

# eventum

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## Ritual and Gender in Medieval Cultures



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Cover Image: Mirror Case with Lovers, French, second quarter 14th c.

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# “When a Woman Recites an Incantation, a Serpent Recites It”:

## Female Magic and Medicine in Caesarius of Arles

### Abstract

Caesarius of Arles was regarded by the ecclesiastical environment of his times as an authority concerning religious rules and the correct behaviour of Christians. He wrote more than 240 sermons that were diffused by an atelier of copyists in Arles as well as by himself. His sermons were extremely successful, influencing preachers all over Christendom. Among many other subjects, some of Caesarius' sermons were concerned with what he regarded as paganism and unorthodox practices undertaken by Christians. Caesarius' reproaches were generally addressed to both men and women indiscriminately, but some reprimands were made specifically towards his female audiences. This article will analyze the practices that were regarded by Caesarius as being performed exclusively by women, relating them to ecclesiastical legislation and other contemporary sources. It will investigate the nature of these practices and their relationship with women's role in society and the need to seek alternative solutions to problems that were not contemplated by Christianity or contemporary medicine. The analysis undertaken will reveal women's agency in shaping their own religious and healing practices, using creative ways to overcome their marginalized position.

### Keywords

Caesarius of Arles; magic; female medicine and healthcare; female practitioners; folk healing



## Introduction

Caesarius of Arles, who became bishop in 502, was known as a man of action. His work is considered fundamental to the Christianization of southern Gaul, the elaboration and imposition of religious dogma and the correct behaviour of Christians who were far beyond his direct sphere of influence. His activities as bishop would go from presiding over councils and founding monasteries to writing an extended collection of treatises and sermons (see Bertrand et al.) – some of these will be analyzed below. He wrote more than 240 sermons that were diffused by an atelier of copyists in Arles as well as by himself, who distributed collections of the sermons to fellow clerics. His sermons were extremely successful, influencing preachers all over Christendom, even many centuries after his death in 542. Caesarius lived in a period of great social and political turmoil in Gaul. During his lifetime he saw the power moving from the Visigoths to the Ostrogoths and finally to the Franks. All of this influenced his work as a preacher and bishop intent on being a patron of charity to his community. Caesarius was committed to reinforcing the process of Christianization of his community, putting a particularly great effort into his sermons, which include an immense variety of subjects aiming to exhort and teach the true path of piety.

Among their many subjects, some of Caesarius’ sermons are concerned with what he considered improper behaviour from his community, not fitting to good Christians. Some behaviours he classifies as failures of virtue, as very often, his audiences’ failures were associated with paganism and unorthodoxy. We know, however, that his notion of “paganism” had much more to do with practices that retained some sort of traditional imprint than real religious deviations. Caesarius was a member of a cultural, religious, and economic elite that voiced the concerns and prejudices of the environment to which he belonged. Therefore, his approach and discourse constructed a stigmatization of and attack on non-elite behaviour and culture (Grig, “Caesarius” 67). Furthermore, to patristic authors of this time, “paganism” became a generic label to designate all that was not in conformity with the most accepted orthodoxy, meaning deviation, subversion, or heresy.

1. For the Latin version of the sermons, I use *Césaire d'Arles: Sermons au peuple* 1, 2, 3, ed. M. J. Delage, Sources Chrétiennes 175, 243, 330 (Paris, 1971, 1978, 1986; hereafter SC I, II, and III). For the English translation, I use M. M. Mueller, *Caesarius of Arles: Sermons*, 3 vols, 31, 47, 66 (Washington, DC, 1956–73; hereafter FC I, II, and III), which are both based on the same Latin version, from Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones*, ed. G. Morin, CCSL 103–04 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953). For his *Vita*, I use the English translation from W. E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool, 1994).

In this article, I want to focus on Caesarius' condemnation of healing practices, which he addresses in seven sermons (13.3, 19.5, 50.1, 52.5–6, 54.1 and 3, 184.4 and Étaix), and his condemnation of remedies used to favour conception and procure abortions, attested in six sermons (1.12, 19.5, 44.2, 51.1 and 4, 52.4, and 200.4).<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, most of his reproaches are addressed to men and women indiscriminately, and in these sermons he frequently uses the comprehensive *homines* to designate those who seek the cure of unorthodox practices such as amulets (*caracteres*), bindings (*filacteres*), or potions (*potiones*) or the service of *caraii*, *divini*, *sortilegi*, *aruspices* and *praecantatores*. The practitioners are also mainly masculine, but in a few cases the bishop sees the necessity to specify the gender of the practitioners that were sought, or of his addressees. In Sermon 52, women are directly identified as practitioners (*erbariae*) as well as those seeking their service. In Sermon 184, women are accused of persuading each other to seek enchanters to cure their children, and in the sermon identified by Étaix, an *incanatrix* is presented as someone sought in the case of illness.

While the picture may not be clear when only healing practices are concerned, it becomes much more evident when we analyze abortion and conception: in five of the six sermons, women are directly accused of taking potions, while in Sermon 51 men and women (*virī vel aliquae mulieres*) are accused of using amulets made of amber to procure a pregnancy. The picture shows that a varied and presumably relied-on web of folk healers providing a multitude of services related to healing practices were available. In this scenario, a portion of these healers might have been women, specializing in female-related problems. We may not be able to rely solely on Caesarius' account to individuate the existence of female practitioners specializing in female health problems, yet he provides precious information that is worth analyzing along with other contemporary sources. Based on his testimony and a number of other documents, we are able to identify the need for specific gynaecological care, which presumably was not extensively available. It is thus only fair to think that to placate this necessity, specialists existed and were sought. The evidence is scant but invites us to take a closer look at what we shall see could have been a network of female domestic care, offering alternative cures to those in need, perhaps available for destitute women, or an alternative

closer to people's popular knowledge and culture, which had always been an environment of a pluralism of practices. As rightly stated by Montserrat Cabré, "neither medieval medical resources nor women's health agency can be accurately mapped without thorough consideration of the domestic sphere, normally left outside the histories of the art of maintaining health and alleviating illness" (Cabré 23).

The late antique health market could be seen as a three-way offering: the medical cure, the Christian cure, and the folk cure. Very often these three systems were working together and, often, people would resort to all of them indiscriminately according to their needs and what was available; pastoral literature often shows these three practices living side by side. A profusion of medical manuals were circulating in Western Europe during late antiquity, such as Galen's, Oribasius', Dioscurides', and Marcellus of Bordeaux's, and many sources, some of which we will see further, mention trained physicians operating during this period.<sup>2</sup> There were even medical manuals available for laypeople (see Dietrich Fischer). What we do not know for sure was the range and accessibility of these professionals. We know that kings and nobles had their own court doctors or access to them, and a few sources also show these professionals may not have been affordable or available to everyone. Apparently to fill in the gap of the healing on offer, we see a profusion of healing practitioners using folk remedies and rituals to attend to what would presumably be the majority of the demand. We can call this a third way of medical practices, and here particularly I would like to draw attention to female practitioners and the service they offered to women and their children.

2. I refer to the bibliography on late antiquity and early medieval medicine; see Upson-Saia, Marx, and Secord; Horden, "Medieval Medicine"; Wallis; Nutton.

