Where a life story was closely followed by biographers, however, the (recorded) number of unfinished gestations can be ascertained. Again, these are the biographies of queens, princesses, and aristocratic women. As these show, miscarriage was an experience from which few of them were spared: Isabella I of Castile suffered at least one fetal loss in a total of six pregnancies, of which there is a record left;[86] her

daughter Catherine of Aragon (Catalina de Aragón) gave birth to one girl who lived till adult age while experiencing various spontaneous abortions and five premature births.[87] Empress Isabella of Portugal (Isabel de Portugal) suffered two abortions in 1534 and 1539.[88] Anne of Austria, queen of France, went through the ordeal six times.[89] Mariana of Austria (1634–1696) had to cope with seven pregnancies between 1650 and 1661, one of which ended in a miscarriage and another with the delivery of a stillborn girl.[90]

Miscarriage frequently occurred in the early weeks of gestation, possibly due to genetic deformations. Premature birth was often triggered by external factors such as infectious diseases.[91] Moreover, contemporary writers warn against lack of caution in behavior: physical exercise, riding on horseback, wild dancing, or hard work.[92] As discussed above, at court, debates about the convenience of coach rides set in at an early stage of pregnancy, and these precautions were probably much more intensely discussed where former pregnancies had already gone wrong. As to peasant women or servants, there seems to be little evidence of miscarriages caused by excessive workload. On the contrary, the medic Fontecha asserts that ordinary tasks like riding in a cart, on the back of a donkey, or carrying weights do not jeopardize pregnancy as long as a woman is used to them. Following Fontecha's view, a miscarriage would strike common women less often than ladies. Where poor women subjected their bodies to excessive strain, and it was habitual among them to do so, he carries on, it would be for the purpose of inducing abortion.[93] As Fontecha's example shows, early modern medical writers were at

pains to draw the line between mishaps, accidents, and intentional acts.

Another perceived cause for an untimely end of pregnancy was the neglect of or aggression towards the expecting mother, be it towards her body or her mind. Harsh words and insults were alleged causes of fetal loss in court suits. Violence against pregnant women, probably often caused by doubts about who might really be the father, appears in private testimonies and in court records.[94] Perpetrators of such acts may have counted on some connivance in a culture obsessed with honor. On the other hand, since being pregnant was considered a blessed and privileged state and an imitation of Mary's salutary mission, such acts were strongly condemned. The Spanish-style comedies of Calderón—always sensitive to the most critical areas of social life—stage cases of pregnant wives attacked by jealous husbands in *La devoción de la Cruz* (The Devotion to the Cross) and in *El mágico prodigioso* ('The Prodigious Magician').[95]

If violence was perceived as a cause for a thwarted gestation, so was inappropriate medical care. When Fontecha discusses the correct manner of bloodletting a pregnant woman,[96] he probably recalls the debate that followed the death of Elisabeth of Valois, with doctors accused of applying treatments without taking into account her pregnancy and thereby provoking the miscarriage of a girl in the fifth month of gestation, and the death of the queen.[97]

Finally, the disease environment mattered. Midwives knew about the impact of illness on pregnancy and birth; they brought it up as an argument when faced with accusations of having exercised their craft without necessary care and skill. For instance, in her fa-

mous apology published in 1627, the French midwife Louise Bourgeois alleged that she could not procure a happy delivery where a woman's body was already weakened by ailments.[98] As for Spanish aristocrats, Empress Isabella of Portugal suffered from malaria, a fact that conditioned her reproductive years and her death following premature delivery in 1539.[99] Queen Margaret gave birth prematurely after being afflicted by smallpox and fever during pregnancy.[100] Similarly, the seventh pregnancy of Empress Margaret Maria Theresa of Spain ended abruptly at an early stage when the lady was afflicted by a fever that worsened the effects of a goiter she had been developing over the years before.[101]

The death of Empress Maria Anna of Spain, sister of King Philip IV, deserves closer examination. Maria Anna caught a sudden catarrh in the later stage of pregnancy after a hunting party she had enjoyed with the emperor, an infection of which she died. Upon her death, a girl was immediately extracted from her womb and baptized during the minutes in which midwives and doctors perceived signs of a life that was not meant to last.[102] The case points to a longstanding debate: In the Middle Ages, postmortem cesarean section was performed because a mother could not be buried carrying an unbaptized infant—a *pagan*—inside her. In early modern times, this care for the salvation of infants' souls prevailed, and contemporaries always included emergency baptism in their accounts of the procedure. Ultimately, the issue was also of juridical relevance. When the fetus showed even the slightest signs of life upon extraction from the womb, a dead mother's property would be inherited by her husband instead of being returned to her family of origin.[103] However, at which stage of

pregnancy could a fetus be considered human and entitled to inheritance? 17th-century attorneys wrote many a page on the subject. Alonso de Carranza's lengthy dissertation on the true status of human birth, published in Madrid in 1628, represents a major example among Spanish writers.[104]

Prevention of miscarriage

So, what were women meant to do? Fontecha admonished women to adapt their lifestyle to the different stages of pregnancy, exercising with moderation and taking care of such delicate movements as getting on a horse's back or descending from it.[105] Such recommendations could not easily be followed as long as the court was itinerant and a queen undertook political missions. Isabella of Castile gave birth in five different places in Spain and suffered an abortion in Cebreros in the province of Ávila after traveling the rough terrain around the town. When pregnant again after eight years of secondary sterility, her Jewish doctor Lorenzo Badoz advised her to travel to western Andalusia on the waterway of the Guadalquivir and not on a horse's back.[106]

Women with child should also be spared everything that caused mental distress.[107] However, many a mother had to bury a child while expecting another and endure the death of a spouse or a close relative in the months of pregnancy. Thus, this, too, was a goal that could not be easily achieved. When Prince John of Portugal died at the age of sixteen on January 2, 1554, 18 days before his spouse Joanna of Austria (Juana de Austria, 1535–1573) gave birth to their first child, the court went to great lengths to conceal the news from the infanta. The shock of the news, it was feared, would harm the future

mother and the child even more.[108] Finally, doctors also pleaded indulgence for all the objects women wished to wear on their necks and bodies in order to protect themselves and the baby: stones, amulets such as the famous claw of a weasel (*comadreja* in Spanish), girdles, and images with holy words inscribed on them.[109]

When all these efforts aiming at a successful pregnancy failed, what were the last acts dedicated to prematurely born infants? Court physicians were eager to distinguish delayed menstruation from actual pregnancy, trying to recognize minute fetuses within the blood lost in a miscarriage and even to determine their sex. As it appears, for all the distress spontaneous abortions caused, they were nevertheless considered part of a queen's reproductive yields and efforts, and a sign of hope regarding her fertility and her capacity to give birth to a male heir.[110] King Philip's account of his spouse's miscarriage in 1653, mentioned above, provides a case in point. According to the king's information, the fetus examined for his sex must have been some eight to ten weeks old.[111]

Habitually, unbaptized infants were not put to rest within the boundaries of consecrated graveyards. Nevertheless, there were practices of burying them close to the family dwelling or under the house's threshold.[112] Graves and tombstones testify to interrupted pregnancies that resulted in the death of both mother and infant. For instance, after the fatal disease and confinement of Empress Maria Anna of Spain at Linz in 1646, a funeral procession mounted on ships took their corpses down the Danube to Vienna and buried them together with great solemnity in the local Augustine church.[113]

Induced abortion

If physicians, theologians, and satirical writers[114] provide an accurate representation of their time, induced abortion, carried out to interrupt undesired pregnancy, was a common yet repudiated practice in Spain. For example, Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, the 15th-century author of the *Corbacho*, claims to have knowledge of cases among married women, widows, nuns, and even newlyweds.[115] They all found assistance in the houses of old matrons[116] and were driven by the urge to avoid public shame. Spanish law punished abortion, maintaining the Aristotelian vision of animation that occurred after forty days in a male fetus and after ninety days in a female one. While the Church initially adhered to the same differentiation and did not label abortion as homicide, its position hardened from the late 17th century onwards. This tendency might have been related to an increasing concern for baptism: An aborted fetus lost his chance of salvation; therefore, it had to be protected.[117] What was the social reality to which such laws and moral concerns referred? The *Portal de Archivos Españoles* (PARES) lists thirty-seven criminal cases of abortions in the time from 1500 to 1800. They might indicate some patterns, such as the following: Abortions were often executed to hush up the consequences of illicit relations, such as the one that a priest had entertained with his housekeeper, a master with his servant, a married woman with a neighbor. In these cases, solving the problem by way of abortion seems to have been of strong interest to the male part. Abortion became public when other issues were involved: violence, an unkept promise of marriage, or family feuds. Close relatives could play crucial but quite diverging roles, both

pushing a pregnant daughter to abort in order to safeguard the family's honor or bringing a case of abortion before a criminal court. Relatives entered the scene when a pregnant woman suffered severe damage or died in the act. Among the persons accused of facilitating the means of a pregnancy's disruption—such as *agua de esparto* (a potion containing esparto grass)—the archives show a predominance of women. Nevertheless, also surgeons (in one case, abortion is reported to be achieved by bloodletting) and apothecaries appear in the records.[118] As Jacques Gélis asserts, in 17th-century Paris, midwives came under heavy attack given their involvement in induced abortion, a fact that encouraged those who claimed for their substitution by male practitioners.[119] As it seems, Spanish female birth assistants never got this closely associated with the interruption of pregnancy.

By and large and with due caution, Françoise Loux's assessment of French popular attitudes might also apply to Spain: the ingestion of herbs, such as the rue (*ruda*),[120] of the named esparto grass, of ergot or other substances deemed effective.[121] In the first weeks after conception, they were considered a means of bringing back menstruation rather than an interruption of a gestation.[122]

Illegitimacy

Pregnancy was considered a privileged state, and to give birth meant to act in consonance with divine providence. However, the degree to which this positive concept of generation could be experienced depended on status, social conditions, and ethnic and religious identity. In the-

ory, childbirth was restricted to marriage, the Church condemned pregnancy out of wedlock, and illegitimate births often carried along social stigma.[123] At the same time, the risk of applying preconceived ideas and supposing that early modern Spaniards lived by the same values and moral judgments as, say, people in Victorian England, is ubiquitous. According to historian Bartolomé Bennassar, the "sin of the flesh" was met with relative leniency in Golden Age Spain,[124] as only saints had the strength and virtue to resist worldly temptations. As long as a couple was willing to marry, sexual relations were tolerated, even encouraged to strengthen the bond. Where the future of a house and family was considered a supreme value, a wedding involving a pregnant bride was considered much less inconvenient than a marriage that lacked offspring.[125]

While rates of illegitimacy were low in rural parishes, almost non-existent in some places, they could constitute up to nearly five percent (ten percent if abandoned babies are added) in others. This applies to 16th-century Valladolid, and even more to towns with a student population like Salamanca, where the rate could reach some twenty-five percent.[126] Servants and slaves frequently were impregnated by their masters; therefore, illegitimacy was higher in the quarters of the nobility than in neighborhoods inhabited by commoners. Likewise, places with a complex social structure and a diversified economy (centers of commerce and ports) saw higher rates of children born out of wedlock, as did military garrisons.[127] The urban bias in illegitimacy was also because unmarried mothers frequently went to bigger towns to give birth anonymously.

Spanish midwives and doctors

Birth was in the hands of midwives, and so were other matters concerning love, sex, parenthood and earliest infancy.[128] Therefore, some general remarks concerning these women's status, schooling, and range of tasks are in order.

Midwives were indispensable and unrivaled; they were "necessary",[129] to put it in the words of 17th-century Catholic preacher Diego Murillo. Nobody challenged a midwife's role in procuring a fortunate delivery. She was expected to deal with *partos no naturales* ('unnatural births'), as the physician Francisco Núñez puts it,—that is, to deliver a baby who came feet, arms or buttocks first, or to deal with the difficult and high-risk delivery of twins[130]—just as she dealt with regular births (see Figure 9).

Surgeons and doctors intervened during pregnancy and were summoned into the birthing chamber when complications arose, for example to conduct a postmortem cesarean section.[131] Although there is some testimony of diverging opinions and disputes in birthing rooms, the general impression is one of respectful cooperation among all professional groups involved. In court chronicles, doctors and midwives are often mentioned as complementary agents, contributing their specific skills and competence.[132] Even where male contemporaries were critical of midwives, they forwarded one main argument for their necessity: shame. Women would not be able to overcome this strong emotion and its impact on the body when attended by a man—this was the common understanding at the time. A process that depended on relaxation and the release of the fetus could not be encour-

aged by male assistants.[133] Thus, male physicians and surgeons did not start to actively compete with midwives up until the 18th century.[134] Interestingly, the first male obstetricians were brought onto Spanish ground by the French dynasty that came to power after the death of the last Habsburg king in 1700.[135] The advance of men into birthing rooms was slow and gradual, confined to urban and aristocratic elites first. It could not be imposed on rural areas until the second half of the 20th century.

4. Birth

A midwife's wisdom

Midwives held special knowledge. Unfortunately, no Spanish midwife of the time put on paper what she knew about birthing. Therefore, scholars have to rely on how male medical and literary authors comment on it or what can be deduced from other sources, such as letters, chronicles or hagiography. Physicians, also in their role as authors of obstetrical treatises, endeavored to teach inexperienced midwives and sometimes criticized their doing, as, for example, their intrusion into the field of pediatrics, often requested by mothers whose trust a wise woman had gained during birth. Carbón, for instance, accuses this profound trust into firsthand knowledge, for which mothers turn to midwives instead of seeking doctors' advice.[136]

Nevertheless, much of what obstetric scholars had to say about a competent midwife stemmed from the close observation of renowned representatives of her craft. Male experts did not only convey the teachings of traditional authorities like Hippocrates, Galen, or Avicenna. They also collected knowledge passed on not by books but by hands and voice, from a mother to her daughter, from an aunt to her niece, from one childbearing

woman to another.[137] It is worth emphasizing that these women's knowledge was consequential: The future of social elites depended on a midwife's skillful proceedings, and even more so in times of demographic crisis and aristocratic women weakened by generations of consanguineous marriage. Likewise, no rural community would have entrusted the future of its families to women whose mastery was not confirmed by experience, who did not stand the relentless judgment passed by gossip and everyday communication. Midwives were experts summoned by law courts. There, they provided their professional opinion on such delicate matters as the preservation of virginity in a marriage (which could be a cause for divorce), or they assessed fake pregnancies and the subsequent smuggling in of a baby presented as official heir to the estate of a family.[138]

A midwife's training

Great differences regarding a midwife's status and education can be observed;[139] in fact, one might speak of two independent lines of historical evolution: On one side, there were attempts to create a group of professionals distinguished by titles and approved by examinations. A tribunal of physicians appointed these midwives, the first of which seems to date from the end of the 15th century and the reign of the Catholic Kings.[140] By contrast, there is a long tradition of non-professionalized midwifery. Those were female practitioners authorized and licensed merely through the (female) parish community. They were respected thanks to talent and vocation, the latter always seen as a divine gift in health matters. Such a woman handled birth in close cooperation

with the relatives of the childbearing woman—a mother, a mother-in-law, an older sister, a future godmother—as well as other women of the community deemed apt to help out: "Comadre no hay. Se valen las mujeres unas de otras"[141] ('There is no midwife. Women rely on the assistance of one another'), reported the bishop's emissary from a parish in Southern Spain.

The distinction must have mattered: 17th-century parish registers sometimes talk of a *comadre de la villa* ('town midwife'), while others refer to a *partera* ('common birth assistant'), whereby the ones belonging to the first category receive more respect and trust in their dealings with the town's authorities, especially with the parish priest.[142] In other cases, a midwife's official status can be guessed by the fact that she is singled out via her name, cognomen, or honorific title: la *matrona* María Oto, la Herradera, *doña* Quirce de Toledo.[143] At the very cuspid of the hierarchy of midwives, some were sworn into office at the court and thereafter enjoyed enormous privileges as *comadres de la reina* ('midwives of the queen'), as was Inés Ramírez de Ayala, midwife of two queens in the 17th century.[144] What can be observed, however, is that there was no clear dividing line between professional midwifery and birthing knowledge acquired through experience. How could there be, in a mountainous country, in times of poor communication, lack of public or motorized transport, and many births—or pregnancy losses—that did not occur on the foreseen date! Village people still tell stories about labor coinciding with the snowstorm of a winter night that made it impossible to call for a doctor or a midwife.[145] Under such circumstances, amateur birth assistants had to help out; it can be surmised

that married women, who had themselves given birth several times, knew what to do. Was there any link or connection between the two traditions? There certainly was. Even the careers of the most respected midwives started with domestic apprenticeship. Moreover, even where doctors required midwives to be instructed and examined, they did not dismiss their real-life experience. *Ordenanzas* issued by the doctors and surgeons of Saragossa in 1663 stipulated that any midwife who aspired to an official title had to lend her hands to an older midwife for some years before obtaining it.[146]

A midwife's practice

A Spanish midwife's competence went far beyond what midwives do in modern hospitals. Her activities encompassed a much longer period and a greater spectrum of tasks. Midwives monitored all stages of pregnancy, but women also sought their help to regain lost virginity[147]—or at least to devise some simulacrum for the wedding night.[148] Regarded as a wise woman, a midwife was sought out to remedy infertility, to interrupt unwanted pregnancy, and also to take care of undesired babies after birth. Her expertise in gynecology and obstetrics could be complemented by a responsibility for matters of love and marriage. A marital union could depend on her intimate knowledge of both the female body and the secret side of social life. It was not uncommon for a cautious suitor and his relatives to solicit the midwife's opinion about a girl's capacity to bear healthy children.[149] Spanish medical[150] and juridical[151] authors remembered Plato's *Theaetetus*, a work in which the philosopher marvels at a midwife's "thorough knowledge

of what unions are likely to produce a brave brood."[152] It is not by coincidence that the *alcahueta* ('go-between') and the *partera* ('midwife') are closely associated in an outstanding work of Spanish fiction, the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, better known as *La Celestina*, first published at the end of the 15th century. Consequently, midwifery had a strong social, cultural, and even religious connotation. Everybody knew the midwife within her parish and community, and she entertained a tight network of social relations: "Con todos tenía que hacer, con todos hablaba; si saliemos [sic] por la calle, cuantos topábamos eran sus ahijados"[153] ('With all she had to do, with all she talked; when we went out on the street, whomever we met was her godchild')—words of the old go-between Celestina evoking the memory of her close friend, the midwife Claudina.

Inés de Ayala, midwife of two Spanish queens

The royal midwife Inés de Ayala (1590–1663) lived the heydays of her career in the 1650s and early 1660s, perfectly fitting the contemporary[154] image of an excellent midwife: a woman beyond her reproductive years and a widow (husbands did not care for nightly excursions of a young wife) who had gained her skill and reputation through the cooperation with her mother, Catalina. She herself had gone through all the ordeals of maternity: An attack of fever in the childbed had almost cost her life, and she lost several children in their first years of life. She was a fervent devotee of the Virgin and bore witness to the life of her close friend Mariana de Jesús, a saintly nun who was proposed for canonization immediately after her death in 1624. Inés de Ayala rose above the status of many others of her craft. However, her case might

not have been as extraordinary as it seems; Ambassador Pötting reports that Spanish midwives, especially the ones from Seville, worked under excellent conditions at the court and were very well paid.[155] Inés de Ayala was a resolute woman with a strong language and an iron will who incessantly toiled for the interests of her offspring and family network.[156] But she must also have been capable of offering soothing words and bringing joy and hope into the chambers where princes and infantas were born, and great expectations so often ended in despair. The capacity to keep a childbearing woman's spirits high and encourage her through stories, stories about other births that turned well despite difficult beginnings, was listed among a midwife's paramount virtues by contemporary authors.[157] It is noteworthy that hagiography provides most details about Inés de Ayala's professional career and private life. Unlike the Italian Trotula de Ruggiero (supposedly writing around 1050) or her near contemporaries, the German Justine Siegemund (1636–1705) and the French Louise Bourgeois (1563–1636), active at the court of France, Inés herself left neither memories of her achievements in a birthing room nor a compendium of the knowledge gathered in the long years of her professional experience.

Birthing: Impending changes of mentalities

The later 17th century witnessed renewed and intense anatomical inquiry. Medics dissected the human body, scrutinized its inside, and captured it into images for the analytical eye. Simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically, physicians described blood circulation and con-

ceived the human organism as a dynamic system subject to permanent transformation. The microscope, a major innovation of the century, allowed for exploring the hitherto invisible structure of female reproductive organs or observing spermatozoids under a magnifying lens.[158] Did these findings and changes affect the way things were done in Spanish birthing rooms? There seems to be no such evidence. Did midwives get any wind of these new visions of the body and procreation? It does not seem likely.

