

Magic and the material culture of healing in early modern England



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the History and Philosophy of Science Degree Committee, at 78,981 words (excluding Bibliography).

ABSTRACT

This dissertation questions how people used objects to preserve health and cure illness in early modern England. Each chapter focuses on a different object or group of objects, to make interventions in the history of contemporary healing, and to demonstrate what we can learn about early modern healing from a study that places things at the centre. I bring together items that vary according to material, size, shape, function and application, to reveal the diverse range of things used for cure and protection in this period. Some were everyday, relatively worthless things, while others were expensive, coveted rarities, and I use both types of object to investigate the complex relationship between value and power. Throughout, this thesis explores how modern research, and trends of collecting and categorisation, have affected our interpretation of the physical evidence of early modern healing, and shows how objects can be resituated within medical contexts. It analyses how and why learned, elite men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries criticised what they saw as erroneous medical belief and practice, and the crucial role played by objects in these condemnations. In comparison, it examines how, despite religious and societal changes, laypeople continued to use a variety of healing objects, even in the face of theological denunciation and diabolical threat. My research contributes to recent scholarship that advocates object-focused histories, and provides a model of how to examine objects on their own terms, regardless of whether or not textual evidence exists. As a study of magic and the material culture of healing, it contributes to histories of household medicine, recipes and secrets, magic, ritual, superstition, demonology and witchcraft, medical politics, curiosity and wonder, and collecting.

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ABBREVIATIONS

PAS	Portable Antiquities Scheme
ADS	Archaeological Data Service
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum
EEBO	Early English Books Online
ECCO	Eighteenth Century Collections Online
OED	Oxford English Dictionary

INTRODUCTION

Nestled within a text listing a thousand recipes and secrets, from a remedy ‘to deck a bald head with haire’ to ‘a strange medicine for the gowt’, lay a recommendation for the medicinal virtues of the ‘Eagles stone’.¹ The miscellanies within this book, printed in 1579, were not limited to health and illness but also provided recipes, strategies, advice and explanations regarding various culinary, veterinary, romantic, domestic, herbal and astrological matters of life.² Many, however, related to medicine and the human body. The text did not describe what the eagle-stone was, yet it was a well-known object within early modern medicine and had been known as a healing object since antiquity. The eagle-stone, also known as the ‘aetite’, was a stone with another, smaller stone inside, ‘as if it were pregnant’.³ [Figure 1].



Figure 1 – Four eagle-stone geodes. Woodcut, 1599. Ferranta Imperato, *Dell'historica naturale* (Naples, 1599). Source: Wellcome Collection.⁴

¹ Thomas Lupton, *A thousand notable things of sundrie sorts: Whereof some are wonderfull, some strange, some pleasant, diuers necessary, a great sort profitable, and many verie precious*, (London, 1579).

² Mary Fissell, ‘Popular Medical Writing’, in Joad Raymond (ed.), *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture: Volume One: Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 418-431; 422-23.

³ John Jacob Berlu, *The treasury of drugs unlock'd, or, A full and true description of all sorts of drugs and chymical preparations*, (London, 1690), 71-2.

⁴ This image was chosen in absence of known, verified, extant early modern physical evidence, but other contemporary images are available, for instance ‘Watercolour of an eagle-stone, or aetites, with gold mounts’, Royal Collection Trust, RL 25480.

Whilst Thomas Lupton, the author of this book, did not identify himself as a medical practitioner, and little is known of his life and career, he evidently understood the power of the eagle-stone and the role it played within pregnancy and childbirth. Tied to the left arm or side, it prevented miscarriage; tied to the thigh, it brought an easy and light delivery.⁵ Knowing that the stone operated magnetically, Lupton warned that ‘you must take it away quickly after birth’, to avoid the womb being pulled down.⁶ He was among many who held the eagle-stone in esteem for its medical potency in this period. As this object increased in popularity over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many texts offered not merely remedial advice, but detailed provenances, forms and functions of the different varieties of eagle-stone. Historians have argued that it was even considered by some as a quasi-relic.⁷ In Lupton’s *A Thousand Things*, the eagle-stone was regarded as a powerful object, used in everyday medicine, and listed in a handbook of household healing recipes.

Over half a century later, in 1634, astrologer-physician John Evans published a book entitled *The Universal Medicine*, advertising a new remedial object: the antimonial cup. [Figure 2]. The virtues of antimony were not novel in early modern medicine. In the medieval period, this substance had been used in the form of pills, powders, grains and salts, and the late medieval philosopher Roger Bacon was known for using it as an oil. In fact, antimony had been at the centre of debates between Galenists and chymical physicians since the mid-sixteenth century.⁸ Evans’ ‘antimoniall cup’, however, offered an alternative

⁵ G. K. Hunter, ‘Lupton, Thomas (fl. 1572–1584), political and religious controversialist’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (September 23, 2004, Oxford University Press).
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-17204> [accessed 25 March 2019].

⁶ Lupton, *A thousand notable things of sundrie sortes*, 38; Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 50.

⁷ Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, (London, 1651), Thomason E.1340 [1], 151-3; Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 51; Sandra Cavallo, ‘Exhibit 17: Pregnant Stones as Wonders of Nature’, in Nick Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming and Lauren Kassell (eds.), *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 180-1.

⁸ R. Ian McCallum, *Antimony in Medical History: An account of the medical uses of Antimony and its compounds since Early Times to the Present*, (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1999); Allen G. Debus, Antimony in Medical History: An Account of the Medical Uses of Antimony and Its Compounds since Early Times to the Present (review), *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 74:2 (Summer 2000), 362-364; George Acton, *A letter in answer to certain quæries and objections made by a learned Galenist against the theorie and practice of chymical physick*, (London, 1670), 9.

method of application. Wine was poured inside the cup, heated and kept warm for at least twelve hours, and the contents were then drunk in the morning before breakfast. Doing so would ‘without any violence or danger’ purge one’s body from both ends, ‘which hardly any other medicine will doe’, as it ‘vanquished and expelled the enemies of Nature, and prevailed against all the impurities of the body.’⁹



Figure 2 – Antimony cup. Europe, 1501-1700. Object number: A641035.
Source: Science Museum, London.

The antimonial cup was a panacea. It prevented contagious and infectious maladies, preserved healthy, strong bodies, and cured countless ‘desperate and dangerous diseases’.¹⁰ Quite how it operated was uncertain, even to Evans. Whilst he regarded antimony as indisputably natural, as it was a mineral ‘contained

⁹ John Evans, *The vniversall medicine: or The vertues of the antimoniall cup*, (London, 1634), [6], [8], [9].

¹⁰ Evans, *The vniversall medicine*, [2].

within the bowels of the Earth', it affected each person differently according to what was 'most convenient and necessarie for the present estate and constitution of the body'.¹¹ The virtues of the antimonial cup were confirmed not just by significant members of society like the former Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Myddelton (d.1631) but also by 'Divine Authoritie, Nature, and Experience'; even so, Evans lamented that it was a 'never-sufficiently praised medicine'.¹² Yet despite condemnation, Evans was able to make a living selling his antimonial cup, and examples of these objects still exist in museum collections today.¹³



Figure 3 – Unknown artist, *Boy with Coral* (c.1670). Oil on canvas. 108.5 cm x 84 cm. Norwich: Strangers Hall, NWHCM : 1949.138.1. Source: Norfolk Museums Collection.

¹¹ Evans, *The vniversall medicine*, [3], [8].

¹² Evans, *The vniversall medicine*, [4], [7].

¹³ Bernard Capp, "Evans, John (b. 1594/5?, d. in or after 1659), astrologer and medical practitioner", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (September 23, 2004), Oxford University Press, accessed 25 March 2019. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-53669>. For other extant examples of the antimonial cup, see V&A Museum object number 1370-1900 and Royal College of Physicians, London, object numbers X409 and X410.

As the seventeenth-century drew to a close, an unknown artist completed an oil painting depicting a baby boy and his dog in a domestic scene. [Figure 3]. The picture shows the boy grasping a stick of coral which was adorned with bells, and attached to his waist by a length of red fabric. It is not known who created or commissioned this painting, but it is not a unique portrayal of this type of object. Many other paintings from this era depict babies and children with sticks of coral around their necks, waists or in their hands. A similar example can be seen in a portrait of the prestigious Capel family from the 1640s; a family of barons, ladies, duchesses and earls, in which the Capel baby is pictured with a piece of coral hanging from its waist. [Figure 4].



Figure 4 – Cornelius Johnson, *The Capel Family* (c.1640). Oil on canvas, 63 in. x 102 in.
London: National Portrait Gallery, accession number: NPG 4759.
Source: National Portrait Gallery.

Since antiquity, authorities such as Pliny had recognised the remedial potency of coral, and this belief persisted into the early modern period.¹⁴ For instance, having received his medical licence from the College of Physicians towards the end of the seventeenth century, John Pechey wrote about the

¹⁴ Pliny, *Natural History*.

‘magistry of coral’ as a curative and protective object.¹⁵ In a treatise concerning the diseases of infants and children, he lauded its virtues for fevers, small pox, convulsions, hiccups, vomiting, bowel problems, worms, navel rupture, and for ‘frights in sleep’.¹⁶ For this latter affliction, Pechey noted that ‘some in this case use Amulets, as Coral, or the tooth of a Wolf hung about the neck.’¹⁷ Sasha Handley has noted how some children were given coral as teething sticks in the early modern period, and Figure 5 provides a late example now owned by the V&A.¹⁸ Whether to protect against bad dreams or help cure toothache, the sticks of coral in these paintings provide examples of objects used in health and illness by wealthy, prominent families, and endorsed by licensed medical physicians.



Figure 5 – Child's rattle. London (possibly, made), 1775-1800. Silver gilt and coral. 13.1cm x 5cm x 5cm. London: V&A Museum, B.150-1997. Source: V&A Museum.

The eagle-stone, the antimonial cup and the sticks of coral were as different from one another as the people who wrote about, created, sold and used them. The objects themselves varied in terms of their materials, virtues, functions and intended users. Whilst the eagle-stone and coral were to be worn (at least for a finite amount of time), the antimonial cup had a more indirect relationship with the human body. All the materials had natural origins, but the eagle-stone

¹⁵ John Pechey, *A general treatise of the diseases of infants and children*, (London, 1697).

¹⁶ Pechey, *A general treatise*, 69-72 et passim.