3. See also Nutzman; Nutton.

In late antique thought, the boundaries between magic, medicine, and religion were blurred and overlapping (Holman et al. 3; Betancourt 74.).<sup>3</sup> In this context, what this article aims to demonstrate is how, under the stigma of magic and *maleficium*, female practices that are condemned by Caesarius can be seen as manifestations of alternative female healthcare. Monica Green has suggested that scholars should investigate "how much religious belief served as a supplement to or substitution for other forms of health intervention" (Green, "Recent Work" 22). It is embedded in this principle that I will analyze Caesarius' discourse on medicine and healing practices as a pastoral exhortation to rely on religion as

a means of cure for body and soul. In this context, his prescriptions are in direct conflict with folk healing. Here I will investigate particularly female practices, their relationship with the role of women in society, and women's need to seek alternative solutions to problems that were not contemplated by Christianity or their community. Thus, I argue for females' agency as a form of creative moulding of their own practices and religious interpretations. I rely on Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische's definition of the sociological concept of agency:

actors develop their deliberative capacities as they confront emergent situations that impact upon each other and pose increasingly complex problems, which must be taken up as challenges by the responsive (and communicative) intelligence (Emirbayer and Mische 969).

Based on this concept, my analysis will reveal that, by subverting orthodoxy, women were acting as agents of social and religious transformation, shaping their own practices and taking part in the construction of an alternative healthcare system while using creative ways to overcome the difficulties imposed by their marginalized position.

It is important to stress that in this tripartite healing market, Christianity was not averse to empirical medicine, and often both were working together, as some clerics were themselves doctors and hospitals were by origin Christian foundations. Furthermore, medicine and medical ideas "greatly informed the development of Christian doctrine, ascetic behaviours, and ritual practice" (Ihssen 1), which shows Christian authors had a deep familiarity with medical practices (Upson-Saia 438).<sup>4</sup> Also, Christian literature often used medical language as a metaphor to talk about not only healing but also topics such as politics and society in general (Mayer 443). We see all these features in Caesarius' discourse, but he, as with pastoral literature in general, is keen to emphasize the superiority of Christian cures over all others, particularly, and with ferocious force, over folk healers. While directing our gaze to the existence of the domestic web of female care that is rebuked and condemned by Caesarius, we see these two strands in a competition for a monopoly on ritualization. According to Lucy Grig, "rituals allow for the intersection of the sacred and the profane through practice. Rituals did not just reflect the diverse and

4. On the history of Christian healthcare, see also Rhee and Ferngren.



5. I am grateful and indebted to Grig for anticipating parts of this work before its publication.

changing religious landscape but also contributed to its ongoing transformation" (Grig, *Popular Culture* ch. 5).<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the conflict over the monopoly on rituals of healing would be another tool for establishing a predominant religious and cultural power.

Catherine Bell argues that ritual "is a strategy for the construction of particular relationships of power. [...] Those who control ritualization are in command of a particularly powerful form of objectification" (Bell 202, 211). If we agree that power and authority construct religion (see Asad), we understand that in the ambit of healing practices and rituals, the church had to establish predominance over unorthodox practices, imposing Christian healing and its monopoly on rituals as a way to establish power: not only over unorthodox and potentially dangerous practices, but also over medicine, because, as Caesarius frequently argues, the maladies of the body are consequences of spiritual maladies and should therefore be treated primarily with religious medicines.

The body of this article is divided into three parts. In the next part, I turn to Caesarius and his sermons that address female religious specialists and women's "unorthodox" practices related to health issues. The second part contrasts illicit female healing practices with the bishop's notion of medicine for the body and soul and his prescription of a Christian cure. Finally, conclusions concern the force and diffusion of the "third way" of healing practices as a means of allowing women to exercise agency and thus to promote social and religious transformation.

## Caesarius' Sermons on Female Practices and Religious Specialists

Caesarius was born in 469/70 to an aristocratic family of Chalon-sur-Saône in modern-day Bourgogne. He started his ecclesiastical career at a young age – first as a member of the local clergy. After travelling far to southern Gaul, he joined the renowned monastery of Lérins. Later, Caesarius reached Arles as the protégé of Bishop Aeonius, who designated him his successor.<sup>6</sup> Caesarius left his mark on Arles and the whole of Christendom, and he firmly believed that his task as a bishop was to save and heal his community. He made it one of his priorities that his flock should lead their lives worthy of

6. The most comprehensive 'biography' of Caesarius remains Klingshirn's *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul*. In this volume, we can find references to and discussions of his life, prose, and language. See also ch. 4 of Grig, *Popular Culture*.

their Christian identity and the kingdom of heaven. This purpose is a common one for a bishop, but Caesarius is regarded to have dedicated himself to it "with exceptional enthusiasm" (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 91), a behaviour attested by his collection of sermons and echoed in his *Vita*, written just a few years after his death by a group of clerics who knew him personally.

Sermons have a crucial social, cultural, and religious meaning and are seen as tools to educate and convey relevant messages regarding many aspects of life in the oral societies of late antiquity and later (see Leemans; Muessig). In late antique Gaul particularly, but also elsewhere, reading sermons aloud to the congregation was a way to educate people and inculcate correct behaviour (Bailey, *The Religious Worlds* 143; see also Weiss). To this extent, Caesarius was particularly dedicated to writing and diffusing his sermons, as the important collection of his writings demonstrates.

In his sermons, Caesarius seldom addresses women specifically on matters of proper behaviour, preferring to address the members of his community in more general terms, regardless of gender, on how to behave as Christians. A few exceptions are made, for instance in Sermon 78, in which he addresses young women who, instead of keeping a proper posture, lie down on the floor of the church,<sup>7</sup> as well as in the sermons that are discussed below. There are also sermons in which we are frequently informed on how a woman ought to behave in relation to male behaviour. In Sermon 43, for example, he says the following while admonishing men on conjugal chastity: "Why do they not observe toward their wives the fidelity they desire to receive from them? Since a man receives his name from manliness, and a woman hers from weakness, that is, from frailty, why does anyone want his wife to be victorious against cruel, bestial lust, when he himself is overcome and falls at the first assault of it?" (FC I, 241).<sup>8</sup> Here we see that virtuous women should enable and facilitate men's virtue, or else be a vessel for the virtue of men.

7. Sermo 78.1, FC I, 360.

8. Sermo 43.1. *Et quare non servant fidem uxoribus suis, quam sibi ab eis servari desiderant? Cum enim vir a virtute nomen acceperit, et mulier a mollitie, id est a fragilitate, quare contra crudelissimam bestiam libidinem vult unusquisque uxorem suam esse victricem, cum ipse ad primum libidinis ictum victus cadat?* (SC II, 31).

Caesarius' role in shaping the religious identity of congregations in Arles through his patronage is another way to access his ideas about female virtue. He was responsible for bringing a monastery for women to the inner city, which aimed to be a model of perfect Christian living. For his sister Caesaria, who was designated abbess of the monastery, he wrote the *Regula virginum*, the first rule written

9. Maria Del Fiat Miola claims that Caesarius' pastoral work was successful only thanks to the active contribution of his sister and niece, the first two abbesses of the female monastery of St John of Arles, and their congregation (Del Fiat Miola). In the same way, Darya Omelchenko argues that Caesarius sees women as his assistants in the transformation of society in accordance with Christian ideals, since he paid tribute to the modesty of the morals of women – as opposed to the vices of men (Omelchenko).