Instruments and surgical tools came into play in cases of emergency, for instance, when it was deemed necessary to employ hooks for the extraction of a dead fetus or one whose head just could not pass through the pelvis. The life of the mother then took preference over the infant's survival.[159] Surgeons opened the womb of a dead mother in order to rescue a fetus that was still alive. Postmortem cesarean sections were meant to facilitate baptism; thus, they counted on the Church's blessing. It even seems that this religious concern drove progress in surgical techniques.[160] Such interventions were usually performed by *cirujanos* ('surgeons of the old style'), but we can assume that midwives were acquainted with the procedure, too. Forceps were not used—and misused, as critical voices claimed—before the 18th century.[161]

When birth took place in the royal palace, both doctors and midwives, who worked in close cooperation, projected a Galenic view onto the body, choosing remedies to rebalance the humors and to find the right equilibrium of cold, heat, moisture, and dryness. Attending to these criteria, the womb should be lowered or lifted, opened, or prevented from releasing the baby prema-

turely. When Queen Mariana of Austria suffered fits of eclampsia in a series of unfortunate births in the 1650s, court physicians passionately discussed whether bloodletting was an appropriate cure for this ailment.[162] In the same way midwives subscribed to humoral theory, doctors considered astronomy, astrology, and the cycles of the Moon to be serious matters. They shared the metaphors midwives lived by: the female being compared to a tree that bears fruit, the womb seen as a place into which the new life sinks its roots,[163] fetal development as an opening of leaves, the process of procreation as the tending of a rose-garden (see Figure 10).[164]

Birth in a multi-ethnic empire

Upon delving into concrete birthing scenarios, early modern Spain's ethnic and religious complexity must be considered. Spain ruled over a multi-ethnic empire, and although Catholicism reigned over the Iberian Peninsula, other traditions and beliefs wielded their influence in its birthing rooms. Until recently, everybody living in Madrid knew the *calle de la comadre de Granada* ('Midwife from Granada Street') and the *barrio de la comadre* ('midwife-neighborhood'). The *comadre de Granada* was remembered as being of Moorish origins.[165] Coming from the south and a Morisco background—that is, from a community of formerly Muslim people who supposedly had been converted to the Christian faith—does not seem to have endangered her career and popularity.[166] Spanish Christians did not want to miss the expertise of Morisco midwives. Similarly, Jewish doctors were welcome at courts until the end of the 15th century. During her childbearing years—five births and a mis-

carriage between 1470 and 1485—the Queen of Castile closely followed the advice and recommendations given by the Jewish physician Lorenzo Badoz.[167]

Nonetheless, with the onset of the early modern age, inter-religious frictions roughened the soil on which Spanish births took place. Muslims and Jews had to officially adapt to the preeminent religious patterns, and they needed to change or hide the birth customs proper to their creed. Christian birth assistants were in charge of watching over baptism for every newborn, lending their eyes and hands to the Inquisition. By the end of the 16th century, Spanish authorities tried to impose a Christian midwife on each Morisco community, thus preventing *Converso* women from giving birth in their old "Moorish manner." Such a midwife kept a record of the days and weeks of every pregnancy in order to forestall the clandestine performance of Muslim birth rituals and to ensure the baptism of every baby. But, as authorities noted with resignation, Morisco families dodged this surveillance by calling the midwife too late, when the baby was already delivered, pretending that labor had set in unexpectedly and delivery had been quick.[168]

Regardless, tensions also arose for Catholic midwives—this is true for both Old and New Christians. Midwives responsible for emergency baptism needed to keep their baptismal record clean,[169] since suspicions of negligence caused by religious heterodoxy could bring serious trouble with the Tribunal of the Holy Office and its zealous bureaucrats.[170] There indeed is some evidence about midwives persecuted for purported heterodoxy. For example, one Isabel, wife of Francisco Buri, was accused in 16th-century Valladolid of having died

in the "Moorish faith," and the town's Inquisitors requisitioned her belongings.[171] Similarly, the formerly Jewish midwife Beatriz Rodriguez faced accusations by the Archbishopric of Toledo. She was said to have willfully corrupted a child's baptism.[172] By and large, as far as sources have been examined on the matter, midwives, nonetheless, do not stand out as one of the Spanish Inquisition's main targets.

There is evidence of syncretistic practices in all directions. Morisco women had no argument over worshiping Mary[173] nor handing down apocryphal tales about the Virgin assisting her cousin Elizabeth in Saint John's birth.[174] Christian authors adduced Shifra and Puah as role models for midwives, and they highlighted the Hebrew heroines of Exodus who procured Jewish survival in Egypt.[175] As to newly conquered territories,[176] indigenous birth practices appear in testimonies of conquest, such as the *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España* ('The General History of the Things of New Spain'). The work emphasizes midwives' voices and their degree of responsibility and exhibits their manual techniques in its illustrations (see Figure 11). Peninsular medics, too, took note of these new territories' potential. A closer examination of Francisco de Núñez's *Libro intitulado del parto humano* reveals: In contrast to his German template, Eucharius Rösslin's *Der Swangern Frauwen und Hebammen Rosengarten*[177] ('Pregnant Women's and Midwives' Rose Garden'), published 1513, the Spanish physician includes substances from the New World, one example being "aquellas gomas traídas de Indias" ('these gums brought from the Indies'), namely, *tachamaca*, or *caraña*.[178]

Birth meant the creation of cultural identity and, as shown in these examples, could, therefore, become a main arena for perceptions of alterity, of the self and the other. Accordingly, the writer Miguel de Cervantes observed that Gypsy (Romani) women had no need for a midwife as they were all acquainted with the craft. After delivery, Cervantes states, they bathed their babies in cold water, preparing them for the hardships of life.[179]

In spite of its multi-ethnic configuration, not everything was done differently in the Spanish Empire's birthing rooms. In a *Converso* or Muslim community, midwives directed the birthing scenario in the same way they did in Christian parishes, in Aztec or other pre-Columbian communities. In all these cultures, birth strengthened ties among female relatives and communities. They all used amulets, charms, and prayers; they counted the length of pregnancy on a lunar calendar and associated the Moon with female divine powers; they all thought an upright birthing position to be the most propitious and were guided by concepts of purity, impurity, and taboo around birth.[180]

Testimonies of birthing: Typical patterns and extraordinary scenarios

In the endeavor to delineate specific patterns of birth, personal and ego-documents are of great value, both for ordinary or exceptional circumstances. Count Pötting, whose wife Maria Sophia of Dietrichstein—as noted above—had important family ties with the Spanish aristocracy, is a good example. On November 3, 1667, the ambassador notes in his diary:

> A las cinco y medio cuarto [sic] de la mañana parió felizmente mi amada mujer a luz una niña en esta Real Corte y Villa de Madrid, en casas de don Fernando Tejada, calle llamada de la Luna. La comadre, muy experimentada, era doña Leonarda. Empezaron los dolores del parto, que fueron muy recios, a las dos de la mañana. Dios nuestro Señor sea mil veces alabado por tanta merced que nos hizo, y se sirva de amparar esta su criatura [...][181]
>
> *At five and half quarter [sic] of the morning, my beloved wife happily delivered a girl in this Royal Court and Town of Madrid, in the dwellings of Don Fernando Tejada, [in the] street named* de la Luna. *The midwife, very experienced, was doña Leonarda. The birth pangs, which were very fierce, started at two in the morning. Be God our Lord a thousand times praised for such a favor he granted to us, and may he be served to protect this creature of his[...]*

Pötting tells of a nocturnal, quick, happy, yet painful delivery without complications. The baby is born in a private home, an experienced midwife assists the mother. In a letter to her mother, dated July 27, 1534, the Catalan noblewoman Estefanía de Requesens depicts a similar setting, together with personal notes on the perception of her body and how she lived through the process:

> El jueves pasado me sentí todo el día muy pesada y por la tarde, tras reposar en la cama, cuando comenzaba a dormir, se me rompieron las aguas, sin daño alguno, y hubo muchas. Me asusté un poco por no estar acostumbrada, y mandé llamar a la comadre quien me aconsejó que permaneciese en la cama, pues no había daño alguno, y que intentase dormir. La obligué también que fuese a la cama, en casa, y durante aquella noche continué expulsando aguas, con un dolor muy leve. Me metí en la

cama entre las 10 y las 11 y fue cuando me comenzaron los dolores. Al tener en casa a la madrina y a la señora tía estuve en la cama hasta las 12 horas cuando hice llamar a la comadre [...] y así quiso Dios que en un cuarto de hora acabase.[182]

Last Thursday, I felt very heavy all day long, and in the evening, after resting in bed, when I was about to fall asleep, I broke waters, without any damage, and there were a lot. I was a little startled as I was not accustomed to that, and I called for the midwife, who advised me to stay in bed, as there was no damage at all, and that I should try to sleep. I also compelled her to go to bed, in our house, and during that night, I continued to expel water, with a very light pain. I went to bed between 10 and 11, and it was then that the pains of labor started. As I had the matron in the house and the lady aunt, too, I was in bed till 12 o'clock, whereupon I had the midwife be summoned [...] and that way, God wished that it was over in a quarter of an hour.

Birthplace and time

The free choice of the location for birth was one of the privileges Fontecha granted to pregnant women in his treatise *Diez privilegios*.[183] When he postulated this, he probably had noble women and their palaces and country mansions in mind. However, assessing the choices given to a common woman within a parish community and a family network would be interesting. For example, in the southwest of Spain, it was customary for a mother-to-be to return to her own mother's house for her first birth.[184] This fact was of no little importance

for the relation thus established between the baby and its maternal grandmother.[185]

Calderón—the play is *El maestro de danzar* ('The Dance Teacher')—introduces a lady who, in order not to be detained by a pair of impertinent city-sheriffs, pretends to be a midwife who rushes to a birth in the deep hours of the night.[186] This seems to be a scene inspired by contemporary life in the capital and the general timing of birth, to be discerned in many accounts: Labor started late in the evening, and the babies were born in the early hours of the morning, together with the rising sun—as chroniclers repeatedly point out when celebrating the matutinal birth of a prince.[187] In such a nocturnal setting, the assisting family gathered around the childbearing woman, and someone, typically the man of the house, set out to fetch the midwife. His task was highly valued in a time when the presence of an honorable woman on nightly streets was neither accepted nor frequent.

Birth hidden from the community

Nighttime best suited those women who, in order to preserve their honor, had to give birth secretly. In Cervantes' novel *La ilustre fregona* ('The Illustrious Scullery-Maid'), the protagonist's mother, a widowed lady whom a gentleman has raped, goes on a pilgrimage to the Our Lady of Guadalupe shrine (Cáceres, Extremadura) to hide her state. On her way, eventually, labor comes over her. She has to deliver with help from her maids, who are sheltered by the secrecy of the chamber of an inn. Finally, she leaves the baby in the care of the village people.[188] Such fictions were not as far removed from real-life experience as they might seem to a Western reader

today. Only one out of many examples will be provided here: On March 30, 1715, a woman entered a house in Granada asking for shelter because she was about to give birth. Her request was not declined. The lady of the house poured baptismal water over the head of the newborn girl, christened her María, and took her to the town's foundling home the following day, where she handed her over, wrapped in rags. Her testimony was put down in the institution's books of admissions.[189]

Poverty combined with illegitimacy was a strong motif for secret birth, but also shame and the need to preserve honor and public appearance, together with the lack of a network of support, could turn parturition into an ordeal. Where the fear of public opinion guided behavior, support dwindled. In these cases, the most likely people to assist the woman in labor were her mother,[190] a loyal servant, or a secretive midwife,[191] whose silence sometimes had to be assured by a handsome hush money.[192]

Some women succeeded in protecting secrets even in their own homes, assisted by the Virgin Mary. She comes to the rescue of women whose family life is threatened by an inconvenient pregnancy, who fear for their reputation and have to come up with strategies for the preservation of their marriage. A woman from Lisbon gives an account of this sort when visiting the abovementioned monastery of Guadalupe. Her visit is the result of a vow she made to the Virgin in a moment of greatest distress. When her husband unexpectedly returned from a long voyage at sea, she had just reached the latest phase of an extramarital pregnancy. Labor set in at night; the woman got out of bed and implored for help, kneeling before an image of the Virgin. Not in vain. She gave birth without pain, and the baby came into

the world as if delivered by the hand of an invisible midwife. Thereafter, the new mother put the baby on her own doorstep, pretending that it was a foundling placed there by an unknown person. The husband agreed to raise the infant in his home. The story was published in a 15th-century collection of Marian miracles.[193]

Delivery and obstetrical care

Historical testimonies usually reveal little about the last stage of labor, the phase of expulsion, and pass it over for lack of knowledge, in the case of male writers, or for the sake of decorum. Here lies the worth of satirical fiction. For all its exaggerations and brashness, it does not fail to illustrate birth scenes with life-like details. Such is the scene Antonio Enríquez Gómez included in a novel titled *El siglo pitagórico y vida de don Gregorio Guadaña* ('The Pythagorean Century and Life of Don Gregorio Guadaña'), published in 1644. As most voices do, Enríquez Gómez depicts birth in a private dwelling. The mother-to-be is a midwife herself, the assistants are all female, and childbirth is described as an act fostered and hailed by the neighborhood. The hearty description is given from the angle of an unborn first-person narrator and goes as follows:

> [...] llenóse la cuadra de vecinas: las cuales para hacer compañía a mi madre cuando ella pujaba para echarme de sí, pujaban todas, y algunas parían antes que mi madre.[194]
>
> *[...] the chamber filled up with neighbors who, in order to keep my mother company, when she pushed to throw me out, all pushed, and some gave birth before my mother did.*

Given the baby's breech-position, the midwife predicts a difficult delivery. A surgeon and some doctors are called for, the use of an *anzuelo* ('hook')[195] is suggested while the choir of female voices increases in volume:

> Entonces las vecinas, unas llorando, otras rabiando, decían: puje, señora comadre que le va la vida; salga de pies o de cabeza. [...] Pidió pujos la comadre, y a dos rempujones me arrojó mi madre de la ventana de la muerte a la calle de la vida. Empezaron todos a reír, y yo a llorar.[196]
>
> *So, the neighbors, some crying, others raging, said: push, Lady midwife, your life depends on it; come it out feet or head first. [...] The midwife asked for pushes, and with two shoves, my mother threw me from the window of death to the street of life. They all started to laugh, and I started to cry.*

Birth under the eye of a notary

Where titles and possessions were at stake, delivery could be subjected to close control, with notaries writing down all they saw and all that was going on in a birthing room. This could occur in cases of posthumous offspring, that is, when a widowed parturient had to defend her rights against the relatives of her husband who had died after conception. In this manner, in 1490, Isabel de Cavallería's rights and legal status were contested. The widow who belonged to the noble urban elite of Saragossa was compelled to leave no shadow of a doubt as to her pregnancy being a real one and that the baby born was hers. A notarial act in a so-called *carta pública de parto* ('public letter of birth') was drawn up to testify to every detail of the event. The letter charts how the

woman is brought into a room, in great pain, and held upright by two midwives, how blessed candles are lit, and windows are opened, how the notary thereafter "lifts the skirts" of these women "up to their shirts" and "palpates their bodies and between their legs" to see if they tried to smuggle a baby onto the scene. Subsequently, the notary testifies to Isabel leaning back against the arms and legs of a man who is seated on a chair and how, with some relics placed on her belly and many blessed candles burning, the midwife, herself a widow called *madrina* Salinas, sits down between Isabel's legs on a low stool, with a cloth on her knees to administer birth, a basin placed before her, into which bystanders see blood and water dripping. Finally, they witness how she "bears from her body" a "creature that is all wet and has its eyes shut." The midwife receives the creature in her hands and states that it is endowed with all parts of the male sex; she cuts the cord and wraps the newborn into cloth. The mother is in a state of complete exhaustion and barely conscious. The man who supported her during parturition, her sister's husband and probably the male relative in charge of caring for her rights, confirms that the baby is hers and orders that this should be made public.[197] Similar documents refer to additional measures of control: Midwives examined the breasts and the belly of an expecting woman, the building she lived in was sealed off during the last phase of gestation, and closely examined for any secret entrances. No other pregnant women or women with babies were allowed in.[198] Even after birth, authorities intervened to examine suspicious pregnancies: Where doubts arose after a woman—supposedly—had given birth to a child, midwives were employed to bring facts to light. Such was the case of Margarita de Iturria, a town midwife from

Lesaca. In the year 1541, she was summoned to court in order to counter another woman's claims of having given birth to the child of a clergyman. As no evidence of a recent birth could be found—no wounds in the woman's flesh, no visible blood, no milk in her breasts—the midwife concluded her claims to be false. As reported in the court file, she made her conclusion evident with her finger, exhibiting the lack of "señal de sangre ni otra evidencia alguna" ('a sign of blood or any other evidence') before the court.[199]

Parturition

A female community, a shared rhythm, great danger, and a final outburst of joy in the first case; male control and birth under suspicion but with midwives still in charge in the second: Both testimonies are characteristic of their time. As discussed above, it was already some time before birth that a woman got acquainted with her birth assistant, for example, when pregnancy was confirmed, when a midwife had to attend to the consequences of a miscarriage, or when she offered advice on how to avoid it. She also gave her expert judgment on when birth was bound to happen. Ideally, in the course of such interactions, a strong bond and a relationship based on trust and sympathy was established. Even then, a midwife could excel in two qualities highlighted by obstetrical treatises: patience and psychological care. As for patience, she should take her time and not be in a hurry to rush off to attend to another woman, driven by pecuniary motives.[200] Estefanía de Requesens's birth assistant sleeps in her mansion on the nights before pregnancy comes to term. As for psy-

chology, she was requested to have a cheerful and optimistic temperament, be calm, be patient, and not be easily troubled or discouraged by what she had to witness and handle.[201] When labor set in and no major complications were foreseen, birth unfolded in close interaction between the parturient woman and the midwife. A midwife was expected to be able to deal with uncommon situations, such as the need to deliver a baby who came feet or buttocks first. She was expected to foresee and handle the great "diversity of cases" that could occur in birth, as Carbón states in his treatise *Book of the Art of Midwives*.[202]

Rhythms of opening

As for the roughest part of delivery, it was a sense of rhythm and a feeling for the right moment that was most expected from the midwife. Visual metaphor and the power of analogy were used to support the rhythm of contractions and the opening of the cervix they bring about.[203] Blessed candles—carefully recorded by the notary at the birth of Isabel de Cavallería's son—were not just a means to facilitate the midwife's work. They provided a temporal frame for the occasion, highlighted it, and set it apart from normal time. In a way, they cast a spell on it: When the flames had consumed the wax of the candles, it was hoped, birth should be accomplished.[204] A similar function was attributed to the so-called *rose of Jericho*, a peculiar plant from the desert that became quite popular in early modern Spain. When Roses of Jericho die, they appear like a spherical bundle of dried leaves; however, when sprinkled with water, these leaves uncurl, allowing the water to reach the blossom's seeds and potentially bring forth new life. As

this process takes several hours, it can very well be set as a paragon for the desired length of delivery. It suggests an analogy between the object and a bodily process, as sympathetic magic does. Already used by Muslim women in the Orient and first brought to Italy by Franciscan friars, the rose was endowed with the aura of the Holy Land and the capacity to act upon the course of childbirth.[205] Ritual and the suggestive power that symbols exerted in birth went alongside its assistants' vast knowledge of herbs, plants, stones, and their qualities. According to Francisco Núñez, who mostly drew on Greek, Roman, and Arab authorities, fumigation of myrrh and galbanum "helped" to bring about birth, and so did pigeon manure mixed with certain gums from the Indies. He also recommends the application of wool moistened with the juice of the *ruda* or decoctions of the *sabina* ('juniper'), another plant known for its abortive properties.[206]

Transition and expulsion

Birth testimonies talk of fear, suffering, pain, the risk of death, and the (relative) composure with which stillbirth or postnatal death of a baby was accepted, even registered as a miracle, at least in those cases in which after a long delay the expulsion was a prerequisite of the mother's survival.[207] But this is only one side: They also talk of hope, encouragement, and the parturient's active contribution. A good midwife sets up the woman for delivery, but she lets *her* accomplish the task. This vision was not unique to Spain. Eucharius Rösslin's *Rosengarten* emphasizes a mother's agency, as does the Spanish doctor Francisco Núñez, who copied large passages from the German writer. Happy delivery needed

a woman "with the good strength of her body," with "good, strong, vigorous breath," put in a propitious state, "so that she may well press and work during birth."[208] Similarly, Núñez writes of the "necesidad del trabajar" ('necessity of labor'), for which the mother should not lack strength ("fuerzas"); the creature needed to be "expelled," "almost from one impulse," and immediately after the opening of the amniotic sac, as if swept out along with its fluid. If necessary, the midwife should smoothen the cervix and birth canal with oils and ointments, thus facilitating the passage. Such a delivery without complications was considered a "parto natural" ('natural birth').[209]

Medieval and early modern authors advocated a posture by which parturient women maintained their wombs vertically. Therefore, they were to sit, kneel, squat,[210] or—as Núñez recommends for buxom women—be on all fours while delivering.[211] A childbearing woman had to be sustained by her assistants, normally two women, who held her under the armpits.[212] The person who supported the becoming mother from behind could also be a man, with the woman slinging her hands around his neck.[213] The use of a birthing stool is recommended by Francisco Núñez in 1580. However, while praising the device's advantages, he attributes its use mainly to French, German, and Italian midwives.[214] In 1606, Ruices de Fontecha mentions both methods, birth with or without a stool.[215] Neither doctors nor midwives seem to have insisted on one specific method. Yet, medical authors all emphasize the active part a healthy body should take. Their consensus is that the childbearing body did not remain unsupported nor untouched during delivery. There is a good deal of evidence that this meant

a lot to women involved in childbirth.[216] Likewise, the language of the time emphasized the active nature of female labor (see Figure 12): *parir* ('to birth'), *dar a luz* ('to bring to light').[217]

Labor pains: the curse of Eve

Many a testimony portrays a smooth and quick delivery; others talk of fierce pain, of "dolores recios," as seen in Pötting's note from November 1667,[218] they describe the agony or "feverish horror" of delivery.[219] In Lope de Vega's play *El mayorazgo dudoso*, a male protagonist faces the challenge of assisting birth by happenstance on a city backstreet at night. The parturient woman, as she leans against a wall, clings to his neck, she presses stronger every time, wails "con una voz del alma" (with a voice from the soul) while biting her cape. Her mouth appears that of "un toro cuando brama" (a bull when he roars), so her assistant even fears some mortal wound might afflict her. Her disheveled hair, drenched in sweat, exudes a strong smell of amber.[220] Pain is paramount in this utterly sensory account of birth. As this example shows, women—daughters of Eve—were perceived to incarnate their ancestress' sin as they went through labor. Painless birth, in contrast, was seen as a grace granted to the Virgin and passed on by her to women in need.[221] The above-referred miracle guarded at Guadalupe provides a case in point. Interestingly, the issue of birth pain was also brought up among the mystics, visionaries, and purported heretical movements that emerged in the atmosphere of religious agitation, reformation, and persecution characteristic of the time. In August 1634, a Jesuit priest reports about one "madre Juana" ('mother Juana'), now "mala Juana" ('evil

Juana'), a "famous trickster" punished by scourge who had made women believe that they could give birth secretly without pain and without being discovered, and to whom the ladies of the court willingly lent their ears.[222]

Complications, maternal mortality

Around 1610, Inés de Ayala, together with her mother, Catalina, assisted one Doña Catalina de Ocariz in childbirth. Labor dragged on for a long time, and eventually both midwives, mother and daughter, concluded that the fetus was no longer alive. Fearing for the woman in labor and not knowing how to rescue her, they called upon the saintly woman Mariana de Jesús. While waiting for her arrival, doctors entered the scene and prescribed a potion to expel the fetus. When the nun arrived, however, she forbade the remedy, alleging that it would no doubt cause the woman's death. Instead, a rosary was placed on her belly; prayers sent to heaven, and soothing words were spoken to the suffering woman. Finally, Catalina delivered a dead baby. This *fortunate* outcome—the survival of the parturient—was attributed to Mariana's saintly intervention.[223]

Risks and death in childbirth[224] are strongly emphasized in our historical imagination. Accordingly, conclusions on pregnancy, parturition, and post-partum in the 16th and 17th centuries often adopt gloomy tones. This is due to three reasons.[225] First, complications in childbirth are what fate held in store for many queens or princesses. Given the abundant documentation of their experiences, these occurrences appear in a relevant portion of the records. Second, death in childbirth conferred hardship on the offspring left behind. Mater-

nal orphans had to be cared for by aunts, grandmothers, foster parents, or foundling homes. Third, the motif is often found in myths and fairy tales; it appears in Golden Age comedies with the same frequency as on today's screens. A mother's sacrifice for her child's sake makes for a terrible yet impressive starting point in life.[226] Calderón created more than a dozen female and male characters whose lives were flawed because of the memory of their mothers' deaths in childbed, Segismundo in *La vida es sueño* being the most famous among them.[227] Historical research indicates a less dramatic situation: a woman's chance of dying was one to two percent in every birth and amounted to six to seven percent throughout her childbearing years. As intolerable as this risk might seem today, it caused less consternation in a time when all sorts of disasters incessantly threatened life.[228] Surprisingly, a contemporary Spanish testimony gives much lower numbers for a charitable institution in Madrid: Diego de Barnuevo, administrator of the *Hospital de los Desamparados* in Madrid, states that between 1648 and 1658, 1138 women gave birth in the hospital's birthing ward, out of which three—that is, 0.26 percent—died.[229]

Birth miracles have proved to be a privileged source for investigating possible causes of maternal death. They facilitate precise and surprisingly accurate descriptions of delivery and the bodily processes it involves, detailed descriptions which, when translated into the language of present times, reveal the dangers a childbearing woman had to confront. What makes this source especially interesting is its proximity to the female experience and its truthful rendering of female voices and participants (as far as this can be guaranteed, in retrospect), be they

mothers, aunts, nuns, or the childbearing woman herself. This is partly because women often were summoned as witnesses in the processes of beatification and canonization that these collections of miracles draw on.[230] Miracle reports of the time allow for statistical insights into the causes of maternal deaths. A vast majority of the births with severe complications belong to one of five categories, starting with the least frequent one: fever and infections in childbed, eclampsia, hemorrhage, prolonged retention of a dead fetus, and obstructed labor. Notably, the last group—obstruction due to malpresentation of the baby—makes for 71.47 percent of all cases. When a mother's life was at risk, in most cases, this was because the fetus could not enter and pass through the birth canal.[231] No wonder obstetricians gave much attention to possible abnormal positions of the fetus and the way the midwife could correct them.