¹⁷ Pechey, *A general treatise*, 72.

¹⁸ Sasha Handley, *Sleep in Early Modern England*, (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 98.

operated magnetically, the antimonial cup offered a restorative purge, and the coral could be used both curatively and prophylactically.

Each of these objects also represent a different facet of the changes and continuities of English healing. Antimony played a part in seventeenth-century medical debates between those who promoted the traditional practice of physic, and those who advocated newer theories of medicine. Evans, the creator of this antimonial cup, was advertising his new commodity and his adherence to a new philosophy. Consequently, his book *Universal Medicine* was shunned by some traditional physicians. The first edition was destroyed by the College of Physicians at the command of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and licensed physician James Primrose (d.1659) was among those who challenged Evans's claims regarding the efficacy of the cup, arguing that he was a quack who had 'misread his sources and exaggerated the authenticity and novelty of his methods'.¹⁹ Unlike the other two objects, the antimonial cup did not cure a specific affliction, but was a panacea for all ages and genders targeted at those who wished to forgo the traditional physician-patient consultation, and instead risk violent purges in favour of healing in the home. Its manufacture in the first half of the seventeenth-century reflected significant societal changes, as patients began to favour trading in things rather than words, and treating their illnesses rather than balancing their overall health.

At the same time, patients continued to use objects that had been part of medicine since antiquity. Coral, used by the Greeks and Romans as a remedy for poisoning and vomiting, remained in use as a healing object throughout the early modern era.²⁰ Similarly eagle-stones, mentioned by classical authorities like Theophrastus (387-271 BCE), Pliny (AD 23/4-79) and Dioscorides (40-90 AD), were still used on women's bodies used in the early modern period to facilitate a healthy pregnancy and birth.²¹ Despite their material and functional differences,

¹⁹ James Primrose, *The communal antimonial cup wide cast, or a treatise concerning the antimonial cup* (London, 1640), esp. 2, 4, 11, 31; Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: astrologer, alchemist, and physician*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 178.

²⁰ Maria Do Sameiro Barroso, 'Coral in Petrus Hispanus' 'Treasury of the Poor', in C.J. Duffin, C. Gardner-Thorpe and R.T.J. Moody, *Geology and Medicine: Historical Connections*, (London: The Geological Society, 2017), 267-282.

²¹ C.N. Bromehead, 'Aetites or the Eagle-stone', *Antiquity* 21:81 (March 1947), 16-22; 16.

these three objects were part of a repertoire of things used by early modern people to prevent disease and heal afflictions. While contemporary physicians and philosophers debated the efficacy of some items, these things present not a divisive image of early modern healing, but a diverse one, in which objects played a central role.

This thesis puts objects at the centre of an analysis of early modern healing. It brings together items that varied according to material, provenance, function, value and power, including amulets, books of ‘popular error’, bent pins, bezoar stones and ‘witch-bottles’, to ask questions about ideas and practices relating to health and illness in England between about 1500 and 1750. It contributes to recent scholarship that advocates object-focused histories, arguing that through an examination of underused material source-bases alongside an analysis of primary textual evidence, we can expand our knowledge of early modern medicine.²² Moreover, it argues for an expansion and diversification of how we define healing objects, and of what constituted healing in this period.

This dissertation contributes to histories of household medicine, recipes and secrets, magic, ritual, superstition, demonology and witchcraft, medical politics, curiosity and wonder, and collecting. These threads of research can be grouped into three, inter-connected themes, that run throughout the thesis: material culture, magic and medicine.

Material culture

What does it mean to study the material culture of healing in early modern England? Using England as a geographical focus has allowed me to examine objects and vernacular texts from a variety of national institutions, in the context of changes and continuities across early modern English society, theology and medicine. Occasionally I have examined objects or texts from other countries, as a means of comparison or in the absence of English material, but the main focus

²² Paula Findlen (ed.), *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500-1800*, (London: Routledge, 2012); Sasha Handley, ‘Objects, Emotions and an early modern bed-sheet’, *History Workshop Journal* 85 (Spring 2018), 169-94; Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway and Sarah Randles (eds.), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

of analysis remains how we can use things to elucidate our understanding of magic and healing in contemporary England.

In defining ‘material culture’, I have found it useful to borrow from Karen Harvey, who explains that unlike the words ‘object’, ‘artefact’, ‘item’ or ‘thing’, the term ‘material culture’ signifies not just attributes such as form, function or ownership, but the various contexts through which an object acquires meaning.²³ Research which investigates the material culture of a particular topic, time-period or culture does not therefore signify the study of inactive, static objects, but rather shows how these objects were an integral part of people’s lived experience.²⁴ The field of ‘material culture studies’ developed from several disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, history, and folklore (a field of great significance to this thesis, discussed further in a moment), expanding in recent decades to include art and design history, cultural and economic history, and literary studies.²⁵ Although traditionally favouring logocentric analysis, historians continue to learn from disciplines like anthropology, sociology, art history, design history and archaeology, which have all approached the study of material culture in different ways. My methods have been especially indebted to archaeological and anthropological approaches.

In 1986, Arjun Appadurai edited a volume entitled *The Social Life of Things*, which analysed the meanings people attribute to objects that are traded and exchanged in a variety of different temporal and cultural contexts. It included essays by various scholars on topics such as commoditization, consumption, and value. Its main aim was to examine objects as if they had social lives, moving towards ‘an anthropology of things’ by which the reader could better understand the concept of value in relation to objects.²⁶ Appadurai examines the traditional opposition of words and things in ‘contemporary Western common sense’, to

²³ Karen Harvey, ‘Introduction: practical matters’ in Karen Harvey (ed.), *History and material culture: a student’s guide to approaching alternative sources*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

²⁴ Anders Andrén, *Between Artifacts and Texts: Historical Archaeology in Global Perspective* (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 145-78.

²⁵ Hamling, Richardson and Gaimster (eds.), ‘Introduction’, 1-28.

²⁶ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Introduction: commodities and the politics of values’, 3-63; Igor Kopytoff, ‘The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process’, 64-94; Alfred Gell, ‘Newcomers to the world of goods: consumption among the Muria Gonds’, 110-40; Colin Renfrew, ‘Varna and the emergence of wealth in prehistoric Europe’, 141-68; all in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

argue that objects should be studied in detail in order to understand how human transactions ‘enliven things’. Thus, even though theoretically humans are the ones who encode objects with significance, methodologically the ‘things-in-motion’ illuminate their human and social contexts.²⁷ Kopytoff’s ‘cultural biography of things’ complements Appadurai’s argument, demonstrating how extended object biographies can act as useful models for detailed attention to things and their lives, from raw materials, through production and exchange:

Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognised “ages” or periods in the thing’s “life,” and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing’s use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?²⁸

This volume, and the individual scholarship of the authors who contributed to it, still represent some of the most prominent anthropological contributions to material culture studies. The work of Appadurai and Kopytoff provides a useful analytic framework for examining objects in this thesis; one that challenges the antiquarian tendencies of folklorists and archaeologists.

Archaeological approaches to the analysis of material culture have traditionally yielded surveys of assemblages rather than individual objects, whether on a smaller scale (such as a household) or a larger scale (such as a community). From the 1980s, changes within the discipline have signalled a move away from the established emphasis on the categorisation, typology, chronology and provenance of objects, to increasingly examine their symbolic value and social contexts.²⁹ One text in particular, Ralph Merrifield’s *Archaeology and the Ritual of Magic* (1987), exemplifies this shift towards contextual analysis by offering a systematic archaeological investigation of European evidence from the pre-Roman Iron age to the present day, supplemented with textual analysis. Although not influential in the field of archaeology in the way Appadurai or Kopytoff have been in the discipline of anthropology, Merrifield’s work provides important context for this thesis by arguing that magic and ritual ‘can be studied

²⁷ Appadurai, ‘Introduction: commodities and the politics of values’, 4-5.

²⁸ Igor Kopytoff, ‘The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process’, in Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*, 66-67.

²⁹ Richardson, Hamling and Gaimster (eds.), ‘Introduction’, 7-11.

objectively like any other human behaviour, and archaeology can make a major contribution towards its investigation' through an examination of extant evidence.³⁰ According to Merrifield, despite fundamental changes to religious belief, 'from primitive animism to developed paganism...to Christianity...and even from religious faith to scientific rationalism, the same kinds of simple ritual have survived to give comfort and a sense of security to humble people.'³¹ His study, whilst broadly chronological, is also structured thematically covering rituals of death, written spells, and charms against witchcraft.

Scholars have since built upon Merrifield's methodology, and his encouragement for archaeologists to document and analyse practices materially, conceptually and temporally, in a way that allows for contextualisation and comparison.³² Examples of distinct studies have included Brian Hoggard's thorough analysis of 'counter-witchcraft and popular magic', as well as a more focused investigation on 'witch-bottles'.³³ The latter topic formed a chapter of Ronald Hutton's edited volume *The Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain* (2015), which unites historical and archaeological method to present a material culture of magic.³⁴ Written in memory of Merrifield, the debt owed to him is evident, as Hutton notes how the volume aims to use 'material data' to fuel established textual debate concerning the history of magic in (mostly) Christian Britain.³⁵

Over the last three decades, material and visual sources have been increasingly favoured within the humanities, and this change has been noticeable within the study of early modern history. Traditionally, historians rarely made use of objects and images, and when they did it was not as evidence in its own right but to elucidate an existing point, to provide routes to past experience, or to exemplify

³⁰ Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, (London: Guild Publishing, 1987), esp. 184.

³¹ Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 185.

³² Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 192-5.

³³ Hoggard acknowledges the debt he owes to Merrifield at <http://www.apotropaios.co.uk/ralph-merrifield.html> (accessed 1 April 2019). Brian Hoggard, 'Witch-Bottles: Their contents, contexts and uses', in Ronald Hutton (ed.), *The Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain: a feeling for magic*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 91-105; Brian Hoggard, 'The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic', in Owen Davies & Willem de Blécourt (eds.), *Beyond the Witch-Trials: witchcraft and magic in Enlightenment Europe*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 167-186.

³⁴ Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*.