10. During Caesarius' lifetime alone, his sermons are reputed to have travelled to "the Frankish lands, Gaul, Italy, Spain, and other provinces" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.55).

specifically for a nunnery. His vision of female behaviour, either lay or religious, was one of virtue and passivity. We see, for example, in his *Rule for Nuns* how he describes religious women that should be perfect vessels of purity (Leyser 98). The passivity of women in Caesarius' discourse is contested by some scholars,<sup>9</sup> but will become evident also through the following analysis, which shows women as active in shaping practices and beliefs, thus challenging Caesarius' prescribed notion of female passivity.

Caesarius' approach to female practices is profoundly dependent on diffused assumptions that were present in contemporary sources, revealing not only his own understanding of subversive female behaviour, but also that of his milieu. Caesarius in particular, and ecclesiastical texts in general, tend to contain ideas that are meant to teach and convince the audience of what ought to be, and not to describe what actually is (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 14). In this respect, we know that pastoral literature is highly repetitive (Filotas, "Popular Religion" 436), and time and again scholars have demonstrated that, particularly on subjects of paganism and superstition, authors copied from one another, presumably demonstrating that those mentions would only mean the persistence of a literary tradition rather than actual popular customs (Hen 171; Harmening 19). Dismissing the validity of these sources is, however, too simplistic, as some criteria can be applied to vouch for a source's reliability (Künzel 1060; Gurevich 83): for instance, the use of vernacular to designate a practice, or the rareness of a mention. On the latter, as we will see, Caesarius is the first, if not the only one, to describe practices or practitioners. Furthermore, he is regarded as the source to which later authors resort to talk about unorthodox practices, which, if admitting the unconscious copying and pasting of authors, at least also recognizes that Caesarius' writings are the well from which many drink.<sup>10</sup> Either way, if we choose to see Caesarius' discourse as a mirror to society, we should bear in mind that it is a selective mirror, which reflects only those aspects of behaviour that he chose to address, giving only his selected interpretations. We know that our sources are always partial, but when using them to understand contemporary social behaviour we should reflect on the fact that this partiality also reveals much about the mentality of religious authorities, how they saw their communities, and how they interpreted their beliefs and behaviours. This means that most frequently these texts are windows

on the ecclesiastical imaginary rather than on its lay counterpart (Jolly 4). Nevertheless, when addressing his community, Caesarius, as well as other Christian authors, could not use rhetoric and subjects completely out of his audience's reality. Themes and motifs ought to be part of people's lives, otherwise his teaching would be ineffective. As stated by Lisa Bailey, "[t]he negative portraits of lay behavior were just as rhetorically constructed as the positive ones, but still provide a series of intriguing suggestions about what lay people may have been up to" (Bailey, *The Religious Worlds* 118). With this in mind, let us see his sermons as a partial and tendentious reflection of society. Nevertheless, we should also pay attention to the echoes of people's practices, provided that even imaginary or ideal constructs must find references in the real world of everyday practices.

As already mentioned, abortion, conception, and contraception are the most rebuked practices regarding women in Caesarius' discourse addressed in six sermons.<sup>11</sup> In late antique Gaul, denunciation of abortion was a way of defining the Christian community and its values (Mistry 66), and in Caesarius' rhetoric we see an emphasis on condemning abortion as a sexual transgression against chastity (Mistry 69). Ecclesiastical documentation, particularly penitential literature, frequently considers abortion as a consequence of fornication and extra-conjugal sin.<sup>12</sup> This can be seen both in the Synod of Elvira (c. 300), canon 63, and the Council of Ancyra (314), canon 20,<sup>13</sup> which influenced later ecclesiastical literature on this topic.

Caesarius' ideas on abortion and conception can be summarized here:

Sermo 44.2. No woman should take drugs for purposes of abortion, nor should she kill her children that have been conceived or are already born. If anyone does this, she should know that before Christ's tribunal she will have to plead her case in the presence of those she has killed. Moreover, women should not take diabolical draughts with the purpose of not being able to conceive children. A woman who does this ought to realize that she will be guilty of as many murders as the number of children she might have borne.<sup>14</sup> (FC I, 221)

11. For a categorization and consideration of how each of these sermons addresses abortion, see Mistry 67–68.

12. As in canon 20 of the sixth-century Irish *Paenitentiale Vinniani*, which is part of a larger section about fornication, informing that abortion is here condemned as a consequence of out-of-wedlock relations. Furthermore, Winnebeck concludes that this canon is addressing abortion and fornication by nuns (Winnebeck 6–9).

13. Council of Elvira, *La Colección canónica hispana* 4, 233–68; Council of Ancyra, *Ecclesiae occidentalis*, 3–115.

14. *Nulla mulier potiones ad avorsum accipiat, nec filios aut conceptos aut iam natos occidat; quia, quaecumque hoc fecerit, ante tribunal Christi sciat se causam cum illis quos occiderit esse dicturam. Sed nec illas diabolicas potiones mulieres debent accipere, per quas iam non possint concipere. Mulier quaecumque hoc fecerit, quantoscumque parere potuerat, tantorum homicidiorum se ream esse cognoscat* (SC II, 328).

15. For a comprehensive study of abortion in ecclesiastical literature in early medieval history, see Mistry; also Elsackers, "Reading between the Lines".

16. For instance, the ninth-century Spanish *Penitential Vigilanum* states that *Mulier Autem Pauperina si in hoc Inruerit, VII Annos Peniteat*, in CCSL 156 A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 7. This chapter was inspired by the pseudo-Theodorian penitential that states *Mulier si aliquem interemerit malitia sua, id est, per poculum aut per artem aliquant, VIII annos poeniteat. Si pauperula est, V annos* (P. Theodori (U) 1.14.25–6, Finsterwalder 309). It thus consists of a common statement in penitential literature.

17. Procopius, *Secret History*: "She was often pregnant, but by using almost all known techniques she could induce immediate abortions". "She paid more attention to the care of her body than was necessary but still less than she would have liked" (Kaldellis 42, 68).

18. Watson 368.

19. John Chrysostom, Homily 24 on Rom. 13:11, Walker et al. 922.

The accusation of the use of potions to seek an abortion is a longstanding theme in civil and ecclesiastical literature.<sup>15</sup> Legal codes and penitential literature were particularly keen to accuse men and women of seeking wicked methods to prevent another child being born, frequently associating these methods with magicians and other traditional practitioners (Diniz, "Religious Crafting" 42 and eadem, "Paganism and Traditional Practices").

Caesarius is mainly silent on the social meaning of abortion, but some motivations can be gathered from other sources. Some penitential literature prescribes blander punishment for those women who seek to concoct a potion to have an abortion due to poverty,<sup>16</sup> which means this cause could have been frequent and the ecclesiastical authorities were sometimes even keen to recognize the burden of too many children for destitute families. Social and aesthetic vanity were reasons pointed out by some sources, such as Caesarius himself in Sermon 52, where he accuses some women of procuring an abortion "fearing that they cannot be rich if they were to have more children" (*timentes ne forte, si plures filios habuerint, divites esse non possent*, Sermo 52.4, SC II, 438), which is not the same as not wanting a child due to poverty, but, according to Caesarius, a fear of losing economic prestige to feed and provide for more children. As for aesthetics, one example is found in Procopius of Caesarea's depiction of Theodora in his *Secret History*, written in the mid-sixth century, in which the historian accuses the empress of avoiding pregnancies due to her own vanity and desire for self-preservation (Procopius, *Secret History* 2.9.19; 2.15.6).<sup>17</sup> Another motivation for abortion is the desire of certain women to deprive their husbands of an heir. The sixth-century *Digest of Justinian*, a legal compendium culled from ancient legislative opinions, cites a rescript in which a woman who, after a divorce, procure an abortion "so as to avoid giving a son to her husband who is now hateful", is punished with temporary exile (*Digest* 48.19.39, book 4).<sup>18</sup> Another reason is given by John Chrysostom in one of his sermons, in which he offers the example of prostitutes who are forced to have an abortion so as not to lose their livelihood. In this case, the one to blame for the murder of the foetus is her client, not the woman.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, in general, the Christian authorities allowed medical practices that provoked a termination of pregnancy if the life of the mother was in danger (Harris 140). This can be seen in a story found in the *Lives of the Fathers of Mérida*, composed in the 630s by Paul the Deacon.