The risks of maternity cannot be assessed without taking into account the conditions of life in their totality, including food, a woman's fitness, and the environment of diseases she was exposed to. Noble women bore children at shorter intervals than commoners and, in some cases, first conceived at a very young age. These factors, together with the genetic exhaustion caused by cousins marrying cousins and uncles marrying nieces, heightened the risks entailed by reproduction. Interestingly, given all the misfortune and disaster Spanish queens, infantas, and newborns were struck by, there is a surprising lack of criticism concerning the part played by midwives and the risk of parturition itself. The only case that comes to mind could be the birth of Don Carlos and the ensuing death of the Portuguese Infanta Maria Manuela in 1545. There, midwives had to strug-

gle with breech birth, and the use of a birthing stool was of little avail.[232] One might conclude that while a woman's reproductive years were fraught with dangers (as were, and even more so, the first days and months a baby spent on earth), the moment of birth itself was perilous to a much lesser degree than some modern renderings suggest. In any case, maternal death lowered the chances of survival for fetuses and infants. Postmortem C-sections were done for the sake of baptism; there seems to be no record of any of these babies being saved for a life that lasted longer than some quarter of an hour. And even when babies were born fit for life, maternal death in childbed very much affected their prospects. Frequently, either maternal care could not be substituted, or there was no intention to do so. Maternal orphans often ended up in foundling homes, which rarely offered a good prospect, with mortality rates oscillating around some eighty-five to ninety-five percent. They nevertheless provided a symbolic good, held in highest esteem: prompt baptism, and thus a chance for the infant to attain salvation in the life beyond.[233]

5. Welcoming

Afterbirth, postpartum care

When birth was accomplished, a midwife had to show her skill in several crucial acts. She had to cut the umbilical cord, take care of the bellybutton, as well as of the complete expulsion of the placenta, a touchy and risky matter if not done right; she washed or cleaned the baby and opened the orifices of the little body.[234]

Honey was applied on the lips and mouth of the infant to bridge the time before it first took the breast.[235] It was also usual to cut the frenulum as this was believed to facilitate suckling. When a court midwife performed these tasks, she was closely supervised by a lady's retinue. Any negligence or error could cause her considerable trouble. For instance, when the Infanta Mariana Apollonia was born at the court of Vienna in 1672, a Spanish midwife, one Ana d'Avalos, assisted the Spain-born Empress Margaret Maria Theresa of Spain. The baby died a few days after birth, and influential voices claimed that this was due to a lack of care on the side of the midwife, patent in the way she bandaged the navel and "loosened" the child's tongue. Some weeks later, Ana d'Avalos was ousted from the court of Vienna.[236]

According to Damián Carbón's 16th-century treatise, it is the midwife who chooses a good wet nurse.[237] This statement surely applied to social strata who could afford to have babies nursed by other women. But it is also true in the context of secret birth and infant abandonment. Midwives carried babies their progenitors would not look after to foundling homes or to the house of a wet nurse, who was willing to provide milk as long as payment was granted.[238]

Every detail and possibility of postpartum care would deserve some debate and treatment.[239] What should be emphasized here is the symbolic dimension of everything said and done in these moments when a new life began to unfold, and the foundations for its existence were laid. As for the midwife, her work comprised three aspects: first, the welcoming and assessment of the child; second, the completion of God's creation; third, the reading of signs that revealed something about the baby's life on earth.

Care and assessment

A baby was received by the hands of a midwife, who then laid it down on the floor to lift it up again as a sign of acceptance and recognition. Alonso de Carranza describes this symbolical practice in his treatise on birth, an ancient rite whose description invokes both the memory of Roman goddess Levana and the gesture *tollere liberos*.[240] Her hands thus bore a powerful message as to the welcoming of the baby into the world and its introduction to a community and its rules of life. It was the midwife who, by handing the baby over to the mother, to the father, grandmother, or grandfather, established the

first and most powerful social relations. Thus, it is not by coincidence that early modern Spanish authors, time and again, make special mention of the midwife's hands. When Fernando de Rojas's heroine Celestina speaks to Melibea on behalf of her future love, Calisto, she refers to his birth and the meaningful act she had performed: "[…] aquí está Celestina que le vido nacer y le tomó a los pies de su madre"[241] ('Here stands Celestina who saw him being born and took him from the feet of his mother'). It is very likely that the old go-between was present at the birth of the doomed lover.

Moreover, the midwife was the one who—by the size of the fetus, the color of the skin, and the movements of the body together with the heartbeat and the capacity to breathe—assessed the infant's fitness for life. This assessment was of the highest religious significance. When a baby was born agonizing but showed some terminal signs of life, no time had to be lost and emergency baptism had to be administered immediately.[242] Historical demographers calculate that about three percent of all babies died after such a hasty baptism. Thus, it was a scenario always to be taken into consideration.[243]

Completion of God's creation

Birth was the fullest expression of life and epitomized God's creative power.[244] *Criatura* ('creature') is a term still much used in Spain for very little children.[245] Drawing on her worldly knowledge and skill, a midwife helped to bring about this work of creation; she even gave it its *final touch*. This included the manual molding of the skull, a practice against which critical voices arose in the 18th century,[246] since a midwife was to procure a "buena forma" ('good form') to the child's head, as Car-

bón claims. Similarly, she should promote its overall bodily growth and help the infant find its "natural forma y figura: según su naturaleza requiere (es a saber) que todos los miembros como nace la criatura son como pasta" ('natural form and position: according to what its nature requires, (namely) given that, when the child is born, all of its members are like a paste').[247] The correct and skillful *fajar* ('wrapping into swaddles') was meant to assure the straightness of growth and bones—just as a young plant would grow straight when duly sustained.[248]

Reading signs about the future

Pregnancy and birth were seen as a summary of a child's fate. The date and precise time of birth were carefully noted by people who had the means to do so and related to celestial constellations.[249] Moreover, there were the signs given by the baby itself and the marks to be detected on its body. Was the first scream of the baby a forceful one? What message could be read into the voice? A birth's unusual circumstances got special attention, as did all the tissues produced for the purpose of the fetus's evolution in the womb and its connection to the maternal body: the amniotic sac, the umbilical cord, the placenta. To be born within the amniotic sac, for example, was considered a sign of good fortune.[250]

The midwife was a privileged interpreter of these signs and seen as endowed with prophetic powers, as shown in all the myths, folk tales, and paintings that relate her to goddesses of birth and fate, such as the Roman goddesses Lucina[251] and the Parcae (see Figure 13).[252] In many acts, a midwife's care and its symbolic effects on the future blended into one. For instance, the application of honey was meant to serve as both a first sweet

sample of earthly nutrition and a spell on the future. Already since medieval times, as a consultation of the medical compendium *Trotula* shows, the substance was meant to encourage a child's disposition for speech.[253] Applying something sweet to the lips of the child might also have been inspired by the pre-modern Muslim rite *taḥnīk*, in which a date was placed on or in the mouth of a newborn in order to fend off evil spirits.[254]

Several authors of early modern Spain wrote treatises on the dignity of a midwife's craft, drawing on famous examples from Antiquity up to their time. Interestingly, they did not only feel motivated to do so out of sheer conviction. Personal relations and family ties can be made out between these apologists and the most prominent midwives at court.[255] Midwifery became sanctified through the Virgin Mary, who, according to some pious traditions, assisted when her cousin Elizabeth gave birth to Saint John.[256] All this added to the reputation of midwives, as did the demographic crisis of the 16th and 17th centuries and the fragility of childbearing noble women whose genetic pool had been weakened by consanguineous marriage. By and large, the positive images of midwives prevailed over the potential dark sides of her actions in early modern Spain. In the same historical period, Northern European Reformation and witch craze tended to demonize midwives and deprive them of their religious aura.[257] Calvin, for example, was strongly opposed to the idea that midwives should administer emergency baptism.[258] By contrast, Mediterranean Catholicism conceived and interpreted a midwife's doings, her role as a gatekeeper to life and death, against the backdrop of the cult of saints and the Virgin, and the expressions of popular religiosity.[259]

It was believed that a midwife could inflict harm on a mother or her baby. However, early modern Spanish culture opted for veneration, praise, and handsome payment rather than for persecution, condemnation, and substitution (see Figure 14).

If a strong feminine element persisted in Spanish religious life, it was also due to the Spanish way of doing obstetrics and midwifery. Conversely, specific features of Spanish devotion, especially the cult of the Virgin, fortified the position of female birth assistants and endowed their work with a special aura. Consequently, Catholic authorities demanded midwives' complicity in their struggle against religious heterodoxy. For instance, Jaime Bleda, a Dominican friar, depicts in his *Coronica de los Moros* ('Chronicles of the Moors') the performance and function of Christian midwives that had been imposed on Morisco communities of Aragón and Valencia in the second half of the 16th century. They were to have a close watch over all things going on and to carry out the first gestures and acts after birth: stating the sex, examining birthmarks (*lunares*), putting the child on the mother's breast, informing the priest and the bailiff. The midwife only took her eyes off the woman who recovered from delivery for brief moments when she cut the throat of a fowl and boiled water to cook it in a pot. All these precautions, however, were of no avail: The husbands concerned only called the midwife after their wives had given birth "with all the ceremonies of Mohamed," pretending that birth had occurred unexpectedly.[260]

First ties

When early modern painters gave their versions of biblical births, they put their figures in the dress of con-

temporary nobles, thereby conveying significant characteristics of birthing rooms of their time. Francisco de Zurbarán's *The Birth of the Virgin* (1625–1630) invites spectators to become part of the female hustle and bustle around a childbed. The exhausted mother recovers in bed, the women around her all have helped to bring about a happy delivery, lighting a fire, boiling water, fetching towels or swaddles, or preparing food. The painter seems to have carefully chosen women of different ages, some in the early stage of pregnancy, some breastfeeding, others having reached the age beyond their reproductive years and drawing their authority from that very fact. The circle of women around the mother symbolizes the cycle of life and its different phases. All these helpers seem to have gone through the ordeal of delivery or are bound to do so shortly, they all know or imagine what delivery carries about. Therefore, the painting testifies to a strong invisible tie of complicity, of mutual support, of shared knowledge and shared feelings.[261] Birth meant cooperation of women in different stages of reproduction. In keeping with this idea, Zurbarán includes his commissioner, a noble lady, in the scene: Placed in the foreground of the canvas and directing her view towards the spectator, she mirrors both her own advanced state of pregnancy and immanent birth in a setting transfused with joy, awe, and devotion (see Figure 15).

Among the ones present at birth, and almost equal in importance to the midwife, were female (especially elder) relatives. Often, it was the childbearing woman's mother or, for want of the prospective grandmother, an elder sister, or an aunt that would be present, as can be deduced from the testimony left by Estefanía de Reque-

sens. Even in her case, the mother, though not present, gets involved by receiving a detailed account.

When Queen Consort Margaret of Austria commissioned a *Nacimiento de la Virgen* ('Birth of the Virgin') to the Spanish court painter Juan Pantoja de la Cruz in 1603, she made him summon both her mother and two of her younger sisters to the scene by virtue of the strokes of his brush. None of them could be present when she actually gave birth in Valladolid; anyhow, this was the setting she imagined and would have desired.[262]

Family and female networks

Birth strengthened ties between close relatives, but it was also an occasion to attend to wider networks of friends and family: There was a protocol to be followed and attention both expected from and restricted to a chosen circle. On September 3, 1667, after the birth of his first daughter, Pötting notes in his diary that the Marquise of Mortara and the Countess of Alba de Liste—as relative of his wife, the Countess Maria Sophia of Dietrichstein—immediately showed up to "see" the mother and her baby. Their visit, nevertheless, was a hasty one, as it was declared that nobody would be admitted before nine days had passed.[263] It seems that the countess needed less repose when going through her second birth, which was some fifteen months later. Delivery took place on December 17, 1668, just three-quarters of an hour after midnight. On December 19 already, the countess was visited by the Countess of Alba de Liste, and on the 24th, by doña Isabel Chacón, Countess of Casarubios, and by the Marquise of Laapilla with her daughter, the Countess of Requena. Finally, the Mar-

quise of Lyche was allowed to sit close to the childbed on December 27.[264]

There was a medical and a social side to restricted visits: Despite the overall sociable character of childbirth, a crowded birthing room was seen as a danger to the newborn because it led to a corruption of the air. This, 17th-century author Fontecha holds, could be the cause of infants' death as much as malevolent designs of old women who had the power to inflict harm by casting an "evil eye."[265] The belief that visitors or supposed helpers could cause great harm was widely shared, and when a newborn suddenly passed away, a mother, in the desperate search for a cause, could direct accusations against a neighbor who had helped to attend to the baby. Then, former friendship and mutual help turned into bitter resentment, and women, who had just been good neighbors, ended up declaring against each other before a trial launched by the Inquisition.[266]

But let us return to the confined Maria Sophia of Dietrichstein. The segregation of the recuperating mother after birth did not keep her husband Pötting from gratefully receiving congratulations from the queen, and did not stop gifts from arriving at the household either: After her first birth in September 1667, Maria Sophia of Dietrichstein received "many sweets of all kinds" from the queen's *camarera mayor* ('chief lady-in-waiting') and 100 boxes of *chocolate* of Guajacca from the Marquise of Mançera.[267] And on December 24, 1668, seven days after the birth of her son, the Apostolic Nuncio graces the confined countess with no less than thirty-six partridges and a great quantity of sweets and butter.[268] Such favors required a response, a response which Pötting considered an important part of the social and po-

litical obligations attached to his embassy. Hence, he carefully kept records of the days on which his wife had brought her congratulations to some lady's childbed or comfort to another one who was keeping bed after a miscarriage.[269]

Support and abandonment

Family meant everything. Family relations or, by contrast, a lack of these relations determined a person's social status as well as the foundations of social and cultural identity. This position was stated at the very beginning of life. Here, the role of fathers and male relatives becomes most patent. The above-described birth of Isabel de Cavallería's baby, well-documented thanks to the notary who had to be summoned, provides a good example. In that case, the status of the child to be born and the sort of life the mother would have to put up with depended on whether or not the newborn was acknowledged as the legitimate son of a man who had deceased.[270] Thus, when Martín de Palomar y de Gurrea, husband of the parturient woman's sister, "backs up" Isabel during delivery, he makes a strong statement not only concerning the important role men sometimes could play at birth but also with regard to the protection he was expected to grant to his nephew. Likewise, it was of great importance *who* first held the baby. Often, it was the (maternal) grandmother who was granted this honor, as can be seen in *El Nacimiento de la Virgen* by Pantoja de la Cruz, where the august Archduchess María Anna of Austria-Styria holds the newborn Virgin in her hands and shows her to the imagined spectator.[271] It is noteworthy that Lope de Vega makes use of this motif to symbolically anticipate an act of adoption

fig. 1

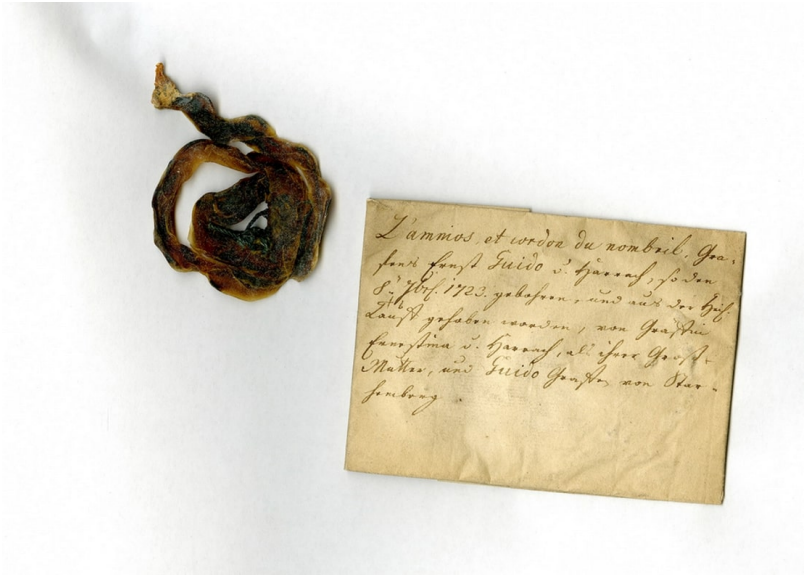


fig. 2

fig. 3

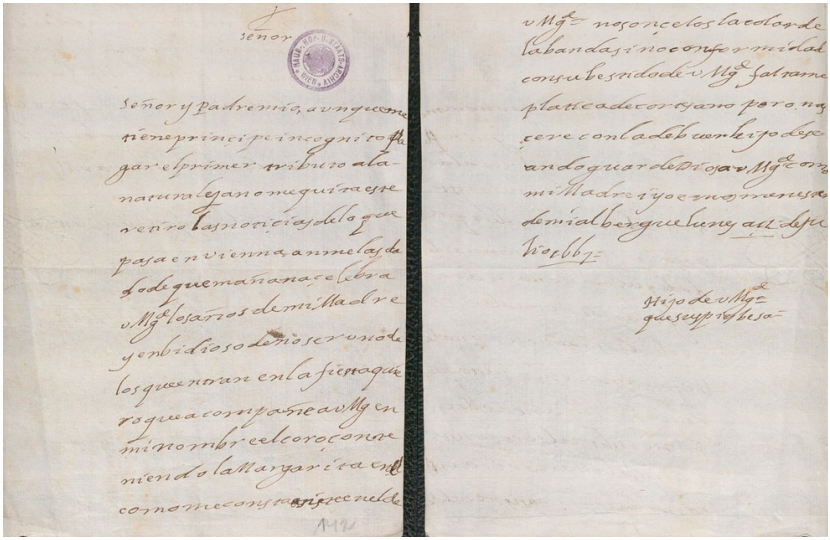


fig. 4

fig. 5

fig. 6

fig. 7


Celeste Dea del parto, Alma lucina,
Principio e causa de ogni ben fecondo
Che informi e serbi e che perpetui l mondo
Sia a noi propitia tua bonta diuina
I. Bonaroi
inuentor

fig. 8

Empero ſi acaſo los gemellos ſalen de pies, debeſe poner mucha diligencia que ſalga el vno deſpues del otro, muy comoda, y apaciblemente, de la miſma arte, y manera, que arriba lo enſeñamos en el parto ſimple de vno.