³⁵ Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, 12.

how certain things interact with broader narratives.³⁶ Tara Hamling has noted that generally if historians used objects or images, it was purely for illustrative purposes rather than as evidence on its own terms, whereas Leora Auslander has referred to historians' trust of words and suspicion of things as reliable source bases.³⁷ Not only has there been a growing literature condemning the logocentricity of historical studies, but scholarship now exists to support an independent field of early modern material culture studies.³⁸ Harvey has thus noted that historians are increasingly recognising the importance of objects not merely as reflective items that were made, used and discarded, but as an integral part of and something that defined human experience, active and autonomous.³⁹ Indeed, in the last decade historians have begun to explore in more detail the possible avenues of methodological interaction with objects, in order to use things alongside texts to reconstruct the patterns of meanings, values, and norms shared by members of society. Giorgio Riello, for instance, has interrogated the difference between 'history from things', 'history of things' and 'history and things', focusing on whether or not objects are the direct focus of study, or used as a tool to examine other relationships.⁴⁰

What can this thesis take from material culture studies, anthropology, sociology, and archaeology? Material culture studies advocates for the capacity of objects to elucidate the practices and values of the past. It offers a methodological framework for this thesis which places objects at the centre of

³⁶ Harvey, 'Introduction: practical matters', 7; Tara Hamling, 'Visual and material sources', in Laura Sangha and Jonathan Willis (eds.), *Understanding Early Modern Primary sources*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 129-152; 132; Leora Auslander, 'Beyond Words' *The American Historical Review*, 110:4 (October, 2005), 1015-45.

³⁷ Tara Hamling, 'Visual and material sources', in Sangha and Willis (eds.), *Understanding Early Modern Primary sources*, 129-152, 132; Auslander, 'Beyond Words'.

³⁸ Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster, 'Introduction', in Richardson, Hamling and Gaimster (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (London: Routledge, 2017), 1-28; Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds.), *Writing Material Culture History*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2015); Hamling, 'Visual and material sources', 132. On history 'beyond the text', see Harvey (ed.), *History and Material Culture*; Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird (eds.), *History beyond the text: students guide* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁹ Ludmilla Jordanova, *The look of the past: visual and material evidence in historical practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Harvey (ed.), *History and Material Culture*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge, 2009; 2018), 3-4.

⁴⁰ Giorgio Riello, 'Things that Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives', in Harvey (ed.), *History and Material Culture*, 26. See also Giorgio Riello, 'Introduction: Writing Material Culture History' in Gerritsen and Riello (eds.), *Writing Material Culture History*, 5.

historical study; where things are the focus of investigation, and are examined alongside, but are not subordinate to, textual analysis. In order to look at healing in early modern England, I analyse a selection of objects which have never before been studied together. Each require me to use different perspectives. Anthropology, archaeology and material culture studies have all informed the sources which I have used, and the questions I have asked. In return, this thesis provides a model of how to take things on their own terms, regardless of whether or not they coexist alongside textual evidence.

Another important part of material culture is collection, as the study of collecting concerns how certain objects have been valued over time and space. This is a pertinent theme in this thesis, which asks which objects have been considered worthy of collection both in the early modern period and today, and how and why this has changed over time. Discussing collection today, Riello distinguishes between ‘unique objects’ usually found in museum collections, and ‘traded commodities’, which mostly do not. The former are favoured due to their ‘material beauty, exceptional value or imaginative power’, as things that ‘epitomise a cultural encounter’, whereas the latter represent ‘the consuming habits of many Europeans, stand for patterns of exchange and are studied as types rather than individual things.’⁴¹ Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall have argued that the different values we assign to objects were conceived in the early modern period, when collecting became a popular antiquarian past-time, and cabinets of curiosities and the first public museums were created. During this time, people began to categorise things and assign them to a particular hierarchy based on socially-constructed value.⁴² But how did early modern people decide what they wanted to collect?

Collectors coveted wondrous and curious objects that pushed the normal boundaries of nature, such as the ‘pregnant’ eagle-stone and or the ‘plant-mineral’ coral. Indeed, the history of collecting and its relationship with the early modern interest in curiosity and wonder yields important context for this research. Building on work by Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, who

⁴¹ Riello, ‘Things that Shape History’.

⁴² Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall (eds.), *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 2.

discussed early forms of collecting, cabinets of curiosity and the origins of museums, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park have explored how the early modern interest in natural objects and phenomena that were wondrous, rare, odd and exotic led to a culture which favoured curious objects.⁴³ Paula Findlen has discussed the things deemed worthy of collection in early modern Italy, asking why nature became a subject deserving of study over the course of the period, and how early museums were situated within the culture of scientific enquiry.⁴⁴ Sometimes, objects were valued and collected both for their wonder and curiosity (and thus antiquarian desirability), and also for the healing power they possessed. The fourth chapter of this thesis uses the bezoar stone to examine this relationship between medical virtuosity and antiquarian curiosity.

As well as collecting wondrous and exotic objects, early modern antiquaries were also interested in collecting popular practices, as we will see in Chapter Two. The interest in collecting popular customs assumed a more sociological tone in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴⁵ Peter Burke has noted that during this period, ‘people’ or ‘folk’ became a subject of interest to European intellectuals, with ‘folklore’ as a word and a concept being coined by William Thoms in 1846.⁴⁶ While disciplinary boundaries were not sharp at this time, the fields we now know as local history, social history and cultural history were all treated as marginal subjects by the majority within academic history.⁴⁷ From the 1920s, as these borders became more distinct, folklore did not secure a place within English universities as it did elsewhere. Instead it was eclipsed by anthropology, and in the words of Ronald Hutton, folklore was ‘completely divorced’ from academic history.⁴⁸

⁴³ Oliver R. Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe*, (London: House of Stratus, 2001); R.J.W. Evans and Alexander Marr, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

⁴⁴ Paula Findlen, *Possessing nature: museums, collecting, and scientific culture in early modern Italy*, (London: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴⁵ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 1st ed. 1978; (3rd ed.: Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 38.

⁴⁶ Burke, *Popular Culture*, 3rd ed., 23; Peter Burke, ‘History and folklore: a historiographical survey’, *Folklore* 115:2 (2004), 133-9; 134.

⁴⁷ Burke, ‘History and Folklore’, 134.

⁴⁸ Ronald Hutton, ‘The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore’, *Past & Present* 148 (Aug., 1995), 89-116; 92.

Whilst British folklore may still be located in a ‘position of academic marginality’, recently academics from various disciplines have turned to the data gathered by folklorists and collectors as an important historical source. The importance of the work done by eighteenth and nineteenth century folklorists and collectors is of great significance to this study.⁴⁹ Particularly pertinent to this thesis are the work and collections of three men: entrepreneur and pharmacist Henry Wellcome (1853-1936), folklorist Edward Lovett (1852-1933) and anthropologist Adrien de Mortillet (1853-1931), who all collected physical evidence and amassed large assemblages of things (including early modern healing objects) that were later given to national museums. A significant part of the current amulet collection at the Science Museum in London is comprised of items originally collected by Wellcome and Lovett, and many of de Mortillet’s amulets are presently owned by the Horniman Museum in London. The work undertaken by collectors and folklorists in the late 1800s and early 1900s has therefore provided crucial research tools for those studying early modern material culture, including classification systems, indexes, thorough bibliographies and annotated collections.⁵⁰ The advantages and challenges arising from their work is discussed in detail in Chapter One, and remains a recurrent theme throughout this thesis.

So, too, is the challenge brought by modern museum categorisations, which, in the case of early modern healing objects, are often informed by the work of collectors such as Wellcome and Lovett. Towards the mid nineteenth-century, folklorist Ellen Ettlinger (1902-94) was among the first to try and explain how amulets were categorised and valued in different museums. Ettlinger classified institutions as ‘A’ or ‘B’ museums according to whether they arranged objects by type (‘A’ museums) or by theme (‘B’ museums), and whether they valued objects by artistic or historical quality (‘A’ museums, like the British Museum) or as amulets (‘B’ museums, such as the Horniman Museum).⁵¹ This

⁴⁹ Dan Ben-Amos, ‘A History of Folklore Studies: Why Do We Need It?’, *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 10:1/2, (Jun. - Aug., 1973), 113-124, 118. Although Gentilcore has argued how scholars have often ‘sifted and extracted’ useful bits of information. David Gentilcore, ‘Was There a "Popular Medicine" in Early Modern Europe?’, *Folklore*, 115:2 (Aug., 2004), 151-166; 151.

⁵⁰ Ben-Amos, ‘A History of Folklore Studies: Why Do We Need It?’, 115.

⁵¹ Ellen Ettlinger, ‘British Amulets in London Museums’, *Folklore*, 50:2 (June, 1939), 148-175. Also see Ellen Ettlinger, ‘Documents of British Superstition in Oxford’, *Folklore*, 54:1 (March,

thesis asks many of the same questions, not only of modern museums, but also of early modern collectors, examining how certain objects have been favoured across time, and how classifications affect this research.

It is important to address not only how contemporaries thought about specific objects, but also how we today think and write about ‘their’ objects, as a means of accessing and examining history. The argument central to Sean Silver’s work *The Mind is a Collection* (2015) is to avoid separating the material from the conceptual. Silver contends that we should not only view cabinets and the items inside them purely as material curiosities, but also as the history of ideas, which can tell us about how people conceptualised their world. He presents his work as a self-styled ‘museum’, taking the form of both a book and website, where Silver ‘reorients the study of minds and things’ by exploring early modern cognitive models, and addressing the split between mind and matter.⁵² The trope of ‘epistemic dualism’ is at the core of Silver’s work, and serves to remind us that subject and object are irreversibly connected. The problems arising from this dualism can be ‘pried open’ via studies of objects. In every chapter or ‘case’, Silver examines a different object, and with it a different concept. Each chapter of this thesis does the same.

Medicine

As noted in the discussion of material culture, scholars over the last three decades have increasingly favoured material and visual sources, a change which is perceptible in the study of early modern history. Yet within the history of medicine, studies centred around material culture have only more recently emerged.⁵³ Sandra Cavallo has noted how, with the exception of Elaine Leong and Sara Pennell’s work on domestic healing from 2007 onwards, initial research

1943), 227-249; and Ellen Ettlinger, ‘The Hildburgh Collection of Austrian and Bavarian Amulets in the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, *Folklore*, 76:2 (Summer, 1965), 104-117.