20. Fear 58.

21. Fear 59.

22. Fear 60.

He chronicles the life of Paul, Bishop of Mérida around 540–50, who was “a Greek by nationality and a doctor by trade” (Paul the Deacon, *Lives* 1.1).<sup>20</sup> He was once called to save the life of a noblewoman whose foetus had died in her womb. Her husband begged the bishop that “as he was a servant of God, he should intercede in his prayers for the health of his wife, or, surely, as he was a doctor, not think it unworthy for him to give the sick woman the favor of being cured by his own hand” (Paul the Deacon, *Lives* 2.3).<sup>21</sup> After refusing the task and offering advice to other doctors, the bishop then gives in and performs the procedure to save the woman’s life:

with wonderous skill he made a most skillful incision by his cunning use of a knife and extracted the already decaying body of the infant, limb by limb, piece by piece and, with God’s aid, restored forthwith the woman who was on the point of dying and only half alive, safe and sound to her husband.<sup>22</sup> (Paul the Deacon, *Lives* 2.11)

This procedure is considered the first documented Caesarean section ever performed (Tsoucalas et al. 203), and the story attests to the fact that Christian and medical cures could be intertwined and walk side by side.

On the other hand, wicked methods were also regarded to be used to procure a pregnancy. Caesarius is as harsh on the use of potions and herbs to promote conception as he is on abortion. In a sermon known as “On Accepting Barrenness”, he states:

Sermo 51.4. Therefore, those to whom God is unwilling to give children should not try to have them by means of herbs or magic signs or evil charms. It is becoming and proper for Christians especially not to seem to fight against the dispensation of Christ by cruel, wicked boldness. Just as women whom God wants to bear more children should not take medicines to prevent their conception, so those whom God wishes to remain sterile should desire and seek this gift from God alone.<sup>23</sup> (FC I, 258)

23. *Et ideo, cui Deus filios dare noluerit, non eos de aliquis erbis vel diabolicis characteribus aut sacrilegis ligaturis habere conentur. Unde ante omnia et decet et expedit christianis ne contra dispensationem Christi crudeli et impio ausu pugnare videantur. Sicut enim mulieres, quas Deus vult plures habere filios, nullas potationes debent accipere, per quas conceptum habere non possint, ita et illae, quas Deus steriles voluit permanere, de solo Deo hoc debent desiderare vel petere* (SC II, 428–30).

Caesarius, however, is only prone to provide harsh accusations. His judgement is peremptory: a woman has no will in her personal situation and should bear whatever God decides to assign to her, to conceive either as many children as possible or none.

24. For a comprehensive study of this case, see Heidecker. See also Flint, "Magic"; more recently, Stone and West.

25. Interestingly, Hincmar in his treatise affirms that some women would use magic and witchcraft to make their husbands impotent, one of the few reasons that would allow a civil and religious dissolution of a marriage. See Hincmar, *De divortio* 717. On the use of magic in cases of divorce (either to procure or avoid it), see Flint, *The Rise* 296ff.

26. MGH, *Leges nationum Germanicarum* 4.1, *Pactus legis Salicae*, 82.

We know from the famous case of King Lothar II (835–9) that a man was able to divorce his wife if she bore no children.<sup>24</sup> Even though Christian thought would rebuke this practice, as attested by Hincmar of Reims in his *De divortio Lotharii regis et Theutbergae reginae*, we can presume the civil practice was possible and used by husbands. On these grounds, if a woman risked being repudiated by her husband, this could justify her resorting to any possible means available to her. Not only the risk of divorce but also that of bearing no heirs is a valuable reason driving women to seek alternative remedies to fight infertility.<sup>25</sup>

Caesarius never associates a specific practitioner with the concoction or administering of abortive or fertility remedies. We might think, however, that it remained a female affair, as demonstrated by the sixth-century Frankish *Leges Salicae*, which presents in article 19.4 the only indictment in which women are explicitly named as subject and as indirect object in a prescript. It is an article called "De maleficiis" and introduces an example of women who were versed in what the source calls *maleficia*, and based on this knowledge prepared abortifacients and contraceptives for other women (Elsackers, "Abortion" 258). It says: *Si quis mulier altera mulieri maleficium fecerit unde infantes non potuerit habere, <MMD denarios qui faciunt> solidos LXII semis culpabilis iudicetur.*<sup>26</sup>

All these sources demonstrate that women seeking abortions or trying to conceive are seen as social and religious outcasts, subverting the moral, social, and civil order. They are subjected to the moral censure of religious authority but also to the civil punishment of law through exile, divorce, or the payment of fees. In a context like this, where religion would offer no support and medical doctors might themselves be religious men or not easily available, a woman would search for alternative solutions, found apparently in folk and informal healing.

Female healers may not have been restricted to the realm of gynaecological specialties or midwifery. Monica Green describes quantitative studies across Europe in the high and late Middle Ages in which prosopographical research has demonstrated that female practitioners could be found performing a variety of medical specialties (Green, "Women's Medical Practice" 42). Documentation of this sort is non-existent for the late antique

period, but it is not impossible to suppose that women were performing a variety of medical specialities, involving the treatment of men. Even though a plurality of practitioners was available, we could presume that women had a better knowledge of female embodiment and could rely on each other to solve their specific problems and provide assistance in cases of necessity. In a study entitled "La sage-femme" (the wise woman), Aline Rousselle states that in sixth-century Gaul many thermal sanctuaries and sacred springs were regarded to have the power to heal gynaecological illnesses which could not be healed through martyrs' miracles. Wise women would have been the holders of healing formulae concerning exclusively female health problems, since for male and other female afflictions the miraculous cures of saints were sought (Rousselle, "La sage-femme" 269; see also Rousselle, *Croire et guérir*).

Let us now discuss Sermon 52, which admonishes mothers who turn to practitioners to heal their children. In this sermon, as is the case with Caesarius' other sermons, there is a parade of practitioners sought for a variety of situations: soothsayers, diviners, and prophets. Here, however, Caesarius gives us a glimpse of what could have been a specialized practitioner, one he calls an *erbaria*, claimed to be a female specialist in medicinal, amuletic, or poisonous *herbae*.<sup>27</sup>

27. This kind of female practitioner makes her first appearance in Latin in this very sermon (Klingshirn, "Magic and Divination" 973).