Empero ſi acaeciere que de los dos gemellos el vno ſalga por la cabeça, y el otro por los pies por contraria manera, entonces la Partera ha de trabajar con igual cuidado, y ſolicitud, que el que de los dos aparezca primero, à eſſe ſaque, y al que ſe moſtrare à la poſtrè, ſe ſaque deſpues, de tal manera, que en la ſalida no ofenda el vno al otro, aunque ſi el que ſale à la poſtre viene por los pies, ſiempre (ſi puede ſer) vale mas tornarle de nuevo à bolver, para que ſalga de cabeça, porque es el modo mas ſeguro de todos, como lo quiſo Hiprocrates, quando dixo:

Lib. de natur. pueri. *Sic autem, & mulieri ab vno coitu gemilli facti vterque in ſina, & pelliculla eſt, & eandem die vtrumque parit, & alter prius foras prodit, &c.*

Porende conviene que luego la Partera vnte la natura de la preñada con algun azeyte templado al fuego, ò con algun mucilago, ò ve-

fig. 9

Tom. III. p. 9.
Fridaria diurna
Suprema media et infima sympathetice respondent in Homine
Fridaria nocturna
Natus de die ab ortu ☉ ad occasum.
Natus de nocte ab occasu ☉ ad ortum.
☉ ab An. 1. ad 11.
♀ ab An. 11. ad 19.
☿ ab An. 19. ad 32.
☽ ab An. 32. ad 43.
♄ ab An. 43. ad 55.
♃ ab An. 55. ad 62.
♂ ab An. 62. ad 68.
☊ ab An. 68. ad 70.
☋ ab Anno 70.
ad Mortem usque.
ab An. 1. ad 10. ☽
ab An. 10. ad 21. ♄
ab An. 21. ad 33. ♃
ab An. 33. ad 40. ♂
ab An. 40. ad 50. ☉
ab An. 50. ad 58. ♀
ab An. 58. ad 71. ☿
ab An. 71. ad 74. ☊
ab An. 74. ad 76. ☋
vel Mortem usque.
Iuventus ab An. 22. ad 41. ☉
Vegetus, foecundus, prolificus.
Virilitas ab An. 41. ad 56. ♂
Fortis, animosus, cholericus.
Senectus ab An. 56. ad 68. ♃
Bonus intellectu, judicio, consiliis.
Fastidiosus, melancholicus, phlegmaticus.
Adolescentia ab An. 14. ad 22. ♀
Studiosus, comptus, ornatus et delicijs gaudens.
Pueritia ab An. 4. ad 14. ☿
vivax, audax.
Homo in Etate respondente est Planetae
Foetus in utero materno per circumscriptos Menses.
Tempus partus maxime legitimum est Mensis nonus et decimus, a Die nempe 15. noni Mensis ad Diem 15. Mensis decimi.
1. ♄ Concipitur
2. ♃ Confortatur.
3. ♂ Membra distinguuntur.
4. ☉ Calore nativo fovetur.
5. ♀ Decorem recipit.
6. ☿ Motus organa complectitur.
7. ☽ Completur et nutritur.
8. ♄ Laborat aegre fert.
9. ♃ Expellitur.
Sex in lacte dies ter sunt in sanguine terni, Bis seni carnem, ter seni membra figurant.
Anni scalares sive Climacterici 7. 14. 21. 28. 35. 42. 49. 56. 63.
Anni Enneacterici 9. 18. 27. 36. 45. 54. 63.
Anni prosperitatis ad lucra commoda, gaudia et dignitates: 21. 22. 23. 26. 29.
Anni felices et fortunati 23. 34. 35. 38. 41. 45. 46. 47. 50. 54.
Anni infelices morborum, damnorum, invidiarum et aliorum casuum infaustorum, 13. 30. 32. 36. 42. 44. 48. 55. 56. 60. 63.

fig. 10

que aveys oydo: deos dios mu
chos dias de vida, paraque
le sirvays, y ayudeys eneste
officio, que os a dado.

¶ Aqui habla la partera,
que apareja a las mugeres pre
ñadas, paraque paran con faci
lidad, y las partea al tiempo del
parir: dize.

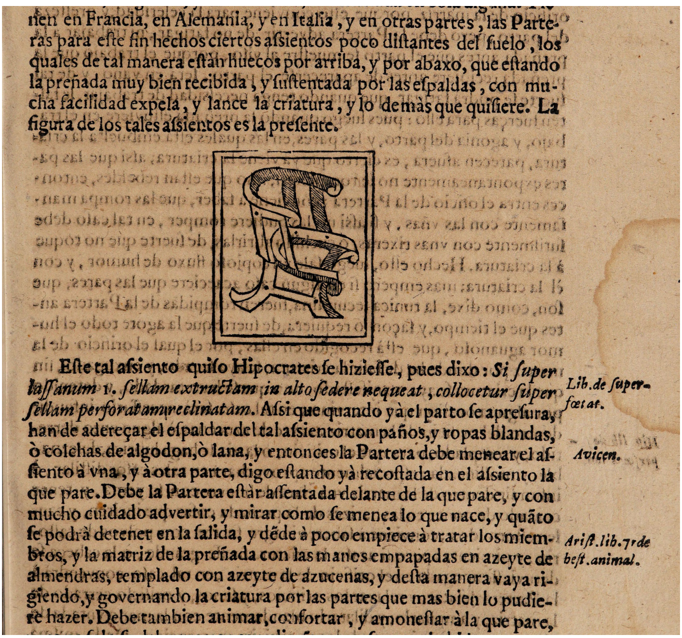
¶ Aqui estays presentes señores,

manoço xicmocnelili inpil…
inconetontli, inichpuchtontli
manoço xicmochivili inmo…
quijtzin, inmonacaatiltzin, …
amjtoltecaoan, in amjam…
caoan totecujo, inic amjt…
oatiloan. Ca ixquich intic…
lia, ticmocaqujtia: maxim…
cotili, maximotequjtili, m…
monânamiqujli intotecujo…
ximopalevili.

¶ Tlatoa inticitl: inin…
caticaanj, inititl quiyellalia…
temjxivitianj: qujtoa.

¶ Cain anmonoltitoque: …

fig. 11



nen en Francia, en Alemania, y en Italia, y en otras partes, las Parte-
ras para este fin hechos ciertos asientos poco distantes del suelo, los
quales de tal manera estan huecos por arriba, y por abaxo, que estando
la preñada muy bien recibida, y sustentada por las espaldas, con mu-
cha facilidad expela, y lance la criatura, y lo demas que quisiere. La
figura de los tales asientos es la presente.

Este tal asiento quiso Hipocrates se hiziesse, pues dixo: *Si super lassanum v. sellam extructam in alto sedere nequeat; collocetur super sellam perforatam reclinatam.* Assi que quando yà el parto se apresura, han de adereçar el espaldar del tal asiento con paños, y ropas blandas, ò colchas de algodon, ò lana, y entonces la Partera debe menear el asiento à vna, y à otra parte, digo estando yà recostada en el asiento la que pare. Debe la Partera estàr assentada delante de la que pare, y con mucho cuidado advertir, y mirar como se menea lo que nace, y quāto se podrà detener en la salida, y dēde à poco empiece à tratar los miembros, y la matriz de la preñada con las manos empapadas en azeyte de almendras, templado con azeyte de azucenas, y desta manera vaya rigiendo, y governando la criatura por las partes que mas bien lo pudiere hazer. Debe tambien animar, confortar, y amonestar à la que pare,

Lib. de superfœtat.

Avicen.

Arist. lib. 7 de hist. animal.

fig. 12

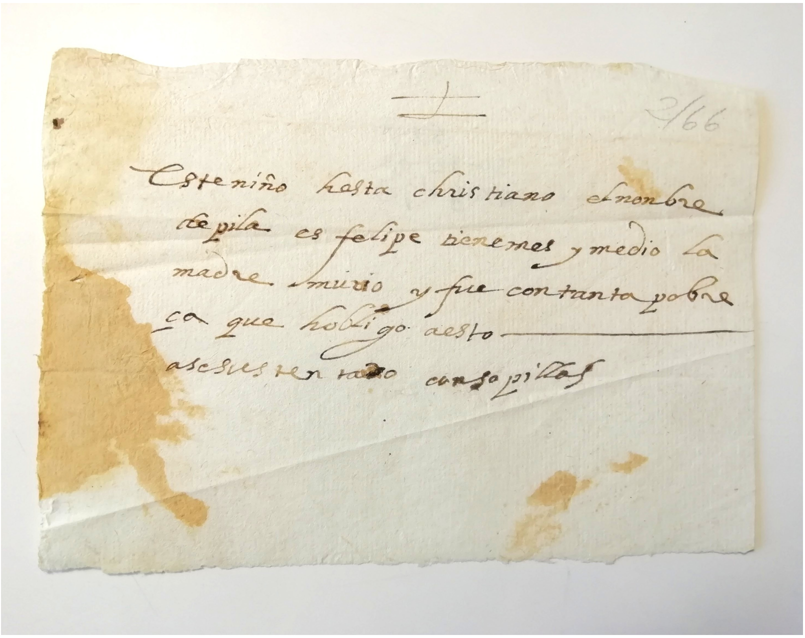

Rerum alma parens
Ex uno capite profluit ardor
Omni modis occursans officiensq;
ALPHONSI A CARANZA
I.C. HISPAN.
DISPUTATIO
DE VERA NATURALIS ET
LEGITIMI PARTUS DESIGNATIONE.
OMNIBUS UTILIS
IURISPRUDENTIBUS NECESSARIA.
AD
DEBITAM IUSTITIAE DIADOSIN
PRIMORI HISPANIARUM
ET SUBINDE TOTIUS ORBIS SENATUI
DICATA.
Don Juan de Iauregui inuentor.
Matriti Anno 1628.
In Natura potest iusto secernere iniquum.
P Perrete

fig. 13

fig. 14

fig. 15

fig. 16



2/66

Esteniño hesta christiano elnonbre
depila es felipe tienemes ymedio la
madre murio y fue contanta pobre
ca que hobligo aesto
asesustentado consopillas

fig. 17

fig. 18

by a foster father. The play in question is *El mayorazgo dudoso* ('The dubious primogeniture') again: After having lifted "niño, sangre, vida y alma" ('child, blood, life and soul'),[272] as Lope masterfully synthesizes the newborn life, Albano tears his shirt into pieces, wraps the baby into the cloth and takes it home to entrust it to the care of his wife, who conveniently has just given birth to a stillborn child (see Figure 16).

Fathers of illegitimate children did not always shun responsibility, even though the relationship they allowed for was not an intimate one.[273] For enslaved women, giving birth to the master's baby, in a number of cases, opened a way for emancipation.[274] On the other hand, infanticide occurred when the mother feared social ostracism, and the father was not likely to officially meet with responsibilities. In 16th and 17th-century Navarre, seven out of thirty women who killed their babies after birth had entertained a relationship with a priest and given birth secretly.[275]

The avoidance of infanticide, together with the safeguard of honor, was the main argument wielded by the promoters of foundling homes, so-called *casas cuna* ('cradle houses'), or *inclusas* ('orphanages'). It was not always the mother but also the father of a woman who had died at birth, a servant or a midwife, who would place a baby in one of these foundling homes' *tornos* ('wheels'), a rotating installation in which the infant could be placed without revealing the carrier's identity.[276] This was by no means a rare event. The Inclusa in Madrid admitted 55,420 infants between 1586 and 1700.[277] The archives of the foundling home of Úbeda, a town of considerable importance in eastern Andalusia and early modern Spain, keep the sad memory of 6417 children under the

age of one year between 1665 and 1788, out of which 85.16 percent died.[278] In some 17th-century parishes of Seville, twelve percent of all the children taken to the baptismal font were foundlings,[279] and the totality of children left at the care of the institution amounted to some 25,000–30,000 in the 17th century alone (see Figure 17).[280]

Human warmth and breastfeeding

Testimonies of abandonment and long lists of babies who died because nobody cared contrast with voices that advocate human warmth, tenderness, and close attention in the first moments of a new life. The baby should be gently rocked in its cradle with loving songs and never be cursed at nor addressed by harsh words.[281] The right rhythm of breastfeeding—three times during the day and three times during the night, according to Damián Carbón—and the quality of the milk were considered paramount.[282] Indeed: "la más dulce cosa para el niño es la leche de la madre"[283] ('the sweetest thing for the child is the mother's milk'), a prerequisite for health and well-being, the same physician states.

The 17th-century aristocrat Luisa de Padilla y Manrique (1590–1646) evokes Roman times as the model to be followed, with infants breastfed in their first two years and pampered ("regalados") until four.[284] Breastfeeding could be substituted by *pap*, a substance prepared with goat milk, yoke, and barley cooked in water.[285] A mother who nursed her baby with her own milk was held as the ideal, Erasmus being the authority whose strong plea for maternal milk would still resonate with Hispanic writers of the 18th century. Yet, there were strong reasons to keep aristocratic women from doing so: decorum, a

desire to preserve their breasts in a juvenile shape, obligations at court, and, above all, the pressure to produce offspring at short intervals.[286] While some queens at the height of their reproductive capacities became pregnant and/or gave birth every year, commoners spent significantly more time nursing a baby, around one and a half to two years where a mother could offer sufficient milk. They thereby allowed for a longer break between one baby and the next, as well as a longer opportunity to restore physical strength. While breastfeeding, women could—to a certain extent—rely on the contraceptive effects of lactation or on the fact that sexual intercourse was considered inappropriate during this period.[287] *Leche preñada* ('pregnant milk'), that is, milk fed by a woman with child, was believed to be of great harm to a nursling.[288]

In short, maternal breastfeeding was characteristic for the lower classes, and if infant mortality was lower in Spain than in France, it might be partly thanks to this widespread habit.[289] Most noble women had recourse to nurses, albeit not always without reluctance as can be deduced from the writing of Luisa de Padilla,[290] and with some outstanding exceptions: Princess Joanna of Castile, born on November 6, 1479, later to become Queen Joanna, known as Joanna the Mad, was nursed by her mother, Queen Isabella I of Castile.[291]

Among social elites, the choice and tending of a wet nurse became a major concern. They should be carefully chosen, Luisa de Padilla states, among the most virtuous, healthy, and robust women of old Christian blood; they should already be introduced into the household four or five months before birth, sharing food with the pregnant woman so that the child might not note

the difference.[292] Such nurses had themselves fed an infant that either died, had been weaned, or abandoned by a mother who did not want to miss the opportunity to commercialize her milk.

Wet nursing

The use of wet nurses[293] had important effects on the psychology and human relations of early modern times: children from the aristocracy did not create the bond with their mothers that nursing usually established as a partial repair of the bodily separation occurring in birth. Instead, there was a second mother and a second separation, brought about at the age of two, three, or four, according to the moment of weaning. Nursing also added shades of complexity to the relations of rich and poor, servants and masters.[294] Wet nurses became part of the household and of the family indeed, and—as freedom charters granted to female slaves in the 16th-century Seville show—nursing made for a strong argument in favor of women being released from forced service.[295]

At court, wet nurses were spoiled with gifts, very well paid, and sometimes held in great esteem for all their lifetime.[296] Nevertheless, their task was a hard and demanding one. However rich and abundant the milk of the wife of a servant or an artisan, she could not redeem premature birth or the genetic flaws babies of the House of Austria so often were born with.[297]

In short, most commoners procured maternal milk for their own children while aristocrats hired wet nurses. However, two important aspects have to be added to this general picture. First, there were those poor women hired to procure nutrition for abandoned children in

foundling homes or to breastfeed a baby they received in their house together with payment for the service granted; their numbers were important in early modern Spain and kept increasing well into the 20th century. Professional wet nursing was an important source of income for lower-class women.[298] While important research has been done, little is known yet about solidary breastfeeding within families, parishes, and small communities.[299] Stories of sisters or neighbors helping out to feed each other's children in past times can still be heard from people in Spain who remember life before the great changes of the second half of the 20th century.[300] Where a biological mother had died or could produce no milk of her own, nursing could turn into a question of life and death. Female relatives who stepped in and helped out counted on long-lasting gratitude and certainly established a close relationship with the child they fed. People whom the same woman had fed considered themselves *hermanos de leche* ('milk siblings'), as bound together by a tie and relation of quasi-kinship created by the shared substance. The care for foundlings fitted into the lifestyle of a parish where a good number of women attended to nurslings simultaneously. There, breastfeeding could be seen as a favor and a service to be granted to others in the ceaseless chain of calculated gifts and favors that were exchanged among neighbors and family members.[301]

Postnatal risks and infant death

What most distinguished the beginning of life in the past was its close proximity to death.[302] How was the death of infants dealt with in the frame of prevailing attitudes

and coping strategies?[303] What emotional responses might cultural expression point to, and what can we conclude concerning the attachment to newborns? As for infants, they were at much higher risk than their mothers. It is estimated that in early modern Europe, on average, four to five percent of all children were stillborn. Around fifteen percent died in their first month of life, and only half of all children reached adult age.[304] It is hard to give exact figures because such an early death was not recorded in any official document. Baptismal registers often only include those children who survived until baptism at church, the ceremony usually being celebrated in the first days of life. For example, an episcopal visitor reported that in Cumbres Mayores, province of Seville, one "Luisa Jiménez, soltera, parió en 20 de septiembre de 1698 viviendo con sus padres Bernardo Jiménez y Isabel Rodríguez, y está criando el parto; no se ha podido sacar por sus padres, ni otra persona, el cómplice [...]" ('Luisa Jiménez, unmarried, gave birth on September 20, 1698, living with her parents Bernardo Jiménez and Isabel Rodríguez, and she is nursing the newborn; neither her parents nor another person could be persuaded to reveal the accomplice [...]').[305] There is no way of knowing when Luisa Jiménez's child was born and how long it lasted.

As noted above, there are strong indications that this kind of ostracizing and inquisitiveness increased from the end of the 17th century onwards. Around that same time, Church authorities urged for a conscientious registering of the baptisms or burials of all babies; burial records of infants that hitherto only had identified the name of the father now also had to reveal the one given to the baby. Emergency baptism was put down in writing

when it had been administered immediately after birth, and the baby had lived the time to undergo solemn confirmation of the ceremony.[306]

The deaths of infants of royal blood are much better documented, thus giving some idea of just how precarious earliest life so often was in those days. Isabella of Bourbon (1602–1644) and Maria Anna of Austria (1634–1696), queen consorts of Spain, provide telling examples. As for Isabella, there is testimony of nine pregnancies, two of which were interrupted by miscarriages; the last of them in the spring of 1644 might have contributed to the queen's death in October of the same year. Three children were born prematurely and died a short time later; two of them received emergency baptism. Two more girls died at a very early age. At last, only one girl (María Teresa, future queen of France) and Prince Baltasar Carlos passed the bottleneck of earliest infancy.[307] Maria Anna of Austria was married to her uncle, King Philip IV of Spain,[308] in 1649 at the age of fourteen. She lived through seven pregnancies between the years 1650–1661. One of these gestations ended in a miscarriage, another with the birth of a dead girl, two more girls died a few days after premature birth.[309] Then there was a boy who died in his first year of life and another deceased shortly before his fourth birthday. Two of Maria Anna's children reached adulthood, the last one, the future King Charles II, coming into the world a week after his older brother had been buried.[310]

The loss of several children in a row could turn into a frightening obsession for a mother. The royal midwife Inés de Ayala was pursued by such a curse in her earlier maternity. According to hagiographic sources, eight children were born by her, and all of them died before

reaching the age of three. When expecting again, Inés turned to the nun Mariana de Jesús, who blessed her belly and prophesized that henceforward, no more of her children would die. Indeed, Inés gave birth to a boy who grew up to adulthood and had three more children.[311]

Newborns and very young babies died because they were born prematurely or with innate deficiencies that made survival impossible. Later on, infants were vulnerable to infections caused by human contact, by animals, by polluted waters; hot summers favored affections of the stomach and the intestines, with ensuing fever, diarrhea, and dehydration. Many a testimony reveals the very abrupt and violent ending such ailments could produce in the earliest time of life.[312]

Illness and death were not simply accepted as inevitable divine providence. On the contrary, gathering from the sources we have examined, the health of their babies seems to have mattered to mothers and other relatives more than anything else.[313] Women exchanged knowledge about earliest care and recommended remedies. Thanks to some special powders, Queen Maria Anna of Austria wrote to a confidante, her baby-son Charles did not suffer from epileptic fits as his elder siblings had.[314]

But in many cases, prayers were sent to heaven in vain. Then, the midwife's task was not to prepare the infant for life but to wrap it in shrouds, lay it out in the coffin, and prepare it for its path to the grave and to the world beyond.[315] Birth triggered cultures of welcoming but also cultures of mourning and coping strategies. In a letter to his ambassador, emperor Leopold I expressed the most common way of fighting the bitter pain a child's death caused in the hearts of its parents. What soothed his affliction, he wrote, was the joy of counting with a strong

intercessor before God. A baby deceased in a state of angelical innocence was thought to be especially effective in its negotiations with divine powers.[316] Though not compatible with Christian doctrine, the death of one child and the birth of a sibling some time later was interpreted in a cyclic vision of life,[317] the later-born taking the place of the defunct one. Consequently, children often received a name a dead sibling had already carried,[318] embodying the sentiment expressed in the saying "Un hijo que nace restaura la falta de tres finados."[319] ('A child that is born restores the lack of three deceased ones.')

Churching

The end of confinement after childbirth was signaled by the *misa de parida* ('mass of the woman who has given birth', or 'mass of the woman in childbed') or *misa de purificación* ('mass of Purification'), with contemporary sources—also literary ones, like Cervantes's *La gitanilla* ('The Little Gypsy Girl')—mostly choosing the first term. Protestant reformers tried to abolish a ritual that they associated with Judaism, with the Pope of Rome, with Marian devotion and female superstitions,[320] however, even in Protestant regions this met with strong resistance, presumably because women did not want to give up a ritual that put them center stage.[321] In Catholic Spain, the *misa de parida* became a thanksgiving by a woman having emerged unharmed from the dangers of birth; moreover, the infant, in a recollection of the presentation of Jesus in the temple, was offered to God who had created it, had endowed it with a soul and had redeemed it.[322] Finally, there was a prayer for its future

well-being and devotion.[323] The ceremony drew its cultural energy from one of the most popular moments in the liturgical calendar, the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also called Candlemas (*Candelaria*), celebrated every year on February 2, in remembrance of Mary's visiting the temple after Jesus was born. On Candlemas, candles were lit to honor the Virgin and, projecting the symbolism of birth and light into the cycle of the year, to mark the return of light after winter.[324] Both *Purificación* and *Candelaria* were very popular names in traditional Spain.[325] Thus, the Old Testament concept of purification from a state of symbolic pollution occasioned by birth was not done away with, but it was now perceived through the life of the Virgin (see Figure 18).