⁵² Sean Silver, *The Mind is a Collection: case studies in eighteenth-century thought*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

⁵³ Sandra Cavallo, ‘Health, Air and Material Culture in the Early Modern Italian Domestic Environment’, *Social History of Medicine*, 29:4, (November 2016), 695–716; 695. See Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers and Harold J. Cook (eds.), *Ways of Making and knowing: the material culture of empirical knowledge*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt (eds.), *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects, Texts, 1400-1800*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

on the material culture of medicine has focused on ‘objects that can more immediately be defined as ‘medical’’.⁵⁴ These included things designed specifically for medical procedures or treatment (like tools for surgery, or corsets for hernias), or things used for demonstration or the exchange of medical knowledge (like anatomical models). Other objects used for healing have mostly been examined in histories of trade, making, cultural exchange, or in texts on specific topics such as stones.⁵⁵

Several scholars have begun to address this omission. Evelyn Welch’s research, including *Making and marketing medicine in Renaissance Florence* (2012), co-authored with James Shaw, offers significant analyses of the material culture of health and illness in early modern Europe, with a particular focus on Italy.⁵⁶ Moreover, *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy* (2013), a volume co-edited by Cavallo and Tessa Storey, highlights the medical significance of seemingly ‘mundane’, household objects and practices, from foot warmers to tennis racquets.⁵⁷ Following on from Sasha Handley’s work on objects, emotions and sleep, there remains space for a similar volume on the material culture of early modern English healing.⁵⁸ This thesis takes the first step. Building upon the work done by Cavallo, Storey, Handley and others, it demonstrates how early modern English healing stretched beyond the restrictions of modern definitions of what constitutes health and illness.

Recent interest in the more quotidian aspects of the history of medicine and the material culture of healing stemmed from studies of ‘popular culture’; the customs, practices and rituals of the lower orders. Despite a long-standing tradition of antiquarianism and folklore, it was only around the late 1960s and 1970s within contexts of increasing interdisciplinarity and the rise of social

⁵⁴ Cavallo, ‘Health, Air and Material Culture’, 695. See also Elaine Leong and Sara Pennell, ‘Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern Medical Marketplace’, in Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies, c. 1450- c.1850*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Elaine Leong, ‘Making Medicines in the Early Modern Household’, *Bull. Hist. Med* 82:1 (2008), 145-168.

⁵⁵ For instance, Christine Göttler and Mia Mochizuki (eds.), *The Nomadic Object: The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Smith and Schmidt (eds.), *Making Knowledge in early modern Europe*.

⁵⁶ James E. Shaw and Evelyn Welch, *Making and Marketing Medicine in Renaissance Florence*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

⁵⁷ Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey, *Healthy Living in Renaissance Italy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁸ Handley, *Sleep in early modern England*.

history, microhistory, the history of everyday life, and the history of material culture that historians ‘rediscovered’ popular culture.⁵⁹ So began the rise of ‘history from below’, a phrase first used by social historian E.P. Thompson in 1980 to denote a methodology which attempts to present the experiences and perspectives of ordinary people, rather than elite men.⁶⁰ Popular culture therefore became central to the interests of historians such as Keith Thomas on England, Carlo Ginzburg on Italy, and Natalie Zemon Davis on France.⁶¹

Yet even as historians engaged with the study of popular culture, they recognised that it came with complexities. Peter Burke, for instance, acknowledged the difficulties in defining the term ‘popular culture’ between the publication of his book in 1978 and its revision in 1988. ‘Culture’, he wrote, is a ‘system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms in which they are expressed or embodied’.⁶² After considering the growth of cultural studies during the 1980s, Burke noted that ‘popular culture’ was ‘perhaps best defined initially in a negative way as an unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite, the ‘subordinate classes’’.⁶³ In the case of early modern Europe, the non-elite were a multitude of ‘more or less definite social groups’ of whom the most prominent were craftsmen and peasants. Burke acknowledged however that the term ‘popular culture’ gives a false impression of homogeneity, and that it might be better to use this phrase in the plural, instead discussing ‘popular cultures’ or ‘culture of the popular classes’. Furthermore, noting the common objection against the binary distinction of elite versus popular culture, Burke acknowledged that the borderline between the two lacks definition, and so scholarly concentration should be on interaction rather than division between them.⁶⁴ The

⁵⁹ Burke, ‘History and Folklore’, 136-7; Roy Porter, ‘The Patient’s View: Doing Medical History from Below’, *Theory and Society* 14:2 (1985), 175-198.

⁶⁰ Although the term was first published by E. P. Thompson in an article entitled ‘History from Below’ in *The Times Literary Supplement*, (1966), the first academic monograph that described this term in detail was E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980).

⁶¹ Burke, *Popular Culture*, 3rd ed., xvi. See for instance: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, (London: Penguin, 1973); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 1966 (Engl. trans. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

⁶² Burke, *Popular Culture*, (1994 rev. repr.) xi.

⁶³ Burke, *Popular Culture*, (1994), xi.

⁶⁴ Burke, *Popular Culture*, (1994), xvi.

most fundamental problem arose from the fact that a ‘culture’ is a system with vague boundaries, which can refer to almost everything than can be learned in a given society; how to eat, drink, walk, talk, and many more. With these nuances in mind, this thesis borrows from Burke to define ‘popular culture’ as the attitudes or values of the non-elite, lower orders of society, as expressed through a variety of practices, texts, images, objects and rituals.⁶⁵

What about the study of ‘popular medicine’? Within early modern medicine there was far more overlap and interaction between professions than today, although a dichotomy still existed. David Gentilcore has shown how in Italy, physicians and scholars were aware of and indeed criticised ‘popular medicine’, which at this time denoted anything other than medicine carried out by traditionally-educated and licensed physicians.⁶⁶ In the history of medicine, it was only after 1985 when Roy Porter promoted patient-centred histories, that studies have more often represented the lay experience of health and illness.⁶⁷ In 1986, Harold Cook coined the term ‘medical marketplace’ to denote a sphere of healers including more than merely formally educated men.⁶⁸ Other historians, in a growing body of medical marketplace literature, have demonstrated a plurality of early modern medical practitioners and emphasised the patient’s increasing agency in choosing their treatment. Religious intervention, which could include prayer or practices such as fasting, remained a significant facet of healing. Yet within the medical sphere, theories concerning suitable methods of healing varied. The prescribed cure would depend on which type of practitioner was consulted: whether a Galenic humoralist, or a healer who employed any one or more of several other medical theories that ran alongside, including Paracelsian, sympathetic or magnetic medicine (discussed in particular depth in Chapter Five).⁶⁹ Within this context of medical competition, the elite, university-educated

⁶⁵ Fuchs, ‘Book Review: Peter Burke - Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe’, 186-90.

⁶⁶ Gentilcore, ‘Was There a "Popular Medicine" in Early Modern Europe?’, 151.

⁶⁷ Porter, ‘The Patient’s View’, 175-198.

⁶⁸ Harold Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*, (London: Cornell University Press, 1986). See also Jenner and Wallis (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies*; Margaret Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London: Patronage, Physicians and Irregular Practitioners, 1550-1640*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁹ David Harley, ‘Mental illness, magical medicine and the Devil in Northern England, 1650-1700’, in Roger French and Andrew Wear (eds.), *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 114-144; 119-121 et passim. For an overview on different types of healers and the competition between them in early modern

physicians, some of whom authored books of ‘popular error’ in medicine (explored in Chapter Two), attacked ‘empiricks’ and the rise of proprietary medicine, feeling threatened by cures such as the antimonial cup.

Gentilcore’s research is useful in tracking the progression of ‘popular medicine’ over time, and understanding how today, this topic remains the subject of debate and re-definition. Indeed, historians such as Mary Lindemann, Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones are among the early modern historians who have disagreed that popular medicine existed at all, and do not believe that popular culture generated a ‘clearly distinct and autonomous medical culture’.⁷⁰ Even if it did, they contended, there would be ‘no means to access it’.⁷¹ Such historians have instead offered models to show how medical knowledge was diffused from the centre to the periphery, and that doctors and patients shared a common language.⁷²

One answer to the limitations of conventional sources for histories of medicine which document everyday practices, has been to turn to household and domestic healing. Books of secrets - compilations of recipes and information about a variety of subjects, from the medical to the culinary - provide a formative source for my research, and were first examined by William Eamon in 1994.⁷³ Scholars such as Roy Porter, Andrew Wear and Lucinda Beier have indicated the breadth of the genre of ‘secrets’ by investigating sources other than merely printed books, such as manuscript recipe collections, letters and practitioners’

England, see Jenner and Wallis (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies*; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts*. On domestic medicine, see Lucinda McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Routledge, 1987); Leong, ‘Making Medicines in the Early Modern Household’, 145-168.

⁷⁰ Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16; Mary Lindemann, unpublished research paper from 1999 in Gentilcore, ‘Was There a “Popular Medicine” in Early Modern Europe?’, 157-8.

⁷¹ Brockliss and Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France*, 16.

⁷² John Henry, ‘Doctors and Healers: Popular Culture and the Medical Profession’, in Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo Rossi, and Maurice Slawinski (eds.), *Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 191-221; 203.

⁷³ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of secrets in medieval and early modern culture*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). For more on the role of recipe books in early modern medicine, and for examples of recipes’ creation and use, see Elaine Leong and Sara Pennell, ‘Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern “Medical Marketplace”’, in Jenner and Wallis, *Medicine and the Market*, 133-152; Elaine Leong, ‘Receipt Books c1571-1800, From the Folger Shakespeare Library – Editorial Introduction’, *Adam Matthews Publication*, (July 2006), http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/receipt_books_from_the_folger_shakespeare_library/editorial-introduction.aspx [accessed 20 August 2018].

casebooks.⁷⁴ Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin have focused on everyday knowledge exchange at a domestic level using these sources.⁷⁵ As many of the objects examined in this thesis would have been discussed, recommended, made, shared and used by people in domestic environments, this research provides crucial context. As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, books of secrets were often condemned by elite physicians. Many of the recipes within these books explained how to manipulate hidden powers; taught how to produce strange and marvelous effects; or demonstrated how to exploit the wondrous natural virtues of stones, plants or animals. This occult knowledge threatened the traditional and exclusive learning of the licensed physician, and the growth of print meant that this information was available to an increasingly wide range of people. As such, secrets came to be closely associated with magic, as both denoted the action of bringing about change in the course of natural events.⁷⁶

Magic

Magic is a term that is vital to early modern histories of healing, yet is complex, and difficult to define and use. Although today, modern ‘Western’ rationality considers magic as irrational, even ‘wrong-headed and embarrassing’, the root of these pejorative connotations lies in early modern religious and philosophical contexts.⁷⁷ In his 1661 dictionary of ‘hard words’, antiquarian and lexicographer Thomas Blount defined “‘Magick Art’ (magia)” as ‘wisdom, or contemplation of heavenly Sciences’. He noted that there were two types of magic:

Natural, which is lawful, and is the ground of all true Physick, and the occult wisdom of nature, without which all mans Reason and Knowledge is Ignorance; The other is Diabolical, superstitious and unlawful, and is

⁷⁴ Beier, *Sufferers and Healers*.