28. *Quando aliquarum mulierum filii diversis temptationibus aut infirmitatibus fatigantur, lugentes et adtonitae currunt matres; et quod peius est, non de ecclesiae medicina, non de auctore salutis exposcunt atque eucharistia Christi et, cum sicut scriptum est, oleo benedicto a presbyteris deberent perungere, et omnem spem suam in Deo ponere. Econtrario faciunt, et dum salutem requirunt corporum, mortem inveniunt animarum. Et atque utiam ipsam sanitatem vel de simplici medicorum arte conquirent. Sed dicunt sibi: illum ariolum vel divinum, illum sortilegum, illam erbariam consulamus; vestimentum infirmi sacrificemus, cingulum qui inspici vel mensurari debeat; offeramus aliquos caracteres, aliquas praecantationes adpendamus ad collum. Inter haec una diaboli persuasio est: aut per avorsum occidere crudeliter filios, aut per caracteres sanare crudelius* (SC II, 438–40).

Sermo 52.5. Mothers in grief and terror hasten when their sons are troubled with various trials or infirmities. What is worse, they do not entreat the Church's remedy, the author of salvation and the Eucharistic Christ. Nor, as it is written that they should, do they ask the priests to anoint them with blessed oil, or place all their hopes in God. They act in the opposite manner, so that while they seek bodily health they effect the death of souls. If only they would seek that health from the simple skill of doctors! However, they say to themselves: Let us consult that soothsayer, seer, oracle, or witch (*illum ariolum vel divinum, illum sortilegum, illam erbariam*). Let us sacrifice a garment of the sick person, a girdle that can be seen and measured. Let us offer some magic letters, let us hang some charms on his neck. In all this the Devil has one aim: either to cruelly kill the children by abortion, or to heal them still more cruelly by the charms.<sup>28</sup> (FC I, 262)

In this passage, there are three interesting points: Caesarius first admonishes mothers for not seeking the "Church's remedy" (the priest's anointment and prayer), but then also laments the fact they



do not even seek the "simple skill of doctors". On the contrary, they go and consult the folk healer. Indeed, the sermon further states:

Sermo 52.6. Sometimes, women who are apparently wise Christians, when their children are sick, reply to nurses or other women through whom the Devil suggests these practices: "I will not get mixed up in such things, because it is read in church: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils." Then, as if excusing herself, such a woman says: "Go, and do as you know how; no expenses from our storehouse will be denied you."<sup>29</sup> (FC I, 262)

29. *Interdum solent aliquae mulieres, quasi sapientes et christianae, aegrotantibus filiis suis, aut nutricibus aut aliis mulieribus, per quas diabolus ista suggerit, respondere et dicere: Non me ego misceo in istis talibus rebus, quia legitur in ecclesia: "non potestis calicem Domini bibere, et calicem daemoniorum; non potestis mensae Domini participes esse, et mensae daemoniorum." Et cum haec quasi excusans se dixerit: Ite, et facite vos quomodo scitis; expensa vobis de cellario non negatur* (SC II, 440).

Here we see explicitly that women used to consult one another in search of advice and care. For Caesarius, women who provide health services gather their knowledge from the Devil. It is also interesting to notice that these female health specialists were apparently earning an income from their trade, even though no documentation allows us to know if these specialists exercised healing as a profession or as a "part-time" job performed on demand.

Bernadette Filotas interprets this single mention of *erbariae* in Caesarius' sermons as evidence that he understood this kind of female practitioner as less harmful to faith than other practitioners (Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 398). Other scholars, however, have understood Caesarius' use of the term *erbaria* as a way of "officialising" the phenomenon of female witchcraft (Campetella 180), as found in other sources. In the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, for instance, the Frankish King Guntrum's second wife, Marcatrude, is called a *meretrix* and *herbaria*, and she is believed to have killed her rival's son with poison.<sup>30</sup> The seventh-century *Pactus Alamannorum* mentions twice the fine to be paid by women accused of being *stria* aut *herbaria*.<sup>31</sup> Around the twelfth century, the term *herbarius* in male form is associated with botanists and herbalists or practitioners of benevolent magic,<sup>32</sup> while the female (*h*)*erbaria* always means the female poisoner or the witch who uses herbs (Campetella 183).

Knowledge of the medicinal properties of herbs was longstanding, and numerous herbals and medical treatises listing herbs and plants circulated in the Mediterranean in the early medieval period (Riddle 59). This knowledge was generally accepted, but its relationship with presumably harmful practices was noticed by religious authorities. The Council of Braga of 572 would, a few decades after Caesarius'

30. Fredegar, *Chronicle* 3.56, MGH SRM 2, 108.

31. *Pactus legis Alamannorum*, MGH Leges 4.1, 24.

32. Poen. Hubertense (first half of the eighth century) 25, CCSL 156, 111. See also Poen. Merseburgense b (c. 774–c. 850) 24, *ibid.*, 176. *Herbarii* of either sex (*Herbarius vir aut mulier*) are considered as murders of infants in two Continental penitentials from the eighth to ninth century. Cf. Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 398.

33. Braga (572), can. 74, *Concilios Visigóticos*, 103. *Non liceat in collectione herbarium, quae medicinales sunt, aliquas observationes aut incantationes adtendere nisi tantum cum symbolo divino aut oratione dominica, ut tantum Deus creator omnium et dominus honoretur.*

34. For references, see Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 399ff.

35. *Tunc enim probatur Christianus si in ista persecutione non deserit Deum, si non mittit ad sortilegum, si non facit ligaturas, si non incantatrices aliquas ducit. Incantat mulier, incantat serpens* (in Étaix 275).

36. According to Filotas, it appears forty times. See Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 407.

37. *Praecantator* appears in Sermons 1.12, 13.3, 19.5, 50.1, 52.5, 54.1 and 3, and 184.

38. Respectively, Charlemagne's General Admonition: [*U*]t cauclearii, malefici, incantatores vel incantatrices fieri non sinantur (K. M. *Admonitio Generalis* (789) 18, MGH CapRegFr 1, 55) and Ansegesis' collection, in a canon attributed to the Council of Laodicea: *Ansegesis capitularium collectio* (first half of the ninth century) 1.21, *ibid.* 399); Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 407.

39. CCSL 40, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 101–05. Augustine, Psalm 127:11, l. 6: *videmus quiamistos parientes intrant multi ebriosi, feneratores, mangomes, quaerentes sortilegos, euntes ad praecantatores et praecantatrices, quando illis caput dolet*, 1875.

40. For a brief discussion of enchanter and incantation in the sources, see Filotas, "Pagan Survivals" 407.

41. LXXXIX, *auguriis vel incantationibus servientem a conventu ecclesiae separandum* (*Statuta ecclesiae antiqua* (c. 475) 83 [89], CCSL 148, 179).

42. LXVIII, *Quoniam non oportet ministros altaris aut clericos magos aut incantatores esse aut facere quae dicuntur filacteria, quae sunt magna obligamenta animarum. Hos autem qui talibus utuntur proici ab ecclesia iussimus. La colección Canónica Hispana IV*, 149.

bishopric, regulate the gathering of herbs and concoction of potions: "in the collection of medicinal herbs, let it not be permitted to perform any rituals or incantations except the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, so that only God may be honoured as creator and lord of all things".<sup>33</sup> This canon evidences the acceptance of herbs as useful tools in medical treatment, as long as they are not associated with any illicit practice that can be associated with magic. From this moment on, the admonition against the gathering of herbs using spells will be repeated in numerous sermons, councils, and penitentials, always recognizing the beneficial use of herbs but exhorting their users to dissociate them from harmful practices.<sup>34</sup>

Another female practitioner is introduced in one sermon of Caesarius discovered by Raymon Étaix. She is called in case of illness, and the bishop gives a fitting judgement on her behaviour:

For then he is proven to be Christian if he does not desert God in [the Devil's] persecution, nor send for the soothsayer, nor make bindings, nor bring in any enchantresses (*incantatrices*).