Besides, reports and descriptions from early modern Spain, together with ethnographic writing, give some idea about what the *misa de parida* expressed not through words but through images and gestures, that is, through enactment. It was the new mother and her baby that attention converged on; it was her reincorporation and re-entry into the community of the faithful, her recovery and health regained that she proudly demonstrated by stepping forward to the altar holding a candle in her hand, dressed up in her best clothes, followed by a congregation of women, friends, and relatives. The candle in women's hands was a strong symbol of life and the female capacity to give life. Churching "was a recognition of their success in the role of motherhood" and an expression of the sorority of mothers, emulating the Virgin as their supreme paragon. An ethnographic interpretation of Churching may grasp an important undercurrent of meaning present in the ceremony: Child-

birth was not considered an act overshadowed by sin and fraught with impurity, but—on the contrary—one that brought the woman close to divinity and God's creative power. Therefore, before returning to normal life, she had to leave this divine force, present herself at the temple, and offer her child to God and to the saints.[326]

6. Conclusions and horizons

Birth and death

To write about birth in early modern times is to write about death. Childbearing mothers risked and often lost their lives, although—let us point this out once again—to a lesser extent than some modern renderings would suggest. And maternal death was by far outnumbered by the death of newborns, of babies thrown into the world before due time, or of infants that did not live longer than a few hours, days, or weeks. Shrouds were shrouds for babies; coffins were produced to fit infants, and souvenirs of dead family members were souvenirs of beings whose life cycle was restricted to one age only. Church bells tolled for defunct children as much as for elder people.[327] (It is a privilege of our time that we can hope *not to get to know* the *whole* story of our children's time on this earth.) About one-quarter of all infants died in their first year; photographs of dead children on the walls of poor people's lodgings, as shown in Benito Pérez Galdós' novel *Fortunata y Jacinta*, convey this grim old order by means of a new medium. Powerful cultural forms and concepts were developed in response to infant mortality: The belief that deceased infants meant a loss on earth but a gain in heaven, as they *spoke up* for the

living in the face of God, was such an answer, as was the anxiety and concern invested in (emergency) baptism—concern that bore directly on the ways pregnancy was monitored, birth was prepared, and the performance of birth assistants was judged.

What is more, the onset of new life was seen as related to previous deaths, be it the death of a father or a grandparent during pregnancy or the death of a sibling, who could become the namesake of the *successor*. Queen Mariana of Austria buried her little son Philip Prospero a week before giving birth to the future King Charles II—and she was not the only one who had to put up with such a plight. When Galdós, in his *Nazarín*, very consciously diverts his attention from a Carnival festival in a poor tenement of Madrid to turn it to a little child that is taken out of the *patio* of that very tenement in a little coffin, he echoes a social world where reveling and mourning did not only occur in closest temporal proximity but were even intermingled.

When talking about the risks of childbirth, though, we need to widen our perspective. Women (and husbands and elder siblings, for that matter) looked at parturition with fear and respect, no doubt. At the same time, they confided in the skill and experience of female birth assistants—the midwife, but also relatives or close friends. A childbearing woman had more trust in the very ancient wisdom of her body than modern Western women have, and she believed that her mind had a powerful influence on her body; hence, the *real* effects of prayers sent to the Virgin Mary and the court of the saints. Mishaps that entailed a mother's or baby's death, in many a case, were not due to complications during delivery itself.[328] They could be caused by acci-

dents during pregnancy or by diseases; they could be the reaction of a body subjected to maternity at an early age and without sufficient time to recover in a series of births. This seems to be especially true for aristocratic women, who normally did not breastfeed, therefore, had shorter intervals between births, and were weakened by consanguineous marriage.

We may well condemn or frown upon a period in which women spent much of their lifetime either in a state of pregnancy or breastfeeding (in *water* or in *milk*, as the saying went in traditional France). However, in so many cases, the question was not whether to have lots of children, but rather how many had to be born for the family and house to live on after the parents were gone. Ambassador Pötting fathered eight children (we know of) in the years of two marriages—none of them was alive when he died at the age of 51 in 1678.

But no matter how short the sojourn of a child on earth may have been, birth and death were preceded by months of pregnancy and by all the care given to a newborn. At every single attempt, failed or successful, unborn life had to be nourished, and pregnant women were exempted from (some of their) work; clothes and swaddles had to be knitted or woven, a cradle had to be prepared… In short, if we measure the efforts devoted to procreation, the energy mustered to lengthen the lifeline of a family or a village, we have to bear in mind that as many of these efforts failed as led to the result of adult life that would in turn result in parenthood.

Emotional bonds

If life was so much exposed to the risk of death, it was better not to invest birth and childhood with too much emotion. This is, in a nutshell, Philippe Ariès' famous and all too often repeated thesis.[329] Some evidence seems to support it, no doubt. One cannot but feel distraught by the chilling laconism with which the death of newborns and infants is put down in some testimonies. Registers of Spanish foundling homes, in which administrators every year saw babies dying by the hundreds and thousands, would be such a source. In every hamlet or parish of the 17th, 18th, or 19th century still, dozens of very small dead infants (who constituted about the same number as defunct elder people) were buried without much ado or ceremony on the very day of their death or shortly after. Life had to be carried on.

And yet, as we are gathering more and more documents in which relatives express their attachment to babies, to young children, or even to unborn babies,[330] the view of cold and uncaring parents as a general attitude of the past becomes utterly untenable. Mothers—and other people who felt close to a newborn—were deeply concerned with the wellbeing of their babies; they showed a keen interest in their utterances—the first sob or cry, the first movements—their constitution and particular features and expressions. They rejoiced when babies willingly took the breast and were happy if they grew up strong; they delighted in their charm and drolleries. In short, they loved them and cared for them as much as we (usually) do, nobles as much as commoners, city dwellers[331] as much as village people. Writers of the time put much emphasis on this love and care, considering it one of the most basic human impulses.[332] Maybe

the fact that they might lose their children at any time for trifling causes even increased a mother's or a father's love and attachment.

How can historians (or at least a considerable proportion of the guild), one might wonder, ignore (or downplay) the infinite number of songs and images that deeply express care and love for babies, in a direct or oblique way: all the pictures of the family of Christ, the innumerable images of the Virgin in tender communion with her baby, all the *villancicos*, lullabies and all the gratitude expressed on ex-votos, dedicated to the Virgin or the saints for their intervention when childbirth got complicated or babies were threatened by illness and death? The unspeakable pain—or sheer horror—on the faces of the mothers fighting for the lives of their children on paintings of the Massacre of the Innocents at Bethlehem. It is true, however, that emotions of joy and tender attachment could find an abrupt ending. As underlined above, strategies had to be devised to come to terms with death and the grief it caused. However, dead babies or children were not just forgotten; people preserved their memories, and on numerous family portraits of the 17th century, they were included in the picture. When people listened to the bells that rang for the souls of the dead every night, they most likely spent a thought on those little souls that had passed away prematurely.

Nevertheless, much work remains to be done with respect to the varieties and interpretations of these basic feelings. Suffice one example here, when Russian nurses came to Spain during the Civil War and gave conferences on painless birth—José María Gironella tells the story in the novel *Un millón de muertos*—a catholic mother thought this to be an unacceptable proposal:

"Cómo querer a los hijos si se los tiene sin sufrir? Esto es un sacrilegio…" ('How can one love their children if they have them without suffering? This is a sacrilege…') she cries out.[333] Most Spanish mothers, we surmise, in 2025 probably would not agree anymore that love for a baby is related to the degree of birth pain.

Community, coincidences, and correspondences

The world of the past was a world full of children. Many of these children would never live an adult life. Moreover, birth and death were not usurped by specialists who dealt with the essential moments of human existence in locations with a low level of emotions and sociability, as is the case today; birth happened where people cooked, washed, prayed, quarreled and stored their memories of joys and sorrows. *Nacer y morir en su casa* ('To be born and to die in one's own house') was still a desired design for where and how life should start and end well into the 20th century. Houses were sanctified and haunted by the births and deaths they had hosted. We take an anachronistic and all too narrow view if we consider and discuss home birth or hospital confinement just in terms of their medical pros and cons. Birth and death were part of domestic cultures.

Consequently, birth was not so much a concern of professionals or semi-professionals (as many midwives still were up to the middle of the 20th century)[334] but a matter that included and challenged families, friends, and neighbors. Birth meant community; it meant everyday interaction and everyday communication. "¿Es-

tás preñada?" ('Are you pregnant?'[335]) is one of the eight questions typically asked when befriended young women met in the streets of a 15th-century Castilian town—according to Areúsa, a main character in *La Celestina*. Add to this that there was a much higher frequency of pregnancies within a community, a greater number of women who went through the ordeals of delivery and childbed simultaneously, who mourned for dead babies or exchanged knowledge about how to foster or prevent conception. Consequently, much more had to be commented on; there was a much greater need for soothing words, advice, and explanations. Today, the distress caused by a miscarriage is at most shared with very close friends or relatives. In 17th-century Madrid, a visit paid to a *malparida* ('a woman who had miscarried') had a semi-public character and was recorded in an ambassador's diary in cases where his noble wife visited another noblewoman. Thus, birth created strong bonds between women who passed through the experience at the same time, as well as between women of different age groups. We have pointed to the importance of grandmothers, especially maternal grandmothers, and to the fact that midwives reached the peak of their reputation when they were beyond their childbearing years themselves. Widowhood was the marital state they were often associated with. When the painter Francisco Zurbarán summons younger and elder women around his *Birth of the Virgin*, some expecting, others breastfeeding, others contributing knowledge gathered in their own maternities, he gives a potent illustration of this cyclic view of life.

We are still far from grasping the social impact of birth as a shared experience; we know far too little about what

fathers did or contributed, where they were present, and where women preferred to keep to themselves. We have only got a glimpse so far of how important breastfeeding was in the social life of a community, how much the fact that a neighbor or sister came to the rescue of a mother who could not nurse her baby could matter for the cohesion of a family or neighborhood.

As birth occurred much more often, there were more coincidences with other key events in the story of a family, and such coincidences or even proximities in time were seen as meaningful. Therefore, it seemed natural that a child would get the name of a close relative who had died at the time of gestation. Moreover, where mothers passed through more than one or two pregnancies, birth rank was perceived more intensely and endowed with all kinds of *interpretations*: "No hay quinto malo" ('There is no bad fifth one') is one such saying still used half-jokingly in Spain.

The time before and the time after birth was fraught with meaning, as was parturition itself; it was a time in which memories of the past were evoked, and defunct members of the community were honored.[336] Likewise, all the acts performed on the baby during birth were done with regard to its future lifetime, and the signs and peculiar traits made out on its body—or on such ephemeral *parts* as the amniotic sac or the umbilical cord—were considered as telling something about the life to be lived.

In short, birth meant life in its fullest expression. It was a hotbed for narratives, a moment in which memories of a family and community were both summoned and enriched, a time laden with past and future. A court biographer simply would not silence the fact that an *in-*

fanta was born during her grandmother's final moments on her deathbed, and he would undoubtedly establish a meaningful correspondence between both events.

The Virgin Mary—source of shared imagery

Mary, the mother of Christ, was seen and represented as a childbearing woman and as one who had to go through quite a peculiar and complicated birth story for that matter. Who could provide a better reference point for every other woman, rich or poor, who had to endure the same ordeal? Not just Mary, but *the story* of Mary became the richest source of shared images that connected individual experience to culture and mediated between personal plights and society. Mary set the *landscape* on which women could foresee, imagine, remember, and assess their own story. When the church bells rang for the Angelus,[337] believers daily remembered divine—and human—expectation and birth.

They did so when they celebrated the Feast days dedicated to the Virgin in the liturgical year—Annunciation, Visitation, Expectation, Candlemas, and, of course, Christmas—but also during every single woman's period of expectation. It is not a coincidence that Galdós paces his heroine Fortunata's pregnancy with allusions to Marian feast days, and it seems impossible to understand (female) forms of devotion and religious practice without bearing in mind this powerful link between the very down-to-earth experience of bodily—and corresponding mental—changes brought about by conception and gestation and the images, sculptures, and texts that guided corresponding mental dispositions. The Virgin was not the only power from the beyond invoked in

childbirth: Saint Raymond Nonnatus, Saint Margareth, or Saint Casilda had their say in matters of birth and fertility. However, none of these devotions got even close to the deep and ubiquitous veneration shown to the Virgin Mary.

Birth fired imagination; it made people recall old stories and weave new ones from what they had to live through. When female painters like Sofonisba Anguissola or Artemisia Gentileschi depicted the Holy Family or royal infants at court, their visions influenced how contemporaries imagined birth and childhood. But these are just the most famous representatives. Women, in general, played a very active part in the dissemination and transmission of symbols, rites, and forms of devotion. That birth was suffused with religious meaning was not only due to *the strong influence of the Catholic Church*—as the phrase goes—but to the maternal desire to frame the event with symbols and stories. It was not only priests and male saints; it was very much nuns and saintly women who embellished birthing rooms with their prayers, rosaries, or relics. Birth meant *re-ligio*, the *restoration of connections*.

Denial of motherhood

No doubt, the values and constraints of Spanish culture forced women to live maternity in a way that put them at great risk, shortened their life expectancy, and kept them from developing other talents and faculties. Quite a few of them survived their childbearing years and reached an older age because of early widowhood, because they entered a nunnery, or simply because they stubbornly refused to get married.

However, if excessive maternity was imposed on some women, the very same culture refused it to others, imposing a lifestyle that disallowed them either to be mothers at all or to fully give loving care for their children. Thus, a history of maternity should include those daughters of households that could not afford a dowry and had to enter a nunnery against their own desire. There, as testimonies report, it was quite common that nuns devoted great tenderness and empathy to dolls of baby Jesuses—so-called *Manolitos*.[338] A history of suppressed maternity should include those wet nurses who offered their maternal milk for sale. Would they not have preferred to breastfeed their own babies? Such a history should also include the letters (*papeles*), relics, and protective objects some mothers adhered to their babies before leaving them at the mercy of a foundling home. These words and objects do not express relief at all but, in many a case, deep sorrow caused by circumstances that forced women to abandon their babies.

A great variety of situations

Social status strongly conditioned birth. The baby of an enslaved mother—to give an extreme example—could be sold by the slaveowner before even being born. Women who gave birth at the margins of society often had to put up with dire conditions. However, even among the enslaved population, mainly residing in Southern Spain, we find a great variety of circumstances and situations.[339] Slight differences in the configuration of households and communities could have an enormous bearing on how birth was prepared and conducted. Poverty mattered, but it could be counterbalanced by

a strong supporting network or also by the fact that a wealthy father extended a protecting hand over the mother.

Furthermore, poverty was not the only threat: When a baby was believed to bring shame upon a young woman and dishonor to a household, when an infant would be born secretly, conditions of birthing were probably worse than when birth was warmly welcomed into the house of poor people, be it only because of the mental stress the mother of an illegitimate child had to go through. In such cases, social status could become a secondary factor. So, we should beware of generally stating that privileged women were more fortunate in their births. We have discussed possible reasons for this: All the care or skill provided by the most renowned physicians or midwives of their time and place could not save an empress, whose frail body had been subjected to a series of gestations, as soon as it was capable of bringing forth children.

The family structure and its evolution over time had its impact on birth. Households with fewer children had a better chance to provide for them; older siblings had a bigger chance to grow up under parental protection and to be supported by aunts and grandmothers from the time of the mother's pregnancy. On the other hand, an older sister or brother could turn out helpful during the expectation and arrival of a younger sibling. There seems to be quite a number of variables that could not be discussed in this study but which would certainly deserve closer attention.[340] Every birth and every death caused readjustments in a family system. A baby born after the death of one, two, or several siblings was most likely attended to with utmost care. A grandfather

who lacked legitimate grandchildren could be moved to grudgingly shelter the upgrowing of an illegitimate one. Again, Galdós offers good examples: Fortunata's second baby is fathered in circumstances strongly censored by the families and partners involved. However, this *unfortunate* start is overruled by the fact that the boy is don Baldomero's (that is, the father's father) only grandson. Even the fate of a foundling could depend on the hazards of family histories: Arturo Barea refers to the case of a boy brought up with special care on his foster mother's breast at the beginning of the 20th century because he has taken the place of another child deceased at a very young age and before having been weaned.[341] (We think it is licit to refer to such cases of the 20th century that portray social mechanisms also working in earlier eras.)

Status matters, and so do resources, but as life and death matters trigger all the strategies and wits people can muster, we have to look very closely at every single situation, its circumstances, and their various effects. Among the poor, in some specific contexts, a baby would be an unbearable burden and jeopardize the mother's status; in others, it could even improve her fate. Such is the case in the world of Galdós and the professional beggars described in *Misericordia*: There, a breastfeeding mother could expect higher gains when begging at the entrances of Madrid's churches with a nursling in her arms.

Further studies could tackle the multiple possible relations of birthing scenarios with family, household, and community and assess to what degree differences in Spain's regional family systems result in significant variations in the way birth was experienced and attended to.[342]

Context alone cannot explain maternity[343]

As the course of a river is the product of a very long process, the way children are conceived and born has developed in the span of the very long history of the human species. As the course of a river cannot be altered altogether by a specific period, the way birth is organized and experienced cannot be completely changed by a specific historical setting. Context alone, we are convinced, cannot explain human energy mustered around childbirth. It takes a much longer perspective to explain the origins, evolution, and social organization of human procreation, of parental care, to understand the importance of grandmothers or of a baby's power to trigger tenderness and compassion. Fascinated as we historians are by the peculiar features of a specific time and culture, we tend to overpass this crucial fact. Studies by biologists, anthropologists, and prehistorians[344] have endeavored to get to the roots of what is peculiar about the way humans organize pregnancy and birth.

Writing a history of birth is a purposive endeavor. However, our history will not claim to unravel the very heart and core of the matter. (Just as Philippe Ariès would probably not have claimed that his history of death—or rather, of dying—could stake such a claim.) A midwife in the times of the Ancient Testament probably did things differently than in Golden Age Spain, and so did a breastfeeding mother or a wet nurse, but some basic features of their doings remained unaltered—just as unaltered as the basic design of our cities, or sleep, or hunger, or the functions of our hands, or the human need for care and company. Historiography of a particular time's social and cultural conditions does a poor job if it feels obliged—often in the name of current political agendas—

to overlook how deeply rooted parental love and the impulse to care for a newborn baby are in the history of humans.

Procreation was an active power in social life

If this view is accurate, it bears a weighty consequence for the study of cultures: If we look for the forces that actively condition and shape societies, procreation should be reestablished among them. Childbearing cannot solely be explained as a function of economic interests or power relations. Much as a given context modifies pregnancy and birth, these phenomena always impose their specific rules and rhythms upon a mother and the community supporting her. Every community driven by the desire to project itself into the future has to create spaces in which childbearing women and babies are less threatened by disease or violence than elsewhere.[345] A mother can decide to interrupt pregnancy, no doubt, or people close to her can force her or persuade her to do so. But once she has decided to have the baby, there is no way of changing, say, the time it will take the baby to develop sufficiently to survive outside the womb. No culture and no context have achieved fundamentally altering the constraint of forty weeks of pregnancy so far. Though the human heart is much influenced by the time and space in which it begins beating, no circumstance can fundamentally change its qualities and workings. We do not know, of course, if or to what extent modern technology will (continue to) change the ways children are conceived, pregnancies carried, and babies born. Birth seems to be both connected to and

disconnected from its historical context. Thus, whoever addresses birth must grapple with the challenge of considering the unique logic of the secluded environment created around birth in every human culture without losing sight of the broader context.

The *comadre* is a symbol of an era

Reading some reports on early modern birth, one could be surprised about how little is said about the mother, who remains a shadowy figure, and how much attention is placed on the midwife. Emperor Leopold I's letters about the confinements of his Spanish spouse and niece, Margaret Theresa of Spain, provide a good example. There are few words about the mother and much more about the midwife's performance. This should, of course, encourage scholars to keep exploring testimonies that convey the voices, feelings, and perspectives of mothers themselves. But maybe this strong focus on the midwife tells us something important about the times and places we are dealing with. In many ways, midwives and Spanish midwives, in particular, were personifications or symbols of their age and the ways childbirth was interpreted back then.

A 16th- or 17th-century midwife was respected by male physicians, male jurisprudents, male counselors at court, and male ambassadors. Nobody questioned the need for a midwife in matters of pregnancy and birth. Whereas physicians and their supposedly nefarious proceedings were so often satirized in drama and fiction,[346] while letters written among members of courts in numerous cases explicitly blamed "los médicos" for the death of an infant,[347] there is little evidence for the scapegoat-

ing of midwives, at least where their core function, the delivery of the baby, is commented on. (This is, by the way, another strong argument for shifting attention from parturition itself to other risks related to pregnancy and procreation.)

17th-century writers evoked prominent models of the past to dignify the doings of contemporary midwives; elder members of the highest aristocracy self-fashioned themselves as midwives in religious paintings; the most prominent Spanish members of the guild were sent from Seville or Madrid to serve at courts far away, so as to attend to the female members of the Casa de Austria now residing there. Their careers bear witness to Spanish imperialism, to consanguineous marriage policies, it is true, but also to the desire to upkeep the Spanish language and Spanish knowledge in such an essential matter as was birth.

Significantly, it is the midwife, not the mother, whom the Spanish mentions when confiding the premature death of a prince to his diary. *She* bore the responsibility of baptizing the infant while there was still time to do so. Emergency baptism reinforced the interpretation of birth not as a process to be carried out without complications but as a moment of deepest religious and existential significance. A midwife lent her hands to God's will and power to create new life or the grant admission to heaven.

Midwives exerted authority in a birthing chamber, and it was in that setting that they performed their main function. However, their importance was by no means limited to the critical days or hours of delivery. We have pointed to the range of functions she performed in her social world, religious, social, and juridical ones.

A midwife could create fictions of untouched virginity; she could become an accomplice in the *switching* of babies, in the introduction and presentation of *false* babies where titles and inheritances were meant to be handed down to the next generation. Her expertise and testimony in court could either substantiate or undermine a widow's claim of conceiving a child prior to her late husband's passing. Midwives occupied those zones of life where events had to be reconciled with principles, where the unexpected was managed to maintain the equilibrium of families and social systems. Thus, Calderón's midwife, hurrying to a secret birth in nighttime Madrid, represents more than a random scene of everyday life; she embodies honor as a crucial value and shame as a powerful tool of social control.