⁷⁵ Elaine Leong, *Recipes and everyday knowledge: medicine, science, and the household in early modern England*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Alisha Rankin and Elaine Leong (eds.), *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500–1800*, (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁷⁶ William Eamon, ‘Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Science’, *Sudhoffs Archiv*, Bd. 69, H. 1 (1985), 26-49; 29.

⁷⁷ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in early modern Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2005 repr.; 215; Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Pub, 2007), esp. 2-3; Michael D Bailey, ‘The Meanings of Magic’, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1:1 (Summer 2006), 1-23; Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

called *Necromancy*; whereby men attain to the knowledge of things by the assistance of evil spirits.⁷⁸

Early modern physicians such as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (or ‘Agrippa’, 1486-1535) and Theophrastus von Hohenheim (or ‘Paracelsus’, 1493-1541) similarly divided magic into two categories: natural and demonic. How to distinguish between different types of magic is the key theme of Frank Klaassen’s *Transformations of Magic* (2013), which uses magical manuscripts to provide a history of magic from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries.⁷⁹ Loosely defined, natural magic was a practical art which used the natural powers of things to achieve certain desired effects, including physiological changes which could heal human or animal bodies from disease. Natural magic had considerable intellectual appeal across broad sections of the scholarly community. It was a dominant influence on Paracelsus, Italian scholar Giambattista Della Porta (1535-1615), and polymath Samuel Hartlib (1600-62), as well as members of the Royal Society such as John Aubrey (1626-97), Elias Ashmole (1617-92) and Robert Plot (1640-96).⁸⁰ Even when learned authorities did not wish to practice natural magic themselves, they sought to comprehend its operations.⁸¹

Indeed, while many physicians used forms of magic to understand disease causation and provide cure and protection, philosophers debated the limits of the natural world and to what extent magical power could be natural. For many, the distinction between natural and demonic magic (magic that derived its potency from the Devil) was clear: natural magic implied approbation, not condemnation; it was rooted in philosophical, as opposed to theological discourse; and it had a discontinuous, rather than persistent history.⁸² Yet for others, who doubted that any magic could be natural, it was met with scepticism. Emphasising these nuanced boundaries, Klaassen has also introduced the term ‘ritual’ magic to

⁷⁸ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia, or, A dictionary interpreting all such hard words of whatsoever language now used in our refined English tongue*, (London, 1661), [196].

⁷⁹ Frank Klaassen, *The transformations of magic: illicit learned magic in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

⁸⁰ Leigh Whaley, ‘The Wise-Woman as Healer – Popular Medicine, Witchcraft and Magic’ in Whaley, *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800*, 178. Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 217-221.

⁸¹ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 1-2.

⁸² Richard Kieckhefer, ‘The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic’, *The American Historical Review*, 99:3 (June, 1994), 813-36; 818-19.

denote magical operations that dealt with the summoning of, and conversing with, spirits such as angels or demons, or that draw upon astrological images and talismans to effect changes in the natural world.⁸³

Key to understanding the complexities of early modern magic and magical healing is comprehending demonology, superstition and ritual in the context of the Protestant Reformation.⁸⁴ Demonologists throughout this period consistently debated what could be achieved in the natural world, and where the line was drawn between natural and diabolical power.⁸⁵ They agreed that certain key principles governed the way in which objects and practices were conceived. Whilst repeated, performative actions had always been an essential component of Western culture and the medieval church, the idea of 'ritual', and the word itself, were only conceived in the sixteenth century. Before this time, the word 'rite' was often used to denote customary ceremonies, both religious and lay. This changed during the Protestant Reformation in the first half of the sixteenth-century, when reformers began to question how religious rites worked. Within traditional Catholicism, certain practices had the ability to alter materials, invest them with potency, and physically to bring something into being, as was the case with transubstantiation. Uttering sacred words over material objects, for instance, was believed to alter their substance and efficacy. In his discussion of early modern ritual Edward Muir, calls this 'the doctrine of presence'.⁸⁶

During the Reformation, the doctrine of presence and the meaning of rituals were contested. Belief was separated from the physical enactment of ritualised actions, as Protestant reformers instead espoused what Muir has called a 'theory of representation'. According to this theory, rites were not understood as behaviours that created and enacted states of being, or invested something

⁸³ Klaassen, *The transformations of magic*; Frank Klaassen, 'Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance', *Aries* 3 (2003), 166-99.

⁸⁴ Such theological problems were also previously raised in the medieval era. See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 285.

⁸⁵ For example, Jean Bodin claimed that nothing was impossible, whereas Reginald Scot claimed the opposite. Clark notes that 'insisting that the Devil worked within nature, specifically preternature, had the effect of building demonology on shifting sands.' Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 177; 182-4.

⁸⁶ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.

with power, but as features of language that communicated meaning: signs.⁸⁷ Consequently, Protestants argued that the Eucharist no longer yielded Christ's physical body, but instead merely reminded Christian believers of his sacrifice. All people (even magicians and witches, who had no greater capacity than ordinary humans) were constrained by the same natural limits. So, whereas Catholicism allowed more room for human operations to manipulate divine power, reformers deemed certain Catholic rituals utterly ineffective. Protestants argued that true religion relied on justification by faith alone, meaning that such religious practices only symbolised God's power.⁸⁸ The term 'ritual' was therefore originally used pejoratively to describe ungodly, traditionally Catholic practices that were ascribed to the doctrine of presence, in opposition to 'true', reformed religion that adopted the theory of representation. Such rituals were condemned as 'ceremonious', 'idolatrous', and 'superstitious', indicating that they were faulty in nature; the terms 'natural' and 'superstitious' becoming conceptually antithetical within early modern theology and natural philosophy.⁸⁹

What did all of this mean for people who used objects for healing in this period? Just as Reformers saw the Eucharist merely as a representation of Christ's body, following the Reformation certain physicians and theologians argued that some healing objects, and the curative or protective acts carried out with them (such as bending a pin, or dropping a coin down a well to remedy a disease) were devoid of natural power, since they could not operate normally within the limits of nature. Where things, and acts involving things, were devoid of natural, godly power, Protestant authorities argued that they must therefore be tokens or signs of a different kind of efficacy: namely, demonic power.⁹⁰ The Devil was thus invoked whenever somebody took an action that, either deliberately or through ignorance, assumed natural power that did not exist.

Whilst nature's limits restricted what real effects the Devil could produce, there were no such limits on what he appeared to do. Laypeople were easily deceived by demonic effects, mistaking the potency of particular objects and

⁸⁷ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 8.

⁸⁸ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 106.

⁸⁹ The classic account of this process, focusing on Protestant England, remains Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Bailey, 'The Meanings of Magic', 8.

⁹⁰ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 199.

practices as natural or godly due to their ignorance.⁹¹ This notion was explained clearly by Thomas Erastus (1524-83), a Swiss physician who wrote: ‘Whoever tries with natural instruments to do things that surpass the strength of nature, using neither the help of God nor that of good Angels, is necessarily appealing for demonic aid by means of an open or secret pact.’⁹² This ‘pact’ was said to be ‘tacit’ or ‘implicit’, to distinguish it from the explicit, open contract that witches intending harm were believed to enter into. The condemnation of certain practices as ‘superstitious’ and as ‘ritual’ thus applied not only to Catholic practices, but also to any acts which were not considered to evoke natural power – including many early modern healing practices involving curative and protective objects. Contemporaries disagreed about the distinction between the acceptable and the unacceptable, generating detailed analyses about which practices, beliefs and objects were superstitious, and how to distinguish them from acceptable acts.⁹³ Chapter Two provides an example of how some authors went to great lengths to dissuade improperly educated people from engaging in superstitious acts.⁹⁴

The contexts in which these theological discussions took place have recently been addressed by historians, although given the immense popularity of the study of witchcraft and magic, few historians have accorded debates concerning contemporary demonology relative attention.⁹⁵ Demonological theory has been significantly addressed by Stuart Clark in an expansive and significant work entitled *Thinking With Demons* (1997), which has been instrumental to this thesis in understanding and explaining contemporary metaphysics.⁹⁶ Complementing Clark’s theological analysis, Euan Cameron has

⁹¹ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 161-5.

⁹² Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 281.

⁹³ Stuart Clark, ‘Demons and Disease: The disenchantment of the sick (1500-1700)’, in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Hilary Marland and Hans de Waardt (eds.), *Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 38-58; 45-6.

⁹⁴ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: superstition, reason and religion, 1250-1750*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2. Helen Parish (ed.), *Superstition and Magic in early modern Europe: a reader*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁹⁵ Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 177.

⁹⁶ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, vii. By the 1980s, while modern studies abounded, little attention had been paid to contemporary intellectual beliefs, historians instead favouring the social and institutional configurations of witch-hunting and patterns of prosecution. Clark instead analysed the development European witchcraft and demonology as cultural constructs, and discussed their significant relations with the central areas of early modern intellectual debate,

provided a broad survey of the European Reformation in *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason and Religion, 1250-1750* (2010), spanning 500 years of religious and superstitious history.⁹⁷ In particular, Cameron's text is useful in understanding key terms such as 'magic' and 'superstition' in late medieval and early modern contexts. The way that the meanings of these terms have changed over time is a significant theme in this thesis, especially with regards to how early modern healing objects are uncritically labelled today. For instance, some objects are labelled as 'superstitious' without acknowledging of the difference between the early modern and modern implications of this word. Discussed most comprehensively in Chapter One, this is a notion which recurs throughout the thesis.

These three sections have demonstrated how studies of material culture, medicine and magic have influenced this thesis. Magic, particularly the significant work done on early modern demonology, provides important context for this PhD by elucidating post-Reformation theological changes, and how authorities conceptualised ritual. This thesis fills a gap in the scholarship on magic by offering a study of magical healing objects, and by examining how objects fit into these theological discussions and changes. My study explores curative, protective and vexatious objects, and the fine line between natural and superstitious, demonic power. Historians of early modern medicine have recently engaged with objects as a significant source base. In this thesis, I build upon work that examines objects not strictly classed as 'medical' in order to explore healing. Finally, material culture studies provide a structure of analysis with which to think about objects. This thesis affords a new way of using objects in historical analysis, by providing a methodology of how to take objects on their own terms.

exploring the relationship of demonological writing within language, science, history, religion, and politics: the five parts of his book.