When a woman recites an incantation, a serpent recites it.<sup>35</sup>

While the male terms *incantator* and *praecantator* (*praecantor*) appear in a conspicuous number of early medieval pastoral sources,<sup>36</sup> including Caesarius,<sup>37</sup> the *incantatrix* occurs only three times: once in Caesarius and twice in the Frankish context of the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>38</sup> *Praecantatrix*, on the other hand, is attested only in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* together with *praecantator* as a practitioner that was sought in cases of illness.<sup>39</sup>

Even though a female practitioner is not specified in the sources, women are accused of practising incantations and enchantments in a number of penitentials and other documents.<sup>40</sup> The purpose and intent of the magic practised by enchanter in general is frequently vague in the texts. It could be sorcery, divination, spells, or just an imprecise collection of forbidden practices. The admonition against incantations is present in the *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua*, compiled in southern Gaul in the last quarter of the fifth century, which recommends the expulsion from the Christian community of those who make use of auguries or *incantationes*.<sup>41</sup> From the same environment comes also the mention found in the Council of Agde (506), presided over by Caesarius, which rebukes clerics who perform the functions of magicians and *incantatores*.<sup>42</sup> Apparently, a specific *incantatrix* summoned in case of illness is found only in Caesarius and Augustine. However, the male *praecantator* in

Caesarius is always related to healing practices, presumably meaning that, to his knowledge, either male or female enchanter could be healing specialists.

As William Klingshirn points out, ecclesiastical documentation evidenced that "both diviners and 'folk' healers could be esteemed as alternative figures of authority in the community. The fact that many of them were women made them doubly threatening to the organized church" (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 222). Indeed, in Sermon 184.4, adapted from Augustine's Sermon 286.7, Caesarius refers to the habit of certain people to advise their peers to employ folk healers:

Sermo 184.4. It usually happens, brethren, that a persecutor on the side of the Devil comes to a sick man and says: "If you had summoned that magician, you would already be cured. If you had been willing to hang those superstitious signs on you, you would already have recovered your health." Perhaps another man comes and says: "Send to that soothsayer, transmit your cincture or fillet to him so he can measure it and look at it." Then he himself will tell you what to do, or whether you can escape. Still another says: "That man knows very well how to fumigate; and everyone for whom he has done this immediately felt better, and every attack left his house." [...] Even women are wont to persuade each other that if their children are sick they should have recourse to some kind of incantation which is not proper to the Catholic faith. This is deception on the part of the Devil.<sup>43</sup> (FC II, 481)

43. Solet fieri, fratres, ut ad aliquem aegrotantem veniat persecutor ex parte diaboli, et dicat: Si illum praecantatorem adhibuisses, iam sanus esses; si characteres illos tibi voluisses adpendere, iam poteras sanitatem recipere. Huic persecutori si consenseris, diabolo sacrificasti; si contempseris, martyrii gloriam acquisisti. Venit forte et alius qui dicat: Mitte ad illum divinum, trans mitte ad illum cingulum aut fasciam tuam, mensuretur et aspiciat; et ipse tibi dicet quid facies, aut utrum evadere possis. Dicit et alius: Ille bene novit fumigare; nam cuicumque hoc fecit, statim melius habuit, omnis temptatio de domo illius discessit. [...] Solent etiam mulieres sibi invicem persuadere, ut aegrotantibus filiis suis ad fascinum aliquid, quod fidei catholicae non conveniat, debeant adhibere. Et ista deceptio de parte diaboli est (Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* II, 750).

It is worth remembering that when Caesarius makes use of other sources, and here particularly Augustine, it is not with unconscious repetition, but sensible adaptation. What he uses from Augustine is what he regarded as useful to his congregation (De Maeyer and Partoens 215; Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 12), making amendments and adaptations according to his knowledge of his community. Here, although making use of Augustine's discourse on the recourse of certain people to wicked healing practices, he adds important and revealing information that is not present in Augustine, who, differently from Caesarius, is very concise in his description of practices:

44. "The universal Southern African word for magic charms, spells, and potions of all sorts; often translated as 'medicine', but as in the expression 'medicine man'" (Hill 106).

45. *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi opera omnia*. Vol. 5, PL 38, 1302.

46. For a collection of female practitioners in the early medieval West with references (albeit scattered and inaccurate), see Gatti. In Anglo-Saxon context, see Meaney.

Sermo 286.7. So while he's being wracked with pain, along comes trial and temptation by tongue; either some female (*muliercula*), or a man, if man he can be called, approaches the sickbed, and says to the sick man, "Tie on that *muti*,<sup>44</sup> and you will get better; let them apply that charm (*ligaturam*), and you will get better. So-and-so, and so-and-so and so-and-so; ask, they all got better by using it." He doesn't yield, he doesn't agree, he doesn't give his consent; he has to struggle, all the same. He has no strength, and he conquers the devil. He becomes a martyr on his sickbed, and he is crowned by the one who hung for him on the tree.<sup>45</sup> (Hill 105)

Here, differently from Caesarius, we don't see any magicians (*praecantator*), or soothsayers (*divinum*), there are no cinctures or fillets to be measured, no fumigations, and more importantly, no women persuading their peers to use these practices to heal their children. Caesarius' additions may be revealing of the practices and instruments that were used by folk healers and of the *modus operandi* of people advising each other on the best method and the most prestigious and reliable healer to consult.

From what we can detect in ecclesiastical sources about traditional cures, references to the practitioners' types and prescribed remedies were numerous and repetitive. The list of magicians and fortune tellers replicated by Caesarius is also found in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (Klingshirn, "Isidore"), which attests to a variety of practitioners and presupposes that people facing different health problems would have diverse options of practices to choose from. While exclusively female specialists are included among these practitioners, one could also assume that women, too, were among the gender-neutral specialists.<sup>46</sup>

We could thus surmise that during late antiquity a rich marketplace for healing was offered. Yet, as we will see below, Caesarius, and ecclesiastical authorities in general, prescribed a standard Christian cure based on anointing and praying, either in church or preferably by the relics of saints and martyrs (Paxton 93). This not to say that ecclesiastical authorities were averse to medical treatments. On the contrary, doctors were recommended and respected by religious authorities, and some clerics were doctors themselves, but in the pastoral discourse, Christian cures remained the most powerful and legitimate. Even so, saints and clerics must have accounted

for a minority of the sick, while family and neighbours must have undertaken most basic nursing tasks. This sector of a curing network is, however, seldom documented, and the knowledge bestowed by these people must have been learned and handed down orally, a fact that renders our understanding of their methods and specialties even harder (Horden, "What's Wrong" 161). Caesarius' sermons show neighbours and family members influencing and persuading each other to search for a certain healer or medical treatment when facing health problems. It is possible that such healers were found nearby, within the same family or neighbourhood (see Horden, "Household Care"). This close network could have also been responsible for primary care, even more so in the case of female health concerns and children's needs. The home was presumably the principal locus of care in this period, a strong alternative as a response to the scarce availability of doctors and the restrictive and not fully inclusive Christian medical care. Taking these into consideration, we could turn our attention to Caesarius' discourse on Christian healing to understand why folk medicine, and particularly female health practices, might have functioned as valid alternatives for people, and particularly women facing gynaecological issues.