In short, midwives acted on thresholds: between life and death, salvation and limbo, secrecy and public scandal. In a time when birth was not just an obstetrical and medical concern, midwives became chief representatives of all the other social, religious, or political concerns, the memory of which is worth being rescued from oblivion. They helped to lay the foundations of a person's identity. We still know far too little about *madres* and the ways they experienced maternity in early modern Spain. By contrast, recent research has brought to light important aspects of the *co-madre*, a term so very appropriately referring to good neighbors—who would help out in the rough moments of childbirth, who would agree to hold your baby over the baptismal font, who would be taught obstetrical skills by their mother, aunt, or even grandmother and eventually gain recognition as a town's birth assistant.[348]

Careful readers will find significant allusions to the status and functions of midwives in this first and foremost masterpiece of the Siglo de Oro that is *La Celestina*, by Fernando de Rojas (and the anonymous author of the first act). Some 350 years later, Galdós' great novel *Fortunata y Jacinta*, set in the Madrid of the years 1869 to 1876, in numerous passages deals with maternity and birth. But times have changed, at least for the well-to-do classes of the capital; there is no demand for a Celestina anymore, where birth, although illegitimate, is supervised by an apothecary, and the baby is bound to become heir of don Baldomero, the wealthy middle-class paternal grandfather. Thus, a woman like Fortunata is assisted by the male *comadrón* don Francisco de Quevedo, *profesor de obstetricia*. Childbirth was now seen as an ailment, and the once powerful and authoritative figure of the midwife, revered and feared,[349] associated with the Virgin Mary, and dignified by her services to queens and duchesses, a professional who ruled over a consortium of female helpers and passed on her knowledge to the next generation, a woman whose hands symbolized divine power over life, death and the life beyond came under the control of male experts and the regulations of hospitals.[350]

Notes

1. See Blanca de los Ríos de Lampérez, '*La vida es sueño' y los diez Segismundos de Calderón* (Madrid: Blass, 1926); Don W. Cruickshank, *Don Pedro Calderón* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 20–21, 34–35, 46; Wolfram Aichinger, "El parto violento en Calderón y el dramatismo del parto en la España del Siglo de Oro." In *La violencia en el teatro de Calderón*, eds. Manfred Tietz, Gero Arnscheidt, Robert A. Folger, Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, and Antonio Sánchez Jiménez (Vigo: Ed. Academia del Hispanismo, 2014), 17–36.

2. María Cruz de Carlos Varona, *Nacer en palacio. El ritual del nacimiento en la corte de los Austrias* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica CEEH, 2018); Alessandra Foscati, *Le meravigilie del parto. Donare la vita tra Medioevo ed Età moderna* (Torino: Einaudi, 2023); Nadia Filippini, *Generare, partorire, nascere. Una storia dall'antichità alla provetta* (Roma: Viella, 2017); María Jesús Fuente, *La luz de mis ojos. Ser madre en la Edad Media* (Barcelona: Penguin, 2023); Enrique García Santo-Tomás, *Signos vitales: procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea* (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2020); Costanza Gislon Dopfel, ed., *Maternal Materialities. Objects, Rituals and Material Evidence of Medieval and Early Modern Childbirth*, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2023); Marie-France Morel, ed., *La naissance au risque de la mort. D'hier à aujourd'hui* (Toulouse: érès,

2021); Dolores Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas en España* (Madrid: Guadalmazán, 2022).

3. Franz Eusebius Pötting, *Diario del conde de Pötting, embajador del Sacro Imperio en Madrid (1664–1674). Vol I*, ed. Miguel Nieto Nuño (Madrid: Biblioteca Diplomática Española, 1990), 340.

4. For a full list of the celebrations in honor of the Virgin and their broadcast through church bells, see for example Nieves Jiménez Díaz, *Historia de las campanas de Granada* (Granada: Diss. Universidad de Granada, 1998), 822–823, 829.

5. See Jerónimo de Barrionuevo, *Avisos de don Jerónimo de Barrionuevo (1654–1658) Vol. II*, ed. Antonio Paz y Mélia (Madrid: Atlas, 1968–69), 306 (August 30, 1656), 156–157 (January 30, 1658).

6. See Athanasius Kircher, *Mundus subterraneus* (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius and Elizeus Weyerstraten, 1665); Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, *Historia Naturae, Maxime Peregrinae* (Antwerp: Ex officina plantiniana Balthasaris Moreti, 1635); Ingrid D. Rowland, "Athanasius Kircher, Giordano Bruno, and the Panspermia." In *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man who Knew Everything*, ed. Paula Findlen (New York/London: Routledge, 2004), 191–205. Quoted in Costanza Gislon Dopfel, "Reality and Imagination in the Iconography of the Lying-in Room." In Gislon Dopfel, *Maternal Materialities*, 90.

7. See Aichinger, "El parto violento," 17–36.

8. Kurt Kriz, "Mal de madre: la patología tras del nombre." *Avisos de Viena* 4 (2022): 73–79. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.4.7526

9. Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, eds. Ignacio Arellano and Ra-

fael Zafra (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2006), *s.v. comadre*.

10. See for example Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, *s.v. perla* and *aborto*, and Nina Kremmel, "Parir a lo castellano: semántica histórica de la preñez y del parto en el *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* de Covarrubias," *Memoria y Civilización* 21 (2018): 89–102. doi:10.15581/001.21.027; Cristina Tabernero Sala, "Las denominaciones de 'parir' y 'malparir' en la historia del léxico," *Revista Historia Autónoma* 16 (2020): 83–100. doi:10.15366/rha2020.16.005

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12. José Antonio Ballesteros Díez, "Bautismos, confirmaciones y matrimonios en la historia social de Mérida en la segunda mitad del siglo xvi," *Revista de estudios extremeños* 58, no. 3 (2002): 974; María Soledad Fernández de la Iglesia, and Ángel Gómez-Cabrero Ortiz, "Estructuras y pautas familiares en un contexto demográfico preindustrial. Navahermosa, 1675–1874," *Revista de Demografía Histórica – Journal of Iberoamerican Population Studies* 18, No. 2 (2000): 194–212; Bartolomé Bennassar, *Histoire des espagnols, vi–xx^{e} siècle* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1992), 367–368. For early modern England with its peak of births in March see E. A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oeppen, and R.S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution. 1580–1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 335.

13. Enrique Junceda Avello, *Ginecología y vida íntima de las reinas de España* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1995), 115–121.

14. Junceda Avello, *Ginecología*, 195–198.

15. Junceda Avello, *Ginecología*, 15–26.

16. Margarita García Barranco, *Antropología histórica de una élite de poder: las reinas de España* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2007), 231–234.

17. For her life at the court of Vienna, see Andrea Sommer-Mathis, "María Ana de Austria: spanische Infantin – Königin von Ungarn und Böhmen – römisch-deutsche Kaiserin (1606–1646)." In *Nur die Frau des Kaisers? Kaiserinnen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Bettina Braun, Katrin Keller, and Matthias Schnettger (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 141–156.

18. Pascale Mormiche, *Donner vie au royaume. Grossesses et maternités à la cour de France, XVII^{e}–XVIII^{e} siècles* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2022), 62–63.

19. Rocío Martínez López, "'Con la esperanza de un sucesor'. El uso político de la fertilidad en las negociaciones matrimoniales de los Habsburgo durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVII," *Hipogrifo: Revista de Literatura y Cultura del Siglo de Oro* 9, no. 1 (2021): 797–822. doi:10.13035/H.2021.09.01.45

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23. María Tausiet Carlés, "Comadronas-brujas en Aragón en la Edad Moderna: mito y realidad," *Manuscrits: revista d'història moderna* 15 (1997): 377–392.

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26. Francisco Rico, ed., *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000), 26. For birth scenes in picaresque literature, see Fernando Sanz-Lázaro, "El nacimiento de un nacimiento," *Avisos de Viena* 1 (2020): 6–9. doi:10.25365/adv.2020.1.6170

27. Cathy McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation in early modern France* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 61–62.

28. McClive, *Menstruation*, 235.

29. Nicolas Monardes, *Primera y segunda y tercera partes de la Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias occidentales, […] Diálogo de las grandezas del hierro* (Sevilla: Fernando Díaz, 1580), fol. 146^{v}.

30. Alfonso Limón Montero, *Espejo cristalino de las aguas de España* (Alcalá: F. García Fernández, 1697), 58–59, 85, 234–235, 327, 330.

31. Junceda Avello, *Ginecología*, 248.

32. Kurt Kriz, "La bucarofagia en el Siglo de Oro: los efectos deseados y los efectos secundarios dañinos por la salud," *Avisos de Viena* 3 (2022): 40–46. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.3.6585

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34. See Nina Kremmel, "Ten Privileges for Pregnant Women in early modern Spain." In Gislon Dopfel, *Maternal Materialities*, 145–154.

35. On the contemporary concern for a childbearing woman's food and nutrition, see Jesús M. Usunáriz, "La alimentación de la mujer en el embarazo, parto y puerperio en la España de la temprana Edad Moderna," *Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro* 9.1 (2021): 673–699. doi:10.13035/H.2021.09.01.41

36. Juan Alonso Ruices de Fontecha, *Diez privilegios para mujeres preñadas* (Alcalá de Henares: Luis Martínez Grande, 1606).

37. Luke 1: 26–38 (Douay-Rheims American Edition).

38. Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, *Verkündigung Mariae mit den Zügen der Königin Margarete (1584–1611) und der Infantin Anna (1601–1666)*, 1604, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. https://www.khm.at/en/objectdb/detail/2373, accessed Feb. 29, 2024.

39. Iván Sorapán de Rieros, *Medicina española contenida en proverbios vulgares de nuestra lengua. Vol. II* (Madrid: A.G. Fuentenebro, 1876), 3; Fontecha, *Diez privilegios*, fol. 88^{r}.

40. Magdalena S. Sánchez, "'I would not feel the pain if I were with you': Catalina Micaela and the Cycle of Pregnancy at the Court of Turin. 1585–1597," *Social History of Medicine* 28, no. 3 (2014): 445–464. doi:10.1093/shm/hkv017

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43. Ochoa, *Cartas de Sor María*, 316 (July 2, 1653).

44. Ochoa, *Cartas de Sor María*, 323 (September 3, 1653).

45. Barrionuevo, *Avisos Vol. II*, 30–36 (August 30, 1656).

46. Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, *s.v. cinta*.

47. Jacques Gélis, "Il parto e l'evoluzione della coscienza del corpo nell'epoca moderna (XVI–XIX sec.)." In *Le culture del parto*, ed. Ann Oakley (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1985), 33–42; Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), quoted in Elisa Tosi Brandi, "A Dress for the Mother in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy." In Gislon Dopfel, *Maternal Materialities*, 90.

48. Barrionuevo, *Avisos Vol. I*, 72, 74 (October 3, 1654), 80 (October 7, 1654).

49. Alonso de Villegas, *Flos sanctorum nuevo* (Madrid: Pedro Madrigal, 1588), fol. 220^{r}; Pedro de Ribadeneyra, *Segunda parte del flos sanctorum, o libro de las vidas de los santos. En la qual se contienen las vidas de todos los Santos de que reza la Iglesia Romana en los seys postreros meses del año* (Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1601), 1.

50. Luke 1: 39–56 (DRA).

51. Ribadeneyra, *Segunda parte del flos sanctorum*, 5.

52. Roberto Muñoz Martín, "El Colegio de niños desamparados de santa Isabel la Real de Madrid: origen, construc-

ción y primera ornamentación (1592–1610)," *Archivo español de arte* 94, no. 373 (Jan–Mar 2021): 8–14. doi:10.3989/aearte.2021.01

53. Damián Carbón, *Texto y concordancias del Libro del arte de las comadres o madrinas y del regimiento de las preñadas y paridas y de los niños* (Mallorca: Hernando de Cansoles, 1541), frontispiece.

54. On the question of sexual relations during pregnancy, see Nina Kremmel, "Intercourse During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period in Early Modern Spain," *Revista Historia Autónoma* 16 (2020): 71–81. doi:10.15366/rha2020.16.004

55. Pötting, *Diario Vol. I*, 30.

56. For this perception in literature, see Clara Bonet Ponce, "La vida (antes de la vida) de don Gregorio Guadaña y otros personajes," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 26–35. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6180

57. Jerónimo de Barrionuevo, *Avisos de don Jerónimo de Barrionuevo (1654–1658* [sic]*) Vol. I*, ed. Antonio Paz y Mélia (Madrid: Atlas, 1968–1969), 166 (July 24, 1655).

58. "Now in the case of males, their movement tends to take place as a rule on the right side at about forty days, that of females on the left at about ninety days." Aristotle, *Historia Animalium Vol. III, Books 7–10*, trans. and ed. D. M. Balme (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 434–435 (583b).

59. Bonet Ponce, "La vida (antes de la vida) de don Gregorio Guadaña y otros personajes," 31–33.

60. Clara Bonet, "Un mediador interior: la carta de Margarita a Leopoldo," *Avisos de Viena* 3 (2022): 18–24. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.3.6581; Clara Bonet Ponce, "Desde el útero: la comunicación con el exterior." In *Culturas del*

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61. Villegas, *Flos sanctorum nuevo*, fol. 260^{v}.

62. "Su madre infinitas veces, / entre ideas y delirios / del sueño, vio que rompía / sus entrañas atrevido / un monstruo en forma de hombre, / y entre su sangre teñido / le daba muerte, naciendo / víbora humana del siglo. / Llegó de su parto el día, / y los presagios cumplidos / (porque tarde o nunca son / mentirosos los impíos), […]." Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *La vida es sueño* (Barcelona: Linkgua Ediciones, 2007), vv. 668–679 ('Many a time his mother saw / In her dreams' delirious dimness / From her side a monster break, / Fashioned like a man, but sprinkled / With her blood, who gave her death, / By that human viper bitten. / Round his birthday came at last, / All its auguries fulfilling/ [For the presages of evil / Seldom fail or even linger] […].' Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life Is a Dream*, trans. and ed. Denis Florence MacCarthy (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), 51. For the motif of the horrifying birth of the viper, see Antonio Sánchez Jiménez, "Víboras y partos violentos en Lope de Vega," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 90–101. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6189

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64. Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, *s.v. imaginación*.

65. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 34^{r}.

66. Sorapán de Rieros, *Medicina española*, 3–24.

67. Barrionuevo, *Avisos Vol. I*, 108 (November 7, 1657).

68. Pötting, *Diario Vol. I*, 73.

69. Rocío Martínez López, "Muertes de sobreparto." In *Culturas del parto*, Aichinger. https://museoecologiahumana.org/obras/death-in-childbed, accessed Feb. 29, 2024.

70. "Llámase nuestra Señora de la O. Lo uno, porque desde este día comienzan en las vísperas unas antífonas, que se dicen hasta la víspera del Nacimiento a la Magnificat, que comienzan en O" ('She is called Our Lady of the O. First, because from this day begin in the vespers some Antiphons, which are recited until the eve of the Birth to the Magnificat, which begin with O.' Alonso de Villegas, *Flos sanctorum nuevo, y historia general de la vida de Christo Señor Nuestro y de todos los santos que reza y haze fiesta la Iglesia Católica* (Toledo: Viuda de Juan Rodríguez, 1591), fol. 34^{v}.

71. Ribadeneyra, *Segunda parte del flos sanctorum*, 711.

72. Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Maria, Kirche im Ursprung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1997).

73. María de la Cruz de Carlos Varona, "Entre el riesgo y la necesidad: embarazo, alumbramiento y culto a la Virgen en los espacios femeninos del Alcazar de Madrid (siglo xvii)," *Arenal* 13, no. 2 (Jul–Dec 2006): 263–290, 278.

74. Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, *s.v. día*.

75. Barrionuevo, *Avisos Vol. I*, 111 (November 14, 1657), 162 (February 13, 1658).

76. Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, *Relaciones de las cosas sucedidas en la Corte de España, desde 1599 hasta 1614* (Madrid: J. Martín Alegría, 1857), 167.

77. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 33^{r}.

78. Manuel Ángel Bermejo Castrillo, *Entre ordenamientos y códigos. Legislación y doctrina sobre familia a partir de las leyes de Toro de 1505* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2009).

79. Wolfram Aichinger, "Dar tiempo al tiempo: embarazo, legitimidad y calendarios femeninos en Calderón y en la sociedad del Siglo de Oro," *Bulletin of the Comediantes* 72, no. 2 (2020): 106–107. doi:10.1353/boc.2020.0037; Jerónimo Cortés Valenciano, *El non plus ultra del lunario y pronóstico* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1695).

80. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *La devoción de la Cruz*, ed. Adrián J Sáez (Madrid: Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert, 2014).

81. Sorapán de Rieros, *Medicina española*, 3–24.

82. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, epistle.

83. For the terminology of miscarriage, see Fernando Sanz-Lázaro, "Mueve la burra, mueve la princesa: algunos sinónimos de abortar en textos literarios y documentos auriseculares," *Avisos de Viena* 6 (2024): 99–113. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.6.8518

84. For a general discussion, see Jacques Gélis, *L'arbre et le fruit : la naissance dans l'Occident moderne (XVI^{e}–XIX^{e} siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), 301–311; Lara Freidenfels, *The Myth of the Perfect Pregnancy: A History of Miscarriage in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

85. Juan Soler Serratosa, "Demografía y sociedad en Castilla la Nueva durante el Antiguo Régimen: la villa de Los Molinos, 1620–1730," *Reis* 32 (1985): 174; for Germany, see John E. Knodel, *Demographic Behavior in the Past. A Study of Fourteen German Village Populations in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 35–101.

86. Garrett Mattingly and Peter de Mendelssohn, *Katharina von Aragon* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammner, 1962), 155.

87. Julio Cruz Hermida, "Biografía histórico-médica de Isabel la Católica," *Toletum: Boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes y Ciencias Históricas de Toledo* 51 (2005): 128.

88. Margarita Sánchez Cabrera, "La muerte de los niños de sangre real durante el medievo. Aproximación al tema a través de las crónicas," *La España Medieval* 31 (2008): 221.

89. Mormiche, *Donner vie*, 91.

90. Junceda Avello, *Ginecología*, 195–207; María José Rubio, *Reinas de España. Las Austrias: siglos XVI-XVII, de Isabel la Católica a Mariana de Neoburgo* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2010), 331–340, 375.

91. See also Gélis, *L'arbre*, 299–307.

92. Jesús M. Usunáriz, "El padre ante el parto en la España de los siglos XVI y XVII," *Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro* 6.1 (2018): 487. doi:10.13035/H.2018.06.01.34

93. Fontecha, *Diez privilegios*, fols. 86^{v}–87^{r}.

94. *Prendimiento de Rodrigo Álvarez tras haber dado muerte a su mujer preñada de siete meses. A petición de Leonor Sánchez, tía de la citada Beatriz, Archivo General de Simancas*, RGS, LEG, 149309, 162, year 1493.

95. Clara Bonet Ponce, "Entre la fertilidad y la esterilidad. Uxoricidio y maternidad en el Calderón serio," *Arte Nuevo. Revista de Estudios Áureos* 8 (2021): 11–12, 15–16. doi: 10.14603/8A2021

96. Fontecha, *Diez privilegios*, fol. 35^{r}.

97. Junceda, *Ginecología*, 136–140 and 146–147.

98. Pascale Mormiche, "Le 'deuil des maillots' : mourir à la naissance chez les enfants de France (XVII^{e}–XVIII^{e} siècle)." In *La naissance au risque de la mort. D'hier à aujourd'hui*, ed. Marie-France Morel (Toulouse: érès, 2021), 129–130.

99. Junceda, *Ginecología*, 78–80.

100. Cabrera de Córdoba, *Relaciones*, 166–170.

101. Leopold I, *Privatbriefe Kaiser Leopold I. an den Grafen F. E. Pötting 1662–1673. Vol. II (Jan. 1669–Dec. 1673)*, eds. Alfred Francis Pribram and Moritz Landwehr von Pragenau (Vienna: Carl Gerold's Sohn, 1903–04), 335–336.

102. Franz Christoph Khevenhüller, *Genealogie des Hauses Khevenhüller* (Vienna: Haus-, Hof und Staatsarchiv (HHSta), Familienarchiv Khevenhüller, vol. 207, 774.

103. Alessandra Foscati, "'Nonnatus dictus quod caeso defunctae matris utero prodiit'. Postmortem Caesarean Section in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period," *Social history of medicine* 32, no. 3 (2019): 10. doi: 10.1093/shm/hky022

104. Alonso de Carranza, *Disputatio de vera naturalis et legitimi partus designatione* (Madrid: Francisco Martínez, 1628).

105. Fontecha, *Diez privilegios*, fols. 89^{v}–90^{v}.

106. Cruz Hermida, "Biografía histórico-médica," 123–124.

107. Usunáriz, "El padre ante el parto," 488.

108. Alice-Viktoria Dulmovits, "Nacido de las cenizas del padre: los nacimientos póstumos de Catalina de Austria y Sebastián de Portugal en obras historiográficas de los

siglos xvi y xvii," *Memoria y Civilización* 21 (2018): 44. doi:10.15581/001.21.028

109. Fontecha, *Diez privilegios*, fol. 67v.

110. Mormiche, *Donner vie*, 91.

111. Ochoa, *Cartas de Sor María*, 323 (September 3, 1653); Barrionuevo, *Avisos Vol. I*, 166 (July 24, 1655).

112. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of childhood. A social history of family life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 39.

113. Khevenhüller, *Genealogie des Hauses Khevenhüller*, 774.

114. For a satirical take on childbirth in popular printed literature, see Juan Gomis, "'Buscad mujer que no para': imágenes satíricas del parto en pliegos de cordel," *Avisos de Viena* 3 (2022): 32–39. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.3.6584

115. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, *Arcipreste de Talavera o Corbacho*, ed. Michael Gerli (Madrid: Cátedra, 1987), 197–198.

116. Tausiet Carlés, "Comadronas-brujas," 382.

117. Wolfram Aichinger and Alice-Viktoria Dulmovits, "Escenarios de parto y bautismo de urgencia en libros de bautismo del siglo xvii," *Revista Historia Autónoma* 16 (2020): 13–35. doi:10.15366/rha2020.16.001

118. See the following cases: Juan de Salazar Uribe 1765, Antón de Gurtubay 1576 (illicit relations), Alonso Marcos 1655 (violence and subsequent miscarriage), Francisco Lainez 1673 (*agua de esparto*), or Antonio de Zarragoitia and María Cruz (involvement of a surgeon). Portal de Archivos Españoles (PARES). https://pares.cultura.gob.es, accessed Jun. 13, 2025.