⁹⁷ Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*. Notwithstanding its scope, the more concise nature of Cameron's work complements Clark's volume, and whilst primarily theological in nature it presents a large range of attitudes to superstition. Cameron delimits his study to focus only on elite intellectuals and theologians, omitting engagement with the wider population. Consequently, those people for whom such 'superstitious acts' clearly embedded in their social and domestic landscape (whom Clark notes are the ones who continued such superstitious practices) are overlooked by Cameron in favour of a broader comprehension of the attitudes of elite churchmen. Whilst *Enchanted Europe* does not represent the entire narrative of early modern demonology, superstition and magical practices, and where an approach considering 'history from below' could add breadth, it provides thorough contextual situation of theological theory which is fundamental to this thesis.

Sources

In order to write an object-centred history of early modern healing, I identified certain extant items that would act as the basis of my analysis. The largest source of objects examined in this thesis is from museums, their archives and databases. I drew objects from a variety of institutions, mainly across England and Ireland but also from Europe and North America, including: the Science Museum, British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum of London, Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, Hunt Museum, Metropolitan Museum, and Norfolk Museums Collection. Online and open-access digital archives such as the Archaeological Data Service (ADS), and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), which digitally record finds from members of the public, have also been useful. Using this wide variety of source-bases has enabled me to locate and examine a broad range of objects, many of which have not been identified as a part of the histories of medicine or magic, to show how they should be realigned within these spheres.

One of the greatest challenges I faced during my research was posed by object records and museum catalogues, since many lack accurate or detailed information regarding date, function or history of the object. This presented difficulties when attempting to connect material and textual records, and is a subject discussed in detail in the first chapter. In fact, I often analysed objects that had little or no textual evidence regarding their worth or use, such as the breverl or wheel of fortune from Chapter One, or the bent pins in Chapter Three. While this made analysing these items more challenging, it meant that I was able to examine them as a facets of the material culture of contemporary magic and medicine without the influence or bias of preceding analyses.

The second body of sources is textual. Like book historians, I argue that text itself is material and should be considered as an object, rather than merely a means through which ideas are communicated.⁹⁸ This thesis provides many examples of the agency of texts, where they intervene and affect the dynamics of

⁹⁸ On early modern book history, see for example Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (eds.), *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Daniel Bellingradt, Paul Nelles and Jeroen Salman (eds.), *Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe: Beyond Production, Circulation and Consumption*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

contemporary medical politics; a topic under particular scrutiny in Chapter Two. Despite occasional absences, as discussed above, texts have also been useful in contextualising the healing objects under discussion. This research has predominantly drawn upon printed, vernacular medical texts. Information that had long been part of a Latin manuscript tradition was increasingly printed into the vernacular in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries following the European invention of the printing press, and as such, access to and dissemination of medical knowledge became increasingly easy across this period. While Elizabeth Lane Furdell has identified two hundred printers and booksellers who dealt with medical texts in London between 1475 and 1700, Mary Fissell has stated that by the eighteenth century, there was one vernacular medical work for every four families.⁹⁹ The printed medical texts used in this thesis were authored by a range of medical practitioners, both licensed and unlicensed. They have been examined not only for their medical discourse, but also for their dedications, advertisements, and publishing information. This thesis has also examined texts by writers who did not exclusively identify with medical practice, but instead recorded popular customs, wrote recipe books, or identified errors. I have occasionally made use of other printed and manuscript sources in the form of inventories, court proceedings, plays, poems and ballads, which contain references to objects or healing practices.

Structure

The five chapters in this thesis perform different interventions within the histories of early modern material culture, magic and medicine, using objects as a focus. As previously noted, these interventions are themed around collection and categorisation, medical politics and empiricism, objects' relationship with human (and occasionally animal) bodies, witchcraft and demonology, rarities and curiosity, and household medicine, recipes and secrets. Each chapter examines a different object or group of objects, and thus focuses on a different theme. However, these interventions nevertheless overlap and interconnect throughout

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England*, (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 49; Mary E. Fissell, 'The Marketplace of Print', in Jenner and Wallis (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies*, 114.

the thesis, naturally arising in the process of examining how each object was used, collected, contextualised, discussed and valued. This thesis thus shows how the study of objects can elucidate a wide variety of topics. Each chapter moreover demonstrates the rich landscape of early modern healing objects, and the various source bases available.

The thesis is structured to first provide context regarding how early modern healing objects have been collected and categorised by contemporaries, by late nineteenth and early twentieth century collectors, and today. Next, the second chapter examines the changing critical contemporary response to healing objects, asking why certain objects were condemned by physicians but still used by laypeople. The third and fourth chapters then comparatively analyse the power and value of two very different objects, asking how both acted as healing objects, yet only one held positive social worth. Finally, a healing object used towards the end of the period that has often been miscategorised brings together the main themes of the preceding chapters.

Chapter One, 'Amulets', discusses nine extant museum objects labelled as amulets, their role in early modern healing, and their categorisation within modern collections. Objects labelled as amulets have often been conceptually disassociated from healing within museums, with the result that amulets are underused by historians of medicine. This chapter, however, confirms the importance and use of amulets within early modern healing. It asks: what are early modern amulets, what have they been used for, and how have they been collected and categorised? In examining nine items materially and conceptually, this chapter interrogates the definition of the word 'amulet', and offers a revised interpretation that recognises the real, potent part played by amulets in early modern health and well-being, while simultaneously demonstrating the virtues of an object-based focus for the history of contemporary healing. As extant early modern healing objects are often uncritically classified as amulets by museums and literature alike, this chapter affords a crucial context to the thesis as a whole. Moreover, this chapter highlights the issues between early modern and modern categorisation, and the need to reconsider classifications within museum collections.

Chapter Two, 'Popular Errors', analyses three texts from a body of early modern literature known to contemporaries as 'popular' or 'vulgar' 'errors': catalogues of popular fallacies. I ask: Who were the errors authors, what objects did they consider erroneous, and why? The three books examined in this chapter condemned errors within medicine, and were compiled by physicians. It examines why the authors considered people to be practicing medicine incorrectly, and the role of objects in these criticisms. It analyses how the authors' criticisms fit within broader theological debates concerning the problematic role of objects, and then what these objects can indicate about tensions within the medical sphere. I argue that an examination of objects within the popular errors texts demonstrates the fundamental situation of things in the fraught relationship between errors and empiricism.

Chapter Three, 'Bent pins', uses three contemporary examples to evidence the curative and vexatious power of the bent pin. This chapter questions: how were pins imbued with the power to heal and harm? In what ways was the bent pin an important part of domestic health and illness? How has it been classified and valued over time? Without any known consultation with medical practitioners or healers, early modern people could undertake certain actions to imbue the pin – an object of low socio-economic value – with both significance and either curative or vexatious power. I explore how a pin that had been bent signalled that it had been invested with an extraordinary power, and using this seemingly mundane object often overlooked by historians and museums, interrogate early modern metaphysical and philosophical arguments concerning demonology and signs.

Chapter Four, 'Bezoar stones', looks at objects with an opposite set of values to the bent pin. The bezoar, a highly coveted early modern healing object, was also desired by antiquaries as a wondrous curiosity. While its provenance and power were debated and uncertain, it was a panacea that pushed the boundaries of nature. This chapter asks: how can we examine the relationship between medical virtuosity and antiquarian curiosity using this complex stone? I argue that the power and value of the bezoar stone did not depend merely upon its medical virtuosity or antiquarian curiosity, but that these facets were mutually and reciprocally important. Moreover, this chapter shows how the bezoar, like

so many objects used for healing in this period, can only be understood when its instability and complexity are recognised.

Like amulets in the first chapter, Chapter Five, 'Witch-bottles', returns to examine a group of objects that have been misunderstood by modern researchers. It questions: what are 'witch-bottles', how did the function of these objects change over time, and what was their role in early modern health and illness? While the function of the 'witch-bottle' changed over time, this chapter shows how, between c.1660-1705, its role as a specific cure for bewitchment is clear, with reference to material and textual records. This study offers an intervention in the history of witchcraft and healing, but it also brings together the main themes of this thesis: collection and categorisation, medical politics and empiricism, objects' relationship with human and animal bodies, witchcraft and demonology, household medicine, recipes and secrets.

This thesis provides an analysis of magic and the material culture of healing in early modern England. I argue that by analysing objects used to cure and protect, we see not only the diversity of what could count as a healing object in this period, but also how a study that places material culture at its centre can provide fresh information about contemporary health and illness. Healing objects were used in daily life by those from the lowest to the highest strata of society, recommended by a plethora of medical practitioners, and also bought and used in the home. An examination of their creation, exchange, trade, condemnation and use can supplement our knowledge of early modern medicine. Rather than analysing one type of object, or one group of objects within a particular context, I examine a wide range of objects that were discussed, prescribed, attacked, and employed by people across all social strata. While curative and protective objects were condemned by concerned theologians and threatened physicians, these things remained central in healing throughout the period. This PhD argues that we cannot fully understand early modern medicine without analysis of the objects central to it.

CHAPTER ONE

Amulets

Introduction: a hare's foot

On his way home from running errands one morning in January 1665, Samuel Pepys stopped to buy a hare. A few weeks earlier despite 'very cold weather', Pepys had celebrated a phase of good health, unsure whether to attribute it to his daily pill of turpentine, the fact that he had 'left off the wearing of a gowne', or simply his 'hare's foote'.¹⁰⁰ Yet this good health did not last. The new year brought burning, pimples and pricks, bladder problems, headaches and 'a great deal of pain' to Pepys' body.¹⁰¹ On this January morning, however, he had run into an acquaintance at Westminster Hall: Sir William Batten, Member of Parliament and Surveyor to the Navy.¹⁰² Pepys sought medical advice from Batten regarding his latest ailment, a most painful bout of colic. Batten showed Pepys the mistake he had made with his previous hare's foot, and guaranteed the perfect modification to the remedy. Originally the foot had not been cut properly, and 'hath not the joynt to it'; this was where the problem lay.¹⁰³ Eager to try anything to alleviate his swollen belly and 'grudgings of wind', Pepys handled Batten's correctly cut hare's foot, and noted in wonder:

[Batten] assures me he never had his cholique since he carried it about him: and it is a strange thing how fancy works, for I no sooner almost handled his foote but my belly began to be loose and to break wind, and whereas I was in some pain yesterday and t'other day and in fear of more to-day, I became very well, and so continue.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ 31 December 1664, Samuel Pepys; Henry B. Wheatley (ed.); *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, (London: Bell, 1893), found at Phil Gyford (ed.), 'The Diary of Samuel Pepys – Daily entries from the 17th century London diary', <https://www.pepysdiary.com/> (first accessed 29 April 2019).