## Christian Medicine: Caesarius as Healer for Body and Soul

As can be detected from Caesarius' sermons, the pluralism and informal healing network present and sought after in his times was in great contrast with the medical cures prescribed by Christianity. Indeed, Caesarius advises the following standardized procedure to his audience:

Sermo 13.3. As soon as some infirmity overtakes him, a sick man should receive the Body and Blood of Christ, humbly and devoutly ask the presbyters for blessed oil, and anoint his body with it. [...] See to it, brethren, that a man hastens to the church in infirmity, and he will merit to receive both bodily health and the remission of his sins. Since we can find a double good in church, why do miserable men try to bring numerous evils upon themselves through charmers, fountains, trees, diabolical phylacteries, sorcerers, soothsayers, seers or oracles?<sup>47</sup> (FC I, 77)

47. *Quotiens aliqua infirmitas supervenerit, corpus et sanguinem Christi ille qui aegrotat accipiat; oleum benedictum a presbyteris humiliter ac fideliter petat, et inde corpusculum suum unguet. [...] Cum ergo duplicia bona possimus in ecclesia invenire, quare per praecantatores, per fontes et arbores et diabolica fylacteria, per caraios aut aruspices et divinos vel sortilegos multiplicia sibi mala miseri homines conantur inferre?* (SC I, 420).

Furthermore, in Sermon 50 he admonishes his community against resorting to wicked practices related to healthcare. He opens his homily as follows:

Sermo 50.1. You know, dearly beloved, that all men seek bodily health, but this we should acknowledge, that, although health of body is good, health of the heart is much better. Consequently, all Christians should always pray especially that God will deign to grant them health of soul because of their devout life. We should pray for bodily health, but doubly and many more times for health of soul.<sup>48</sup> (FC I, 253)

48. *Nostris, fratres carissimi, omnes homines sanitatem corporis quaerere: sed hoc debemus agnoscere, quia, quamvis bona sit sanitas corporis, multo melior est sanitas cordis. Unde omnes christiani debent specialiter semper orare, ut illis Deus sanitatem animae digne tur pro sua pietate concedere. Orandum est pro sanitate corporis, sed dupliciter et multipliciter pro salute animae supplicandum* (SC II, 416).

49. Similar rhetoric can be also detected in Sermons 23.2, 36.4, 43.9, 57.2, and 59.5.

50. As Peregrine Horden remarks, "the hospital before the great 'medicalization' of the modern age [...] was by origin a Christian invention, and in our period its history is overwhelmingly a Christian history. It was therapeutic by medieval medical standards as a beneficial regulator of the environment in which the needy poor lived and slept. But still more was it therapeutic by medieval theological standards in that it looked after the health of the soul: the founder's soul through the prayers of patients; the patients' souls through the spiritual and physical healing of the liturgy and the sacraments" (Horden, "Sickness and Healing" 103; see also Horden, "The Earliest Hospitals in Byzantium").

51. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 18.

Even though for him a spiritual care and cure was the priority, we can see that he was not averse to doctors or practical medicine. On the contrary, he emerges as a promoter of empirical medicine. In his sermons, Caesarius often uses the language of medicine or mentions doctors as an analogy of the church in offering remedy for the soul. God appears as the healer of souls just as a physician provides remedy for the body. For instance, he writes in Sermon 17.4: "Truly, dearly beloved, God does not want to kill the sinner, but his sin. Like a good doctor He wants to strike the disease, not the person who is ill" (FC I, 92).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Caesarius undertook the building of a structure that was very similar to what later became a hospital.<sup>50</sup> As documented in his *Vita*,

He had a very great concern for the sick and came to their assistance. He granted them a spacious house, in which they could listen undisturbed to the holy office [being sung] in the basilica. He set up beds and bedding, provided for expenses, and supplied a person to take care of them and heal them.<sup>51</sup> (*Vita Caesarii* 1.20)

Caesarius' hospital is probably the earliest foundation of this sort in Gaul. According to Caesarius' *Vita*, this structure must have been of considerable capacity, annexed to the basilica that some scholars identify as the cathedral of Saint Stephen, patron of Arles (Février and Leyge 63). It is probable that along with the person supplied to take care of the sick, there was also some sort of doctor employed – if this was not the same person (Sternberg 197), suggesting that, along with spiritual remedies, medical treatments were offered to the sick.

Arles was also a renowned place of healing, as its physicians were famous in the region. In a letter from Bishop Avitus of Vienne to Caesarius, the former asks the latter to receive a certain Bishop

52. Letter 2, in Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 81.

53. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 12–13.

54. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 30.

55. SC I, 314–16.

56. Gregory of Tours, in the *Historia Francorum* 7.25, describes the many properties of Chilperic's court physician, Marilief: "He had landed property, horses, gold, silver, and other valuable possessions – all to disappear, though, when he lost his patron at Chilperic's death." This might be an indication of the wealth of physicians. Another interesting anecdote is told in the *Vita Caesarii* 1.50. After Caesarius visited a villa and was welcomed by its owners, a physician named Anatolius used the same bed in which Caesarius had slept to stay with a prostitute. For this audacity and shameful act, he was publicly seized by a divine power and had to confess his sin (Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 34). We see here that doctors would be guests of wealthy people, attesting to their prestige and presumably exclusivity. The anecdote, however, also testifies to the not-so-great esteem hagiographers had for these professionals.

57. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 16.

58. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 17.

Maximianus who is seeking "a skilled physician somewhere, who cures eye diseases by a skilful remedy".<sup>52</sup> Caesarius himself as a young monk was taken to Arles "to regain his health" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.7),<sup>53</sup> after being dedicated to a harsh ascetic lifestyle while at the monastery of Lérins. The deacon Helpidius was a known physician who served King Theoderic and whose medical skills were famous in Gaul and Italy (Avitus of Vienne, *Epist.* 38). Nevertheless, when assailed by a demonic infestation, Helpidius was helpless. Only after Caesarius entered his house to purify it with holy water was he delivered from his distress (*Vita Caesarii* 1.41).<sup>54</sup>

Doctors, however, may not have been easily accessible. In another sermon, Caesarius informs us that these professionals might have been quite expensive:

Sermo 5.5. When bodily doctors refuse to come to the sick, dearly beloved, they are begged with great humility, and rewards and gifts are promised, even though it is doubtful whether their remedies will be beneficial. How is it, then, that we who in no way at all despair of spiritual healing and seek neither earthly reward nor temporal gains should be despised in this way? [...] Since bodily health is sought with such great expense and so much pain, why is not the health of souls willingly sought by men when it is granted without any expense?<sup>55</sup> (FC I, 36–37)

Even though the merits of medicine were recognized by pastoral literature, doctors might have offered a costly service not available to everyone,<sup>56</sup> and even so, the Christian cure was always regarded as the best and most appropriate one. Indeed, according to Caesarius' *Vita*, his relics were reputed as having a curative power. Thus, Caesarius provided not only spiritual but also bodily health. His work as a spiritual guide is in numerous cases associated with that of a physician. In one case, he is even described as "a physician of the spirit, who cured the innate vices of diseases and prevented new ones from arising out of wicked thoughts" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.15).<sup>57</sup> In another case, he is reputed to offer the right word and prayer according to each person's needs: "Like a good physician he provided different remedies for different ailments; he did not offer what would please the patient, but rather what would cure him. He did not consider the wishes of the sick but fittingly desired to heal the infirm" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.17).<sup>58</sup>

59. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 29.

60. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* 34.

61. For a list of more examples, see also Flint, "The Early Medieval 'Medicus'" 137.

62. *De virtutibus Sancti Martini* 2.1: *Omnem ingenium artificii tui inpendisti, pigmentorum omnium vim iam probasti sed nihil proficit perituro res saeculi. Unum restat quod faciam; magnam tibi tyriacam ostendam. Pulverem de sacratissimo domini sepulchro exhibeant, et exinde mihi facito potionem. Quod si hoc non valuerit, amissa sunt omnia evadendi perfigia.*

But Caesarius would also provide physical cures through miracles. In one case, while visiting Ravenna, he was called by a mother to cure her young son after she had already sought other unspecified means of healing: "When there was no more hope of a human cure and no more consolation for him, his mother left him behind and ran in haste to the man of God" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.39).<sup>59</sup> Needless to say, Caesarius' payer cured the young man. In another case, a slave of the illustrious patrician Parthenius, known through other contemporary sources as being of noble upbringing and an influential political figure, fell ill, and became victim of a wicked attack. "And since the attack by his enemy seemed in fact to be a spiritual affliction rather than a physical infirmity, he was anointed with holy oil that had been consecrated by the blessed man." The man made a full recovery thanks to Caesarius, "after the treatment of a physician of this world had failed" (*Vita Caesarii* 1.49).<sup>60</sup> We see here that Parthenius could lavishly afford a doctor, but one was of no avail to cure his slave from both his bodily and spiritual infirmities.

Hagiographical accounts of saintly cures often show a pattern of behaviour in which the sick persons would first seek the cure of a doctor and/or a witch doctor. Not finding the healing they are looking for, sufferers end up at the shrine of a miraculous saint or at a holy man's dwelling, where they receive a free cure (Flint, *The Rise of Magic* 252).<sup>61</sup> In Gregory of Tours' account of the miracles of Saint Martin of Tours, for instance, the author provides episodes from his own experience to promote saintly healing powers over secular cures. In one case, when Gregory is suffering from severe dysentery, he comments about the physician Armentarius:

You have offered all the wisdom of your skill, and you have already tested the strength of all your salves, but the devices of this world have been of no use to me who am about to die. One option remains for me to try; let me show you a powerful antidote. Fetch dust from the most sacred tomb of lord [Martin], and then mix a drink (*potionem*) for me. If this dust is not effective, every refuge for escaping [death] has been lost.<sup>62</sup> (Van Dam 229)

The dust is brought from the tomb and a concoction mixed by the physician, who then administers this medicine to Gregory, who immediately starts feeling better. In Gregory's narrative, secular remedies are often sought before succumbing to the power of a saintly cure (Kitchen 17). In this case, the physician is the one



administering the miraculous "potion", showing a sort of hybrid medical practice in which formal medicine and Christian cure are again walking side by side. Here we have also an added third dimension, as in this particular example the Christian cure has a strong folk imprint.

We might consider it as a hagiographical *topos* in which a discourse with a rhetorical strategy is built with a didactic scope to emphasize the power of the saint or martyr against popular ignorance and fake healers. However, this detailed description of different steps to achieve the cure must have been plausible for contemporary readers and audience. The folk healers must have been really reputed to offer a credible alternative to the Christian church, otherwise it would have been pointless cataloguing their practices and, most importantly, their failures. As stated by Horden, "the hagiographers are the first to admit that the sick tried secular therapy first and its heavenly counterpart second" (Horden, "Sickness and Healing" 92).

A network of healing practices and healing specialists offering authorized as well as unauthorized rites and rituals was available to people in Arles in Caesarius' times. We may presume, however, that this availability was not comprehensive, or else not obtainable by either women and/or destitute people (Klingshirn, *The Making of a Christian Community* 222). Doctors may have been few and their services expensive. In the realm of folk healing, we see that a great variety of practices and practitioners were available, probably to fill in the void of medical doctors, and some of these could have been women, specialized in female illnesses and available to help in female-related problems, such as their children's sickness. However, as Caesarius demonstrates, and as is generally stated by ecclesiastical discourse, church people promoted the idea that only through prayer and connection with the church could a person find both a spiritual and bodily healing. We see, then, multiple conflicting approaches at stake, which denotes a complex and often unbalanced dynamic of power.

What we have called a third way in medical practices, or else domestic and folk healing, constituted a potentially powerful network of practitioners and neighbours that helped and cared for each other. In this environment, female care was denounced as an illegitimate accessing of ritual power (see also Tuzlak). Accordingly, female healing was not considered as a professional speciality, but

rather can be seen as "an inseparable part of everyday domestic duties and participation in the community of women" (Weston 201). As Caesarius' sermons demonstrate, people found themselves between the lay and Christian cures, relying on each according to specific needs and economic possibilities.

## Conclusions

In his multiple abilities and resources, Caesarius of Arles emerges as a healer of both bodies and souls. Being a champion against people's faults and vices, he was also keen to establish proper Christian rules and conduct on what concerned healthcare. To fight subversion, Christian cures should prevail over all other practices, which were considered valuable resources in most cases but inferior to religion in healing the spiritual maladies that led to physical illnesses.

Christian healing, however, neglected the value of traditional medical pluralism for most people. Furthermore, it did not offer a valid alternative for solving a number of health problems, particularly gynaecological ones. Medical doctors were expensive and presumably quite rare if compared to the scale of the demand. In this scenario, female problems were seen as moral and social deviations, passive of spiritual and legal sanctions. Caesarius' accusations of women producing magical potions and resorting to witches is scant if compared to our body of knowledge, but it confirms a widely known social fact that women's problems and concerns were often dismissed or not exhaustively attended to in society.

Alternative women's healthcare practices can thus be seen as attempts to use subversive ways to cope with problems and matters that were overlooked by the other, official medical spheres. Women practitioners were socially useful figures (Gatti 127), performing important roles as domestic healthcare providers (Blumenthal 532), offering services that were often neglected by physicians and the church. As women were frequently seen as social outcasts, women's practices that subverted the prescribed religious norms were seen as sins, paganism, magic, and heresy. Whether talking about the vices of men (drunkenness and promiscuity) or those of women (healing practices), Caesarius' judgement is always the same: they are signals of paganism and bestiality (see Bailey, "These Are Not Men" 34).

Despite these accusations, women had to seek alternative ways to care for their bodies and children. These subversive ways allowed them to take control over their own bodies and to decide about their reproductive system. Women could become agents by crafting and seeking, within their domestic and neighbouring network, solutions to bodily and health issues involving themselves, their children, and other family members. Therefore, women could find ways to take hold of different resources, material and supernatural alike, that would serve their needs (see Frank; Grey). Evidently, despite the official church's attempts, as manifested through Caesarius' pastoral care and work, to keep women in an inferior social place, the latter found ways and means to exercise control. They overcame their exclusion from the ritual performance of healing by being agents of religious transformation, building community through the performance of alternative ways to deal with problems that afflicted them.

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