119. Gélis, *L'arbre*, 398–399.

120. Fernando Sanz-Lázaro, "Más conocida que la ruda: una 'planta medicinal' de uso cotidiano en su contexto," *Avisos de Viena* 4 (2022): 15–23. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.4.7520

121. Tausiet Carlés, "Comadronas-brujas," 385.

122. Françoise Loux, *Le jeune enfant et son corps dans la médecine traditionnelle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978); Gélis, *L'arbre*, 392.

123. Jesús María Usunáriz, "'Volved ya las riendas, porque no os perdáis': la transformación de los comportamientos morales en la España del XVI." In *El mundo social y cultural de la Celestina: actas del Congreso Internacional de la Universidad de Navarra*, eds. Ignacio Arellano and Jesús María Usunáriz (Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2003), 295–322.

124. Bennassar, *Histoire des espagnols*, 368–369.

125. Allison M. Poska, *Women and Authority in Early Modern Spain: The Peasants of Galicia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 233–234.

126. Manuel Fernández Álvarez, "La demografía de Salamanca en el siglo XVI a través de los fondos parroquiales." In *Actas de las Ias jornadas de metodología aplicada a las ciencias históricas. Vol. 3. Metodología de la historia moderna: economía y demografía*, s.e. (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1975), 281–296.

127. Manuel Bustos Rodríguez, "La población de la Provincia de Cádiz en los siglos XVII y XVIII," *Trocadero. Revista del Departamento de Historia Moderna, Contemporánea, de América y del Arte* 1.2 (2022): 13–14. doi:10.25267/Trocadero.1990.i2.01

128. For a rich study on how this historical era's different voices articulated midwives and wet nurses, and on how

they inspired works of literature and art of the time, see García Santo-Tomás, *Signos vitales*.

129. In his sermon, Murillo states: "En los otros partos es necesario que asista, quien tenga, y ayude a la preñada, en un trance de tanto trabajo, y peligro, y no menos es necesario que haya partera que reciba la criatura, y que la lave y la faje y haga los demás ministerios, que en esto se ofrecen" ('In other births [other than the Virgin's], it is necessary that whoever is there assist and help the pregnant woman, in a course of so much labor, and danger, and it is not less necessary that there is a midwife that receives the newborn, and that washes and wraps it and does the rest of the tasks that present themselves in the process'). Fray Diego de Murillo, *Discursos predicables sobre todos los evangelios que canta la Iglesia, en las festividades de Cristo, nuestro redemptor* (Saragossa: Angelo Tavanno, 1607), 164.

130. Francisco Núñez, *Libro intitulado del parto humano, en el cual se contienen remedios muy vtiles y vsuales para el parto difficultoso de las mugeres, con otros muchos secretos a ello pertenescientes* (Alcalá de Henares: Iuan Gracián, 1580), fols. 32^{r}–40^{v}.

131. Teresa Ortiz, "From Hegemony to Subordination: Midwives in Early Modern Spain." In *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe*, ed. Hillary Marland (London: Routledge, 1993), 98.

132. Wolfram Aichinger, "El Siglo de Oro de la comadre: testimonios de Inés de Ayala," *Memoria y Civilización* 21 (2018): 23–24. doi:10.15581/001.21.026

133. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 12^{v}.

134. Dolores Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas en España* (Madrid: Guadalmazán, 2022), 253–270.

135. Manuel Jesús García Martínez and Antonio Claret García Martínez, "Fechas claves para la historia de las matronas en España," *Génesis* 38 (1998): 249.

136. "Suelen los niños tener diversas enfermedades: de las cuales acostumbran morir: y es por culpa de sus padres, y madres: porque en lugar de pedir el consejo del médico lo demandan a la comadre: y ella no sabe las causas y hace remedios. Y así se pierde y es pecado grande. [...] Y dicen que no lo hacen por mal: digo que no las excusa del pecado pues miren lo que hacen" ('Children use to suffer from various diseases: of which they commonly die: and it is on account of their fathers, and mothers: because instead of asking for a doctor's advice, they seek the midwife's: and she does not know the causes and prepares remedies. And in this way [the child] is lost and it is a great sin. [...] And it is said that they do not do so for ill will: I am saying that this does not excuse them from their sin, just look at what they do'). Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 61^{v}.

137. Ortiz, "From Hegemony," 97.

138. Carranza, *Disputatio*, 24–25, 374.

139. García Martínez and García Martínez, "Fechas claves," 243–260.

140. García Martínez and García Martínez, "Fechas claves," 247.

141. Manuel Jesús García Martínez, Antonio Claret García Martínez and Juan I. Valle Racero, "Registro y control de las Matronas por la Iglesia hispalense. (La imagen de la Matrona a través de los Libros de Visitas Pastorales del Arzobispado de Sevilla, siglos xvii y xviii)," *Híades* 1 (1994): 21.

142. Aichinger, and Dulmovits, "Escenarios," 25–26.

143. García Martínez and García Martínez, "Fechas claves," 247.

144. Aichinger, "*El Siglo de Oro*," 11–41.

145. Information provided by Beatriz Villegas based on her fieldwork in Lanzahíta (Ávila) in October 2023.

146. García Martínez and García Martínez, "Fechas claves," 248.

147. Kurt Kriz, "Las remiendavirgos en el Siglo de Oro," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 55–61. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6184

148. Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas,* 295–97.

149. Maurizio Bettini, *Nascere. Storie di donne, donnole, madri ed eroi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2018), 336–339.

150. "Si la buena comadre ha de tener tales condiciones, no me espanta ya que diga Galeno de opinión y parecer suyo y de Platón que es obra de las comadres saber declarar y señalar los cuerpos acomodados para la concepción y saber distinguir qué hombres son infecundos y qué mujeres estériles" ('If the good midwife ought to have these features, it does not astonish me that Galenus, of his and Plato's opinion, says that it is the work of midwives to know how to declare and indicate bodies fit for conception, and to know to distinguish which men are infertile and which women are sterile'). Fontecha, *Diez previlegios*, fol. 110^{v}.

151. Manuel Jesús García Martínez, "¿Transición o crisis profesional? La alegación de D. Alonso Carranza en defensa de las parteras (siglo xvii)," *Híades. Revista de Historia de la Enfermería* 8 (2001): 299–309.

152. "Socrates: And I dare say too, or rather I am absolutely certain, that the midwives know better than others who

is pregnant and who is not? [...] Did you ever remark that they are also most cunning matchmakers, and have a thorough knowledge of what unions are likely to produce a brave brood?." Plato, *Theaetetus*, transl. Benjamin Jowett (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Charles River Editors, 2018), 39–40.

153. Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*, ed. Francisco J. Lobera (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2011), 169.

154. See also María del Carmen García Herrero, "'Administrar del parto y recibir la criatura': Aportación al estudio de Obstetricia bajomedieval," *Aragón en la Edad Media* 8 (1989): 286, 289.

155. Aichinger, "*El Siglo de Oro*," 32, 36.

156. Wolfram Aichinger, "Matronas hacen linajes: la comadre Inés de Ayala (1590–1663) y su nieta Inés María de Sada (1635–1667)." In *El hacedor de las musas: homenaje al Prof. Francisco Domínguez Matito*, coord. Juan Manuel Escudero Baztán and Rebeca Lázaro Niso Cilengua (La Rioja: Cilengua, 2023), 5–22.

157. Fontecha, *Diez privilegios*, fols. 127^{v}–128^{r}.

158. Gabriel González Navarro and José Antonio Usandizaga Beguristáin, *Historia de la obstetricia y ginecología española. Vol. 1* (Madrid: Habe – SEGO. Sociedad Española de Ginecología y Obstetricia, 2006), 36–37.

159. Aichinger, "*El Siglo de Oro*," 40.

160. See, for example, Francisco González Laguna, *El zelo sacerdotal para con los niños no-nacidos* (Lima: Imprenta de los niños expósitos, 1781), 62–136; Wolfram Aichinger, and Alice-Viktoria Dulmovits, "Obstetrics Shaped by Ritual: Water and Emergency Baptism in Spanish Birthing Scenarios (1500–1800)." In Gislon Dopfel, *Maternal Materialities*, 223–237.

161. Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas*, 267–274.

162. Junceda, *Ginecología*, 204.

163. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 26[r]. For the peculiar relation between animal births and human childbirth in the early modern imaginary, see Wolfram Aichinger, "'Si está parida la gata': el impacto de partos animales en el imaginario colectivo del Siglo de Oro," *Avisos de Viena* 3 (2022): 13–17. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.3.6579

164. Eucharius Rösslin, *Rosengarten*, ed. Gustav Klein (München: Carl Kuhn, 1910).

165. Wolfram Aichinger, "Childbirth Rhythms and Childbirth Ritual in Early Modern Spain, Together with Some Comments on the Virtues of Midwives," *Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro* 6.1 (2018): 397. doi: 10.13035/H.2018.06.01.29

166. Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas*, 125–128.

167. Cruz Hermida, "Biografía histórico-médica," 123–124.

168. Jaime Bleda, *Coronica de los Moros de España* (Valencia: Felipe Mey, 1618), 953–954.

169. Jesús María Usunáriz, "El 'oficio de comadres' y el 'arte de partear'. Algunos apuntes sobre Navarra: siglos xvi-xviii." In *Modelos de vida y cultura en la Navarra de la modernidad temprana*, coord. Ignacio Arellano (New York: Instituto de Estudios Auriseculares, 2016), 333–334.

170. Ronald E. Surtz, "A spanish midwife's uses of the word: The inquisitorial trial (1485/86) of Joana Torrellas." In *Mediaevistik*, 19, no. 1 (2006): 153–168. doi:10.3726/83006_153

171. Anastasio Rojo Vega, *El Siglo de Oro: inventario de una época* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1996).

172. Renée Levine Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel?: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 140–149.

173. Esther Fernández Medina, *La magia morisca entre el Cristianismo y el Islam* (Granada: Editorial de la Universidad de Granada, 2014), 260–267.

174. Usunáriz, "El oficio," 322.

175. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fols. 11^{r}–11^{v}; Carranza, *Alegación jurídica*, 308.

176. For an analysis of parish records from the Viceroyalty of Peru, see Luis A. Moreno Príncipe, "¡Dime quién te trajo al mundo, y te diré quién eres!" *Avisos de Viena* 4 (2022): 29–34. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.4.7522

177. Rösslin, *Rosengarten*.

178. Núñez, *Libro intitulado*, fols. 41^{v}–42^{r}.

179. Miguel de Cervantes, *Novelas ejemplares. 2 Vols*, ed. Harry Sieber (Madrid: Cátedra, 2009), 348.

180. Liselotte Kuntner, *Die Gebärhaltung der Frau. Schwangerschaft und Geburt aus geschichtlicher, völkerkundlicher und medizinischer Sicht* (Bonn: Magas Verlag, 2022), 91–110.

181. Pötting, *Diario Vol. I*, 334 (November 3, 1667).

182. Fargas Peñarrocha, "Explicar el cuerpo," 143–144.

183. Fontecha, *Diez Privilegios*, fol. 92^{r}.

184. José María Domínguez Moreno, "El ciclo vital en la provincia de Cáceres: del parto al primer vagido," *Revista de Folklore* 61 (1986): 3.

185. For the significance of grandmothers, see Wolfram Aichinger, "Grandmothers Reborn: Allomaternal Care

as an Uncharted Territory of Spanish history," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 12–25. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6179

186. Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Comedias. Vol. III*, ed. Don W. Cruickshank (Madrid: Castro, 2007), 162.

187. Junceda Avello, *Ginecología*, 142. For the deeper social roots of this phenomenon and a case study carried out on 19th century parish registers, see Carlos Varea, Lara Carasa, Pere Planesas, and Wolfram Aichinger, "Hora del parto en Daimiel (Ciudad Real) en la primera mitad del siglo XIX," *Avisos de Viena* 5 (2023): 73–82. doi:10.25365/adv.2023.5.8159

188. Cervantes, *Novelas ejemplares*, 186–190.

189. Archivo de la Diputación de Granada, Casa Cuna, Entradas de expósitos, 1710–1722, libro 7323, fol. 119r.

190. Literature affirms this tendency. In Cervantes' text *La fuerza de la sangre*, the parturient protagonist is assisted by her mother, and only be her, given the shame and dishonor brought about by the rape that caused the pregnancy. See Cervantes, *Novelas ejemplares*.

191. For midwives' implication with secrecy, see Sabrina Grohsebner, "Clamor, susurro, silencio. La comadre áurea y los secretos del parto." In *Vínculos de sangre, parentescos manipulados, derechos familiares en Calderón. XIX Coloquio Anglogermano sobre Calderón. Vienna, September 28th–30th 2021*, ed. Hanno Ehrlicher and Christian Grünnagel (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2023), 69–93.

192. Again, fiction relates to the social realities of the time. In the novel *El siglo pitagórico y vida de don Gregorio Guadaña*, the protagonist witnesses a secret birth, after which the midwife—blindfolded on her way to the birth site—receives generous compensation for her silence. Antonio Enríquez Gómez, *El siglo pitagórico y vida de don*

Gregorio Guadaña, ed. Teresa de Santos (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1991), 239.

193. *Los milagros de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (siglo xv y primordios del xvi)*, ed. María Eugenia Díaz Tena (Mérida: Editora Regional de Extremadura, 2017), 720–721.

194. Enríquez Gómez, *El siglo pitagórico*, 152.

195. See for this instrument, Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 225.

196. Enríquez Gómez, *El siglo pitagórico*, 153.

197. García Herrero, "Administrar del parto," 290–292.

198. García Herrero, "Administrar del parto;" Alice-Viktoria Dulmovits, "Unseen heirs. Written traces of pregnant widows and posthumous children in early modern Spain (c. 1490–1673)," *Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro* 6, no. 1 (2018): 433–449. doi:10.13035/H.2018.06.01.31; Wolfram Aichinger, "La comadre Catalina de Cuenca y la suposición de un parto," *Avisos de Viena* 3 (2022): 8–12. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.3.6578

199. Archivo Real y General de Navarra (AGN), *Tribunales Reales. Procesos*, leg. 282491, fols. 10^{r}–11^{r}. Quoted in Usunáriz, "El oficio," 327–328.

200. Fontecha explicitly admonishes midwives not to be greedy: "Luego con mucha razón se pide que no sea avarienta, porque no sería mucho por ir a coger y alegar dineros de otras partes dejase a la pobre parida con las pares o partes de ellas en el cuerpo o con algún gran flujo de sangre, y por no aguardar lo que es justo y a lo que está obligada suceda una desgracia y si siendo avara no es limpia ni liberal, claros están mil daños [...]" ('So, with good reason it is required that she not be greedy, because it would not take her much to go and claim

money in other places and leave the poor post-partum woman with the afterbirth, or parts of it, in her body, or with some big discharge of blood, and for not waiting for what is just and what she is obliged to do, a misfortune happens, and if for being greedy she is not cleanly nor liberal, a thousand harms are evident [...]'). Fontecha, *Diez Privilegios*, fol. 109^{r}.

201. Fontecha, *Diez Privilegios*, fols. 108^{v}–109^{r}.

202. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 12^{r}.

203. Aichinger, "Childbirth Rhythms."

204. Pedro Salvador, *La azuzena de Madrid* (Madrid: Imprenta Real de la Gaceta, 1764), 353–354.

205. Aichinger, "Childbirth Rhythms," 396–398.

206. Núñez, *Libro intitulado*, fols. 40^{r}–46^{v}.

207. The case of Inés de Ayala's intervention in the parturition of Catalina de Ocariz (described below) is a good example.

208. Rösslin, *Rosengarten*, 22.

209. Núñez, *Libro intitulado*, fols. 5^{r}–6^{v}, 30^{r}–32^{v}.

210. Núñez, *Libro intitulado*, fol. 28^{v}.

211. "Mas si la que pare fuere gruesa y carnosa, más útil será que se eche en el suelo sobre la cara de tal manera que toque el suelo con la frente, teniendo las rodillas y piernas encorvadas arriba" ('But if the one that gives birth is thick and fleshy, it will be more useful to lie on the ground on the face in such a way that she touches the ground with the forehead, having the knees and legs bent upwards'). Núñez, *Libro intitulado*, fol. 30^{r}. As the passage is translated directly from Eucharius Rösslin's influential *Rosengarten* (published in 1513), there seems to

have been wide agreement between German and Spanish doctors. See Rösslin, *Rosengarten*, 28.

212. For medieval traditions in Andalucia, which in rural areas persisted until the 20th century, see Arīb Ibn Sa'd al-Kātib al-Qurṭubī, *El libro de la generación del feto, el tratamiento de las mujeres embarazadas y de los recien nacidos: tratado de obstreticia y pediatría del siglo x*, ed. Antonio Arjona Castro (Sevilla: Sociedad de Pediatría de Andalucía Occidental y Extremadura, 1991), 93.

213. Fontecha, *Diez Privilegios*, fol. 144v. When was the birthing stool introduced in Spain, how widespread was its use? It seems that it was considered a recent habit but the issue needs a detailed discussion in an exclusive study (see, for instance, Núñez, *Libro intitulado*, fols. 28v–29r). Physicians to the royal chamber and midwives first tried out a birthing stool when the Portuguese princess Maria Manuela, first spouse of Philip II, gave birth to Don Carlos in 1545. Many years later, Philip still thought that the use of the new technique was responsible for his spouse's death. One should doubt, however, whether "colocar a la parturienta tumbada" ('placing the birthing woman in a lying position') would have been considered an alternative at that time, as María José Rubio suggests. See Rubio, *Reinas de España*, 101.

214. Núñez, *Libro intitulado*, fols. 28v–29r.

215. Fontecha, *Diez Privilegios*, fols. 123v, 127v.

216. Aichinger, "Childbirth Rhythms," 400–403.

217. Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, *s.v. parir*.

218. Pötting, *Diario. Vol. I*, 334.

219. Fontecha, *Diez Privilegios*, fol. 113r.

220. Félix Lope de Vega y Carpio, *Comedia famosa de El Mayorazgo dudoso*, ed. Emilio Cotarelo (Artelope, 2021), Act I vv. 343–394. https://artelope.uv.es/biblioteca/textos AL/AL0738_ElMayorazgoDudoso.php, accessed Feb. 29, 2024.

221. Throughout parturition, her body remains unharmed, as hagiographic writing of the time affirms: "[…] y ella sin dolor, sin pesadumbre, sin corrupción,y mengua de su pureza virginal, vio delante de sí, salido de sus entrañas, más limpio, y más resplandeciente que el mismo Sol, al bien y remedio del mundo, tiritando de frío, y que ya con sus lágrimas comenzaba a hacer oficio de Redentor" ('[…] and without pain, without sorrow, without corruption, or decline of her virginal purity, she saw before her, emerged from her entrails, cleaner and more splendid than the sun itself, the good and remedy of the world, shivering from cold and who already with his tears began to fulfill the office of a Savior'). Ribadeneyra, *Segunda parte del flos sanctorum*, 729. See also Ryan D. Giles, "Advocate of Eve: Marian Parturition in Medieval Iberian Literature and Culture." In *Christ, Mary, and the Saints*, eds. Andrew M. Beresford and Lesley K. Twomey (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 37–56.

222. Real Academia de la Historia (España), ed., *Cartas de algunos PP. de la Compañía de Jesús sobre los sucesos de la monarquía entre los años de 1634 y 1648. Vol. I* (Imprenta Nacional, 1861), 89.

223. Salvador, *La azuzena de Madrid*, 355–356. On Inés de Ayala's career, see Carlos Varona, *Nacer en palacio*, 142–158; Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas*, 119–122; Aichinger, "El Siglo de Oro;" Aichinger, "Matronas hacen linajes."

224. For this topic, see also Marie-France Morel, "Death in Childbirth: History and Representations," *Avisos de Viena* 6 (2024): 7–21. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.6.8521

225. Wolfram Aichinger, "¿Lo que más temían las mujeres? Partos mortales y embarazos de riesgo en palacio y en casas de pobres (Siglo de Oro con incursiones contemporáneas)," *Avisos de Viena* 6 (2024): 53–66. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.6.8527

226. The image of Rachel, matriarch who tragically dies in the birth of Benjamin, significantly imprints on how early modern minds interpret maternal deaths in childbirth. See Sabrina Grohsebner, "Madre e hijo, sombra y luz: la muerte de Raquel en el nacimiento de Benjamín según reescrituras de la temprana Edad Moderna," *Avisos de Viena* 6 (2024): 29–39. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.6.8528

227. Blanca De los Ríos de Lampérez, '*La vida es sueño*' *y los diez Segismundos de Calderón* (Madrid: Blass, 1926).

228. Jesús M. Usunáriz, "De la melancolía a la locura: embarazo, parto y posparto (España y el mundo hispánico, siglos XVI-XVII," *Asclepio* 74.1 (2022): 592. doi:10.3989/asclepio.2022.10; Gélis, *L'arbre*, 344–346.

229. Diego de Barnuevo, *Segunda relación de las consignaciones, rentas y efectos que tienen los hospitales reales, general, pasión y sus convalecencias [...] en todo el año pasado de 1658* (Madrid: José Fernández de Buendía, 1659), fols. 25^{r}–25^{v}.

230. Aichinger, "*El Siglo de Oro*," 39–41.

231. Jesús María Usunáriz, "Milagros y partos peligrosos en las hagiografías de los siglos XVI y XVII: Una aproximación a las causas de la muerte materna en el Siglo de Oro español," *Avisos de Viena* 6 (2024): 41–52. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.6.8529

232. Junceda Avello, *Ginecología*, 95–99.

233. Adela Tarifa Fernández, *Pobreza y asistencia social en la España moderna: la Cofradía de San José y niños expósitos de Ubeda, siglos XVII y XVIII* (Jaen: Diputación Provincial de Jaén, Instituto de Estudios Giennenses, 1994), 141–146.

234. García Herrero, "Administrar del parto," 287.

235. Cervantes, *Novelas ejemplares*, Vol. II 250–251; Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fols. 53^{r}–53^{v}.