¹⁰¹ 4 January; 8 January; 9 January; 18 January; 19 January (1664/5). Pepys; Wheatley (ed.); *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

¹⁰² Pepys; Wheatley (ed.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

¹⁰³ 20 January 1664/5, Pepys; Wheatley (ed.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

¹⁰⁴ 20 January 1664/5. Pepys; Wheatley (ed.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.



Figure 6 – Hare's foot amulet, 1870-1920. London: Science Museum, A666124.
Source: Science Museum.



Figure 7 – Hare's foot: charm, undated. Boscastle: Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, 202.
Source: Museum of Witchcraft and Magic.

The next day, having obtained a new animal and taken Batten's advice, Pepys was finally convinced: 'To my office till past 12, and then home to supper and to bed, being now mighty well, and truly I cannot but impute it to my fresh hare's foote.'¹⁰⁵ The hare's foot had worked. Pepys was cured of colic.

This object is not unfamiliar to us. While no hare's feet from Pepys' era are known to survive, later examples from two English museums demonstrate how people continued to believe in the potency of this object well into the twentieth century. Figure 6 shows a 'hare's foot amulet' from the Science Museum in London, originally from Norfolk and dated 1870-1920. Figure 7 offers a similar example, described as 'Hare's foot: Charm', perhaps dating from 1936, now at the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle.¹⁰⁶ Hares' and rabbits' feet can still be bought as 'lucky charms', and are widely available for sale on the internet.¹⁰⁷ Magazines, articles and blogs continue to reference the use of these items; *Scientific American*, for instance, published an article on 'What Makes a Rabbit's Foot Lucky' in 2011.¹⁰⁸ They are still recognised and used over three hundred years after being employed by Pepys, even though their function has shifted.

Pepys' story is part of a larger narrative of healing in which learned medicine, religion, astrology, magic, fate and fortune all played a role. Objects could be invested with power from any one or more of these various sources, and employed as a means of cure or protection. These objects have often been called amulets, both historically and today, although our interpretation of them has

¹⁰⁵ 21 January 1664/5. Two months later, Pepys wrote once more in celebration of his 'very perfect good health', marvelling: 'Now I am at a losse to know whether it be my hare's foot which is my preservative against wind, for I never had a fit of the collique since I wore it'. Despite his ambivalence, he was still cured of colic. Pepys; Wheatley (ed.), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*.

¹⁰⁶ An original version of this chapter was based solely on objects from the Science Museum collections and has been published as an article, but has now been revised to fit within this thesis and this includes objects from other museums. Annie Thwaite, 'A History of Amulets in Ten Objects', *Science Museum Group Journal* 11 (Spring, 2019), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/191103>, (accessed 2 May 2019); '202 – Hare's foot: Charm', Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, <https://museumofwitchcraftandmagic.co.uk/object/hare039s-foot-charm/> (Accessed 1 April 2019).

¹⁰⁷ For instance on eBay, 'LUCKY Rabbit Foot Good Luck Charm': <https://www.ebay.co.uk/i/222775139002?chn=ps&adgroupid=49939730778&rlsarget=pla-380792705024&abcId=1129946&adtype=pla&merchantid=6995734&poi=&googleloc=9060160&device=c&campaignid=974198600&crdt=0> (accessed 9 January 2018).

¹⁰⁸ Krystal D'Costa, 'What Makes a Rabbit's Foot Lucky?', *Anthropology in Practice*, *Scientific American* (October 26, 2011), available at <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/anthropology-in-practice/what-makes-a-rabbits-foot-lucky/> (accessed 26 November 2017).

changed over time. We have not always entirely understood the healing potency of such objects, nor comprehended their means of operation. Yet within their own contexts, this functional complexity has not detracted from their curative or protective effects. The narrative of healing that included things like hares' feet continued throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and only when modern medicine necessitated 'scientific', empirical evidence of the mechanisms of the objects' efficacy did this change. In other words, such items were relegated from the domain of authorised healing once it became a requirement to know and explain how cures worked, not only that they did work.

In this thesis, I examine objects that early modern English people used for healing. Upon reviewing the extant material record, I noticed that museum cataloguers have often classified items that do not align with modern healing, like the hare's foot, as 'amulets'. Sometimes curators and cataloguers contextualise and historicise the role of these objects within healing, but frequently they treat amulets as a distinct category, unrelated to modern, European understandings of health and illness. This type of categorisation conceptually disassociates amulets and healing, and means that these objects are an underused part of the material record of healing. This underuse does not, however, negate the importance of amulets as an invaluable source-base for historians of health and illness.

This chapter demonstrates the importance of amulets to early modern English healing. In doing so, it provides crucial context for the rest of the thesis. It examines nine objects, their roles as curative and protective objects, and how modern museums categorise them. Of these nine objects, the majority are labelled as amulets, although occasionally categorisation varies: this study will explore the reasons why. Nine is enough to illustrate the range of things that museums and researchers can class as 'amulets', but not too many to overburden the analysis in this chapter. The chosen objects come from the collections of seven different museums and libraries, and often more than one example of each item is given, in both instances to provide a means of comparison. All are from Europe, and most from England. Not all can be definitively dated as from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, due either to either a lack of surviving material and evidence, or vague museum categorisation. However, these nine objects provide

examples of things that, from reference to the written record, were known to be used for healing in early modern Europe.

In this chapter, I ask: what are early modern amulets? What materials are they made from, what functions did they have, and what is their relationship with human and animal bodies? How have they been collected and categorised over time? Through material and textual analysis, I interrogate what can we learn about the significant situation of amulets within healing. In analysing these nine objects, this chapter has three main aims. Firstly, it reflects on the complex and changing definition of amulets, and offers a revised interpretation. Secondly, it demonstrates the virtues of an object-based focus for the history of contemporary healing. Finally, it highlights the problematic relationship between early modern and modern categorisation, and the need to reconsider modern classifications.

Between antiquity and the early modern period, the formal definition of the word ‘amulet’ remained largely the same. Originating from the Latin ‘*amulētum*’, this word was used by Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) to denote an item worn on the body for therapeutic, apotropaic or exorcistic benefit.¹⁰⁹ Whilst many authors have traced this word to the Arabic *ḥāmala(t)* (‘a carrier, bearer’), the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) has refuted this, arguing that the resemblance between the Arabic and Latin words is purely fortuitous.¹¹⁰ In the early modern period, people similarly used the word ‘amulet’ to signify something hanging from the body (usually the neck), used to cure or protect. By the end of the period, Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) described an amulet as:

A'MULET. n. s. [amulette, Fr. amuletum, Lat.] An appended remedy, or preservative: a thing hung about the neck, or any other part of the body, for preventing or curing of some particular diseases.¹¹¹

Today, the word amulet is defined by the OED as ‘Anything worn about the person as a charm or preventive against evil, mischief, disease, witchcraft, etc’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Don Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 6-7.

¹¹⁰ amulet, n.’ *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018 www.oed.com/view/Entry/6778 (accessed 2 February 2019).

¹¹¹ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary Of The English Language*, (London, 1755). From LEME <https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry/1345/1463>, (accessed 3 April 2019).

¹¹² "amulet, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2019. Web. 8 May 2019.

This definition appears similar to the older ones, except for one significant omission: the ability of amulets to cure. What this means is that sometime between the early modern period and today, amulets' prophylactic functions have been forefronted, and their curative functions have been disregarded. Many museums like the Pitt Rivers in Oxford adopt or borrow from the OED's definition, as seen in the description of their amulets project, entitled 'Small Blessings'.¹¹³ While researchers and museum curators continue to use this formal definition that excludes amulets' curative functions, they disregard the other functions amulets may once have had.

Dictionaries and museums often use the terms 'amulet', 'charm' and 'talisman' interchangeably. Don Skemer's 2006 study of textual amulets interrogates the problems with defining these terms, noting the inconsistency and overlap with which they were used both in the medieval period and today.¹¹⁴ Many early modern authors took a relaxed approach to the formal definitions of these words, allowing for some overlap. However, all three words had distinct meanings; they were related, but not synonymous. If an amulet was a thing hung about the body, 'charm' signified an enchantment, spell or form of witchcraft, (an example being the word 'ABRACADABRA' written to cure fever); whilst 'talisman' denoted images or figures made under certain constellations.¹¹⁵ Like amulets, both charms and talismans could be worn on the body to prevent or cure disease.¹¹⁶ All three terms were firmly related to healing. Today, these three words are often used synonymously, for instance by the Pitt Rivers and Horniman museums, and by the OED which defines charm as: 'The chanting or recitation of a verse supposed to possess magic power or occult influence; a magic spell; a talisman;...Anything worn about the person to avert evil or ensure

¹¹³ 'Small Blessings: Amulets at the Pitt Rivers Museum', Pitt Rivers Museum, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/>, (accessed 8 April 2019).

¹¹⁴ Skemer, *Binding Words*, 6-19, esp. 10.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia: or A Dictionary*, (London, 1656), [307]; Coles, *An English Dictionary*, [7], [25], [73], [136]; Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim; J.F., *Three Books of Occult Philosophy [...] translated out of the Latin into the English tongue by J.F.*, (London, 1651), 374.

¹¹⁶ Agrippa; J.F.; *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 374.

prosperity; an amulet'.¹¹⁷ As with amulets, these modern definitions mostly omit the curative function of charms and talismans.