236. Wolfram Aichinger and Christian Standhartinger, "Midwife Diplomacy. The Recruitment of a Midwife for Empress Margarita María Teresa de Austria (1666–1673)," *Memoria y Civilización* 23 (2020): 590–593. doi:10.15581/001.23.028

237. García Herrero, "Administrar del parto," 287.

238. Wolfram Aichinger, "Dar tiempo al tiempo," 97.

239. See Antonio Castillo de Lucas, *Folkmedicina. Medicina popular, folklore médico, etnomedicina, demoiatría, etnoiátrica y otras denominaciones* (Madrid: Dossat, 1958).

240. "Dea sacrata est [...] quae inde nomen sumpsit, quod natus infans simul ac sublatus erat ab obstetrice, statuebatur in terra, ut auspicaretur rectus esse, [...] Et hanc Deam cum Levana (ut haec obiter dicam) malè confundit" ('She is a holy goddess [...] who received her name because the child, as a newborn, had been lifted subsequently by the midwife, put [to stand] on the ground on his feet, so that it would start to walk upright [...] And [Tertullian] mistook this goddess for Levana [which I hereby marginally mention]'). Carranza, *Disputatio*, 292. We thank Mandy Vondra for her translation of the Latin text. For the rite called *tollere liberos* and the (partly false) belief in such ancient practices up until the early modern

age, see Brent Shaw, "Raising and Killing Children: Two Roman Myths," *Mnemosyne* 54, no. 1 (2001): 31–77.

241. Rojas, *La Celestina*, 133.

242. Aichinger and Dulmovits, "Escenarios," 30–33; Tamara González López, "'Por el peligro que le amenazaba': bautismos de socorro y mortalidad infantil en la diócesis de Lugo," *Avisos de Viena* 4 (2022): 86–94. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.4.7528; Karin Fuchs, "Agua de Socorro, padrinazgo matrilineal, bautismos bajo condición: lo que los libros bautismales de Mieza nos cuentan sobre la historia local de los siglos xvii y xix," *Avisos de Viena* 4 (2022): 95–136. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.4.7529

243. Wolfram Aichinger, "Los bautizados de socorro de Pedro Bernardo (Ávila). Un momento de transición en el registro de la muerte neonatal," *Memoria y Civilización* 26, no. 1 (2023): 234. doi:10.15581/001.26.010

244. For a perspective on childbirth as a metaphor for the creative and poetic works of the mind, see García Santo-Tomás, *Signos vitales*.

245. Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, *s.v. criatura*.

246. Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas*, 149–150.

247. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 52^{v}.

248. García Herrero, "Administrar del parto," 290. For the symbolical intricacy of swaddling, and of cloth as a material incorporated in a midwife's work, see Sabrina Grohsebner, "Nuestra vida una tela: Threads, cloth, and the fabrication of life in early modern Spain." In Gislon Dopfel, *Maternal Materialities*, 235–247.

249. Leopold I, *Privatbriefe Vol. II*, 213–214.

250. Tamara Hanus, "'Nacido con mantillo': creencias populares y testimonios literarios acerca del saco amnióti-

co," *Avisos de Viena* 5 (2023): 10–25. doi:10.25365/adv.2023.5.8152

251. Hannah Maria Antonia Fischer, "Lucina: Die Göttin an der Schwelle." *Avisos de Viena* 7 (2024): 1–109. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.71.8745

252. Hannah Fischer-Monzón, "Nacer en tiempos de Calderón: Lucina, Diana y (la) Luna, las diosas lunares del parto en el Siglo de Oro," *Memoria y civilización* 21 (2018): 61–88. doi:10.15581/001.21.031; Sabrina Grohsebner, "Threads of Life: The Golden Age Midwife Amidst Cloth, Tissue and Antique Deities of Fate," *Avisos de Viena* 1 (2020): 20–28. doi:10.25365/adv.2020.1.6175; Wolfram Aichinger and Sabrina Grohsebner, "Manos y materia. Volver tangible la sociabilidad en el parto áureo," *Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro* 9, no. 1 (2021): 716. doi:10.13035/H.2021.09.01.42

253. *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, ed. Monica Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 107.

254. Mohammed Hocine Benkheiraen, "'Pour Out the Blood and Remove the Evil from Him.' The Creation of a Ritual of Birth (*'aqiqa*) in Islam in the Eighth Century." In *Childhood in History: Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn Reidar Aasgaard and Oana Maria Cojocaru (London/New York: Routledge, 2018), 194.

255. Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas*, 122.

256. Pedro de Ribadeneyra, *Flos sanctorum o libro de las vidas de los santos... En el qual se contienen las vidas de Christo Señor Nuestro y de su Santíssima Madre, y de todos los santos de que reza la Yglesia Romana, por todo el año. Van añadidos en esta segunda impressión los Santos Extravagantes* (Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1604), 494.

257. Tausiet Carlés, "Comadronas-brujas," 378–80.

258. Aichinger and Dulmovits, "Escenarios," 32.

259. Aichinger and Grohsebner, "Manos y materia."

260. Jaime Bleda, *Coronica*, 953–954.

261. Similar effects of identification must have been triggered by renderings of the Visitation (see above), very popular at the age, where Saint Elizabeth welcomes her cousin Mary, both are pregnant, the older one after long years of vain hopes, both share their gratitude and expectation. See, for example, El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos), *La Visitación*, 1610–1613, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Dumbarton. https://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/823, accessed Feb. 29, 2024.

262. Wolfram Aichinger, "Juan Pantoja de la Cruz: *El nacimiento de la Virgen* (1603)." In *Meisterwerke der spanischen Malerei in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Ralf Junkerjürgen y Helmut C. Jacobs, (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2018), 43–55.

263. Pötting, *Diario Vol. I*, 334.

264. Franz Eusebius Pötting, *Diario del conde de Pötting, embajador del Sacro Imperio en Madrid (1664–1674). Vol II*, ed. Miguel Nieto Nuño (Madrid: Biblioteca Diplomática Española, 1993), 428–430.

265. Fontecha, *Diez privilegios*, fols. 177^{r}–230^{r}.

266. This was the case in Santiago del Prado, Cuba, in 1624, where one Paula de Eguiluz faced charges of having bewitched and killed a baby while pretending to care for its navel. See María Cristina Navarrete, *El arte de curar en Cartagena de Indias siglo xvii: Diego López y Paula de Eguiluz, sanadores de castas* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 2021), 102–103; Margelis Guerra Bonfante, *Mujeres, bru-*

jería y redes de denuncias en los procesos y causas de fe registrados en Cartagena entre 1627–1638 (Cartagena de Indias, Colombia: Tesis University of Cartagena D.T. y C., 2023). hdl:11227/17555

267. Pötting, *Diario Vol. I*, 336–337.

268. Pötting, *Diario Vol. I*, 429.

269. Pötting, *Diario Vol. II*, 258, 294.

270. Dulmovits, "Unseen Heirs."

271. Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, *El nacimiento de la Virgen*, 1603, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-birth-of-the-virgin/b1b4ac38-f543-4366-8899-41b27a454139, accessed 29 February, 2024.

272. Lope de Vega, *El mayorazgo dudoso*, Act I, v. 402. For an analysis of this scene, see Wolfram Aichinger, "Las manos de la comadre y la camisa del padre: el parto y la creación de los primeros vínculos humanos," *Avisos de Viena* 1 (2020): 13–19. doi:10.25365/adv.2020.1.6174

273. See Usunáriz, "El padre ante el parto"; Jesús M. Usunáriz, "Asistir a la madre y cuidar de la criatura: el reconocimiento de paternidad en los siglos xvi y xvii," *Revista Historia Autónoma* 16 (2020): 101–119. doi:10.15366/rha2020.16.006

274. Manuel F. Fernández Chaves, "Amas, esclavas y libertad en Sevilla, 1512–1600," *Ohm: Obradoiro de Historia Moderna* 32 (2023): 6–9. doi:10.15304/ohm.32.8741

275. Mikel Berraondo-Piudo, "Los hijos como víctimas: el infanticidio en Navarra (siglos xvi-xvii)," *Memoria y Civilización* 16 (2013): 61. doi:10.15581/001.16.77

276. Berraondo-Piudo, "Los hijos como víctimas."

277. Pedro Espina Pérez, *Historia de la Inclusa de Madrid* (Defensor del Menor: Madrid, 2005), 99.

278. Tarifa Fernández, *Pobreza y asistencia social*, 281.

279. Baltasar Arias Pérez and Silvia-María Pérez-González, "Aproximación al estudio de los niños expósitos en la Sevilla de finales del siglo xvi y primera mitad del xvii a través del análisis de los libros de bautismo," *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna* 46, no. 1 (2021): 214. doi:10.5209/chmo.70456

280. León Carlos Álvarez Santaló, "La Casa de expósitos de Sevilla en el siglo xvii," *Cuadernos de Historia del Instituto Jerónimo Zurita* 7 (1977): 506.

281. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 55^{r}.

282. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fols. 53^{v}–61^{r}.

283. Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 54^{r}.

284. Luisa María de Padilla Manrique y Acuña, *Nobleza virtuosa, dada a la estampa por el M. RPMF Pedro Enrique Pastor, provincial de la orden de San Agustín de la provincia de Aragón* (Saragossa: Juan de Lanaja, 1637), 316–317.

285. For a discussion of the topic see Marie-France Morel, "Wet Nurses at Court in xviith Century France," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 74–80. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6187

286. Francisco José García Pérez, "La maternidad de las reinas consortes bajo control: el caso de María Luisa de Orleans," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 44–51. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6182

287. González Laguna, *El zelo*, 231.

288. See, for example, Carbón, *Libro del arte*, fol. 54^{r}.

289. Bennassar, *Histoire des espagnols*, 368.

290. Padilla, *Nobleza virtuosa*, 306.

291. Cruz Hermida, "Biografía histórico-médica," 125.

292. Padilla, *Nobleza virtuosa*, 308.

293. Nadine Amsler, "The Work of Many Bodies. Wet Nurses and Dynastic Reproduction at Early Modern German Courts," *European History Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2023): 391–406. doi:10.1177/02656914231181253

294. See, however, the pioneering study by Pilar Panero García, "Pobreza, lactancia solidaria y milagros en unos exempla del s. xvii," *Avisos de Viena* 3 (2022): 85–95. doi: 10.25365/adv.2022.3.6589

295. Fernández Chaves, "Amas," 9–11.

296. Wolfram Aichinger, "Enfants et rires, richesse de pauvres: un ama de cría le canta las cuarenta al Rey Felipe IV de España," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 10. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6178

297. Aichinger, "Enfants et rires."

298. Joan Sherwood, *Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Spain. The Women and Children of the Inclusa* (Toronto/ Buffalo/ London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 62–99.

299. Panero, "Pobreza," 85–95.

300. Information gathered from Beatriz Villegas who carried out fieldwork in Lanzahíta (Ávila), November 2023.

301. Elena Soler, *"Lactancia y parentesco". Una mirada antropológica* (Barcelona: Anthropos Editorial, 2011).

302. For an analysis of the proximity of death and childbirth in literature, see Hannah Mühlparzer, "'To Die and to Be Born – Two Actions Like One': The Analogy of Birth and Death in an Allegorical Play of Calderón," *Avisos de*

Viena 4 (2022): 24–28. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.4.7521; Hannah Mühlparzer, "The Uterus and (the) Beyond: The Analogy of Birth and Death in Baroque and 20th-Century Latin American Literature," *Avisos de Viena* 8 (2024): 1–103. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.8.8769

303. Michael Mitterauer, "Grabstätten früh verstorbener Königskinder," *Avisos de Viena* 2 (2021): 62–69. doi:10.25365/adv.2021.2.6185

304. Marie-France Morel, "Morts des méres, morts des nouveau-nés: histoire et représentations (xvıe–xxe siècle)." In *La naissance au risque de la mort. D'hier à aujourd'hui*, ed. Marie-France Morel (Toulouse: érès, 2021), 43–44; for a fuller discussion of figures and their accuracy see Wolfram Aichinger, "Los bautizados de socorro," 249.

305. Martínez, Martínez, and Valle Racero, "Registro y control," 16.

306. Aichinger and Dulmovits, "Escenarios," 23.

307. Junceda Avello, *Ginecología*, 182–190; Rubio, *Reinas de España*, 289–315, 318.

308. For life at the court of Philip IV, see Santiago Martínez Hernández, *Escribir la corte de Felipe IV. El diario del Marqués de Osera, 1657–1659* (Aranjuez: Edición Doce Calles, 2012).

309. We have only found reference to the one supposedly born in 1654, in Barrionuevo, *Avisos Vol. I*, 92.

310. Ochoa, *Cartas de Sor María*, 173.

311. Aichinger, "El Siglo de Oro," 39–40.

312. Anastasio Rojo, *Anecdotario histórico de Valladolid* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1997), 178.

313. Votive images (ex-votos) were often donated to express gratitude for divine intervention in favor of a woman in childbed, or little children struck by diseases. See Marie-France Morel, "Quels recours en cas de naissances difficiles? La leçon des ex-voto (XVI^{e}–XIX^{e} siècles)." In *Pregnancies, Childbirths, and Religions: Rituals, Normative Perspectives, and Individual Appropriations. A Cross-Cultural and Interdisciplinary Perspective from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Giulia Pedrucci (Roma: Scienze e Lettere, 2020), 75–91; Museo Etnográfico de Castilla y León, *México y España. Un océano de exvotos: gracias concebidas, gracias recibidas* (León: Museo Etnográfico de León, 2008), 318–328.

314. Standhartinger, "Embarazo y nacimiento," 107. See also Laura Oliván Santaliestra, "'My sister is growing up very healthy and beautiful, she loves me': The Childhood of the Infantas María Teresa and Margarita María at Court." In *The formation of the child in early modern Spain*, ed. Grace E. Coolidge (London: Routledge, 2016): 165–187.

315. Marland, *The Art of Midwifery*, 50.

316. Leopold I, *Privatbriefe Vol. I*, 166–167 (January 15 and 18, 1668); Standhartinger, "Embarazo y nacimiento," 107.

317. Standhartinger, "Embarazo y nacimiento," 108.

318. Marie Stockinger, "Nachbenennung nach verstorbenen Geschwistern: Ein Familienschicksal des Zweiten Weltkriegs und eine spanische Namensliste aus dem 17. Jahrhundert," *Avisos de Viena* 4 (2022): 8–14. doi:10.25365/adv.2022.4.7519

319. Rojas, *La Celestina*, 291.

320. Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 120–121.

321. Muir, *Ritual in early modern Europe* , 32.

322. See, for example, Luis de Morales, *La Purificación de la Virgen o La Presentación en el Templo*, 1562, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/la-purificacion-de-la-virgen-o-la-presentacion-en/e0251389-4f49-44ff-b6f0-3cf52c15dee7, accessed Feb. 29, 2024.

323. Usunáriz, "De la melancolía," 7.

324. Prisciliano Cordero del Castillo, "Estructuras en crisis de la familia rural leonesa," *Revista de Fomento Social* (1975): 292–293.

325. José Antonio Ballesteros Díez, "Onomástica y mentalidades en el siglo xvi," *Espacio Tiempo y Forma. Serie IV, Historia Moderna* 17 (2004): 29. doi:10.5944/etfiv.17.2004.3450

326. Cordero del Castillo, "Estructuras en crisis," 293.

327. See for example Roberto Palacios Martínez, and Jorge Pérez Calvo, "Morir en Bilbao (siglos xv-xvi). Un estudio de las actitudes ante la muerte a través de las Ordenanzas," *Vasconia* 36 (2009): 85–100, 91.

328. See with a wider historical perspective Eva Labouvie, *Andere Umstände. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Geburt* (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 1998), 163–166; Sophie Fäs, "'Frau Holliger könne Hebamme sein, aber soll von Doktor Häggy nichts lernen.' Als das Fricktal seine Hebammen in die Schule schicken sollte," *Avisos de Viena* 10 (2025): 10–25. doi:10.25365/adv.2025.10.9233; Jürgen Schlumbohm, "Saving mothers' and children's lives?: the performance of German lying-in hospitals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 87.1 (2013): 1–31. doi:10.1353/bhm.2013.0013; Marita Metz-Becker, *Drei Generationen*

Hebammenalltag (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2021), 165.

329. Ariès, *Centuries*, 411; for a critical discussion see Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children. Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

330. See for example Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi, "Patadas de Pepachu: un testimonio de vínculo prenatal entre padre e hija," *Avisos de Viena* 10 (2025): 8–9. doi:10.25365/adv.2025.10.9258

331. Aichinger, "Enfants et rires."

332. They do so, for example, when writing about child abandonment, often with reference to the authority of Plutarch's *De amore prolis*. See Tomás de Montalvo, *Práctica políticas y económica de expósitos* (Granada: Imprenta de la Santisima Trinidad por Antonio de Torrubia, 1701), 304–305.

333. Gironella, José María, *Un millón de muertos* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1994 [1961]), p. 517.

334. According to Arturo Barea's autobiographical account, in a Castilian village at the end of the 19th century, a neighbor was called to a birth because she "knew about those things" ("entendía de esas cosas") Arturo Barea, *La forja*. Primera parte de *La forja de un rebelde* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1993 [1951]), 76. See also Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas*, 254.

335. Rojas, *La Celestina*, 212.

336. A profound reflection on this aspect from a medievalist's point of view of can be found in Georges Duby, *Dames du xii^{e} siècle, II. Le souvenir des aïeules* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

337. See for example Antonio Sánchez del Barrio, and José Luis Alonso Ponga, *Las campanas de las catedrales de Castilla y León* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2002), 38–40, 283.

338. See for example Fernando R. Bartolomé García, "Niños montañesinos en Álava/Children Jesus like the ones carved by Juan Martínez Montañes in Alava/Montañesen eredua jarraitzen duten Arabako Jesus Haurtxoak," *Ars Bilduma* 5 (2015): 45–63.

339. Much new insight can be expected from further work done by the research group at the University of Sevilla: Manuel Chaves Fernández, Rafael Pérez García, Eduardo Corona. See Eduardo Corona Pérez, "De Sevilla a Vila Rica de Ouro Preto: maternidades esclavas en perspectiva comparada, siglos xvi-xvii." In *Esclavas, horras y libres. Historias de mujeres en los mundos ibéricos, siglos xvi-xix*, ed. Rafael Mauricio Pérez García, Eduardo Corona Pérez, Eduardo França Paiva, and Manuel F. Fernández Chaves (Sevilla: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, 2023), 95–117; Eduardo Corona Pérez, "No quedarás en poder de esos faraones: la relación prohibida entre la esclava María Josefa y el clérigo don Tomás Bautista de Melo. Sevilla, 1676," *Avisos de Viena* 9 (2024): 54–65. doi:10.25365/adv.2024.9.9050; Rafael M. Pérez García, "El impacto de la esclavitud en la familia y la comunidad morisca granadina en el destierro, 1569–1610," *Avisos de Viena* 9 (2024): 31–44. See also Arturo Jesús Morgado García, "La vida familiar de los esclavos en el Cádiz de la modernidad (1600–1750)," *Trocadero* 24 (2012): 67–81. doi:10.25267/trocadero.2012.i24.05

340. For Germany, see Knodel, *Demographic behavior*, 84–90.

341. Barea, *La forja*, 32.

342. See Emmanuel Todd, and David Garrioch. *The Explanation of Ideology: Family Structures and Social Systems* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

343. For the concept, see Andrew Shryock, and Daniel Lord Smail, *Deep history: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

344. See Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Father time. A Natural History of Men and Babies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024); Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mothers and Others. The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Kristen Hawkes and Richard R. Paine, *The evolution of human life history* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2006); Cristina Bernis and Carlos Varea, "Hour of Birth and Birth Assistance: From a Primate to a Medicalized Pattern?" *American Journal of Human Biology* 24 (2012), 14–21. doi:10.1002/ajhb.21228; Marcos García-Díez and Javier Angulo Cuesta, "Imágenes de la genitalidad y sexualidad femenina en los albores de la humanidad." In *Eros y Anteros. Visiones sobre la sexualidad femenina. Patrimonio en femenino* (Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2015), 8–16; Emmanuel Todd, *Lineages of the Feminine: An Outline of the History of Women* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2023). On the other hand, there are those historians who simply state an opposition between "el hecho biológico de la reproducción" ('biological fact of reproduction') and the "hecho social de la maternidad construida culturalmente" ('social fact of the cultural construction of maternity'), without offering further analysis on how both phenomena might be related to each other, and on how deep history may have conditioned and possibly restrained the cultural constructions of each historical era. See, for example, Gloria A. Franco Rubio, "Introducción." In *Debates sobre la maternidad. Desde una perspectiva histórica*

(siglos xvi-xx), ed. Gloria A. Franco Rubio (Barcelona: Icaria, 2010), 7–22.

345. See René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1972), 323.

346. See for example María Rosa Álvarez Sellers, "Médicos reales y metafóricos en el teatro del Siglo de Oro," *eHumanista: Journal of Iberian Studies* 39 (2018): 122–136.

347. See for just one example, Standhartinger, " Embarazo y nacimiento," 107.

348. Covarrubias, *Tesoro*, *s.v. comadre*.

349. See Wolfram Aichinger, "Königin Anna von Polen und die Hebamme Kirmeierin. Verkehrte Welt am Hof zu Polen (1593–1595)," *Hebammen am Kaiserhof*. https://hebammen.hypotheses.org/696, accessed Oct. 1, 2024.

350. Benito Pérez Galdós, *Fortunata y Jacinta*, II, ed. Francisco Caudet (Madrid: Cátedra, 2011 [1984]), 645–646, 657–658, 677–678, 746. On the hospitalization of birth, the rivalry between midwives and male practitioners, and the gradual displacement and *downgrading* of female birth assistants, a process starting in the cities at the end of the 16th century and lasting till the 1960s in some rural areas, see Ruiz-Berdún, *Historia de las matronas*, 182–288.

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Useful links

Culturas del parto en España y Europa (siglos xv a xviii), Museo de Ecología Humana

https://museoecologiahumana.org/espacio/exposiciones-temporales/ano-2022/culturas-del-parto-en-espana-y-europa-siglos-xv-a-xviii/

Digital exhibition, hosted by the Virtual Museum of Human Ecology.

Atlas etnográfico de Vasconia

https://atlasetnografico.labayru.eus

Ethnografic atlas with many references to birthing rituals in rural areas and in popular religiosity.

Portal de Archivos Españoles (PARES)

https://pares.cultura.gob.es

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