The hare's foot provides an example of how amulets' powers and functions are perceived to have changed. Whether situated in museum collections or referred to in common parlance, this object is not commonly recognised today as a curative item, nor regarded as an effective remedy for the colic. For instance, the Science Museum records the hare's foot as an amulet employed 'for protection against cramp'.¹¹⁸

Indeed, museum curators and researchers often identify amulets as prophylactic or apotropaic, or as an item 'against' a particular affliction, rather than highlighting their curative features.¹¹⁹ There appears to be a tendency to group anything vaguely esoteric, supernatural, or unexplainable into the category of amulets. In the collections of the Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle, the classification of one object is specifically questioned, labelled as 'amulet(?)'. In this instance, the cataloguer notes that 'The combination of colours - red, black and white - and the use of tiny metal springs...suggest this is an amulet or part of an amulet', yet does not explain the significance of these material features and their connection to amulets.¹²⁰ This tendency often manifests in the way that museum catalogues and secondary literature label amulets as 'magic' and 'superstitious'. The British Museum, for instance, has catalogued twelve amulets as 'superstitious medicines', and notes the origins of a fourteenth-century Italian toadstone ring as a 'superstition'.¹²¹ As discussed in the Introduction, the modern

¹¹⁷ 'Discover... Amulets and Charms', Pitt Rivers Museum, <https://prm.web.ox.ac.uk/files/amuletspdf>, [2], (accessed 7 April 2019); 'Magic Charms and Amulets', Horniman Museum, <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/collections/stories/magic-charms-and-amulets/story-chapter/keep-safe-and-well-working-magic-into-charms-and-amulets> (accessed 14 November 2017); charm, n.1". OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/30762?rskey=oupvW1&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed March 31, 2018)..

¹¹⁸ 'Hare's foot amulet', *Science Museum Group* (2018), <https://collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects/co108096/hares-foot-amulet-used-as-protection-against-cra-amulet-foot-animal-component> (Accessed 1 February 2018).

¹¹⁹ For instance, Alison Rowlands, 'The Conditions of Life for the Masses', in Euan Cameron, (ed.), *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41.

¹²⁰ '1709 – Amulet: Charm', Museum of Witchcraft, <http://museumofwitchcraftandmagic.co.uk/object/amulet-charm-3/> (accessed 8 May 2019).

¹²¹ For instance, objects Af1972,14.170.a, Af1972,14.169.b; Af1972,14.166.b; Af1972,14.173; Af1972,14.172. https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?object

definition of ‘superstition’ is often associated with beliefs or practices that are ‘irrational’, ‘unfounded’ or ‘based on ignorance’.¹²² Similarly, ‘magic’ is today related to an ‘occult or secret body of knowledge; sorcery, witchcraft’.¹²³ To anachronistically categorise early modern objects using modern definitions leads to the disassociation of objects from what we recognise today as healing.

Another significant way in which the function of amulets has changed over time is the attribution of ‘luck’. The feet of rabbits and hares, for example, are now often bought, used and regarded merely as ‘lucky’ items. We do not yet have a full history of the hare’s foot, and this object may have been affected by historical changes and cultural discontinuities left unrecorded. Yet whether vague semantics or functional progression, the hare’s foot epitomises the modern tendency to assume an object’s use, as many museums catalogue hares’ and rabbits’ feet as ‘lucky’ regardless of the era from which they originated, and without acknowledging any evolution of use.¹²⁴ Historians, too, often erroneously refer to Pepys’ practice of carrying his ‘lucky hare’s foot’, although Pepys never said this.¹²⁵ Other examples of this modern attribution of luck to a healing amulet abound.

For instance, a ‘charm or amulet’ known as the ‘Archer Butler Luck Stone’ currently resides at The Hunt Museum in Limerick, Ireland.¹²⁶ [Figure 8]. While the museum has not dated this rock-crystal stone, it was originally owned by the Butler family of Garnavilla near Cahir, County Tipperary, who were active between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹²⁷ Archival information confirms there is no evidence that the family used this item ‘for luck’, nor that the original

[Id=584735&partId=1&searchText=amulet+superstitious&view=list&page=1](#) (Accessed 8 May 2019).

¹²² "superstition, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/194517. Accessed 9 May 2019.

¹²³ "magic, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/112186. Accessed 9 May 2019.

¹²⁴ For instance, Pitt Rivers Museum object numbers 1985.51.305, 1985.51.355; Museum of Witchcraft object number 202, ‘Hare’s foot: charm’.

¹²⁵ For example, Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England*, (London: Yale University Press, 2015), 2.

¹²⁶ ‘Archer Butler Luck Stone’, *Hunt Museum* (2018), <http://www.huntmuseum.com/collection/archer-butler-luck-stone/> (accessed 24 September 2018).

¹²⁷ ‘Butler Dynasty’, *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butler_dynasty#Butlers_of_Cahir, (accessed 16 February 2019).

owners referred to it as ‘lucky’.¹²⁸ The provenance of the appellation ‘luck’ is unknown. In fact, several secondary texts from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries refer to the object as the ‘Archer-Butler Murrain Stone’ and the ‘Archer Butler cattle-curing stone’, as it was lent out locally in previous years to cure murrain (an infectious disease) in cattle.¹²⁹



Figure 8 – Archer-Butler Luck Stone, undated. Limerick: Hunt Museum, HCM 152.
Source: Hunt Museum.

When we infer an object’s purpose and categorise amulets as protective, superstitious and lucky, regardless of the era from which they originated, we make assumptions about their power and value. This is true for objects that museum curators and research categorise today as amulets. To class amulets in this way disregards their disparate and diverse provenances and functions. It undermines the fact that they were legitimate healing items within their own

¹²⁸ Pers. comms. Amy, The Hunt Museum, Limerick, Ireland, 6 February 2018, confirming that ‘Unfortunately I could not find any direct evidence where the stone was referred to as a luck-stone by the family’.

¹²⁹ Archival documents from the Hunt Museum; ‘Proceedings’, *The Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, Vol. V Part I (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1879), 347; Robert Day F.S.A, ‘The Archer-Butler Murrain Stone’, *Journal of the Cork Historical Archaeological Society* Volume X (1904), 233-5; J.C, ‘Notes and Queries: A Kerry Amulet’, *Journal of the Cork Historical Archaeological Society* Volume XII (1906), 150-1.

contexts, and leads to the formation of incorrect categorisation and pejorative connotations. Objects such as hares' feet do not align within the modern Western boundaries of healing, and we often forget the fact that objects' value and power evolves and changes over time. But why has this happened?

Firstly, the desire to sensationalise things seems to be attractive, and the idea of looking back on the objects and practices of an apparently mystical past is captivating. Secondly, scant information about distinct items or groups of objects and their contexts means that a term like 'amulet' becomes a useful catch-all category when we cannot infer specific functions, provenances or meanings.¹³⁰ Thirdly, whilst amulets are necessarily defined by collectors and museum curators, often the descriptions they give are promulgated uncritically. Institutions that hold a substantial collection of amulets, such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford or Science Museum in London, owe a significant debt to twentieth-century collectors. Men including Henry Wellcome (1853-1936), Edward Lovett (1852-1933) and Adrien de Mortillet (1853-1931) who harboured a passion for collecting alongside other occupations, amassed objects from across geographies and temporalities which went on to form part of the collections of these museums.¹³¹ However, the sheer volume of their stock often led to vague and questionable cataloguing. Whilst the Pitt Rivers' catalogue does not provide objects' dates, those given to amulets in the Science Museum collections often relate not to the objects themselves, but rather to the active dates

¹³⁰ On amulets and classification, see William Matthew Flinders Petrie, *Amulets*, (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1914); Beatrice Blackwood, *The classification of artefacts in the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); E.A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, (London: Humphrey Milford, 1961); Tabitha Cadbury, 'Amulets: The Material Evidence', in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, 188-208.

¹³¹ Tabitha Cadbury, 'The Charms of Scarborough, London, etc.: The Collecting Networks of Charles Clarke and Edward Lovett', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 25 (2012), 119-137. For biographies of Wellcome and Lovett, see 'Henry Wellcome 1853-1936', *Science Museum Group* (2018) <http://broughttolife.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/people/henrywellcome> and 'Edward Lovett', *Wellcome Collection* (2018), <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/edward-lovett> (both accessed 4 April 2018). Whilst the remit of this article prevent a detailed discussion of these two collectors, further information can be found. Secondary analysis of Lovett is scant, but his monograph provides an excellent starting point; see Edward Lovett, *Magic in Modern London*, (Croydon: Advertiser Offices, 1925). For more on Henry Wellcome, see Robert Rhodes James, *Henry Wellcome*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994); Helen Turner, *Henry Wellcome: The man, his collection and his legacy*, (London: Wellcome Trust and Heinemann, 1980); Ken Arnold & Danielle Olsen, *Medicine Man: The Forgotten Museum of Henry Wellcome*, (London: British Museum Press, 2003).

of the collector (usually around 1870-1930).¹³² Ultimately, these are likely to be self-perpetuating actions. Once a museum or research has misinterpreted the purpose of an object or its date of use, or disassociated the object from the realms of healing, other institutions and individuals continue to do the same. This then becomes the default, primary function or dating of the item in question.

Nevertheless, research on amulets is rich and wide-ranging. Analyses vary from their situation within a particular culture, region or time period, to more comprehensive studies of amulets within the disciplines of archaeology or anthropology.¹³³ Other articles examine specific amulets, whether as an object-study or as a means of elucidating a facet of ritual (that is, practices that had the ability to alter materials and invest them with potency).¹³⁴ Fewer historicise them, or consider their changing definitions or functions over time or space.¹³⁵ Yet this facet of study is crucial for museums that deal with large, disparate groups of objects all labelled as amulets. They are complex, differing according to social, spatial and temporal geographies. Their functions, materials and cultural significances vary. Studying them can reveal historical methods of healing that cannot be afforded by reference to textual sources alone.

Certain museums are helping to lead the way in recognising amulets not as bizarre and extraordinary pieces of the past, but part of the broad and varied history of healing. During my time as a Wellcome Trust Secondment Fellow I worked closely with the Science Museum's amulet collection, comprising over 2,000 amulets, the majority of which were donated by collectors like Lovett and Wellcome. The museum's new 'Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries', which opened in November 2019, spotlight amulets as a part of healing. There is opportunity for other museums to do the same.

¹³² See for example the sigil discussed in this chapter.

¹³³ Campbell Bonner, *Studies in magical amulets chiefly Greco-Egyptia*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950); Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*; Skemer, *Binding Words*.

¹³⁴ For examples, see Stefan Münzer, 'Egyptian Stamp-Seal Amulets and Their Implications for the Chronology of the Early Iron Age', *Tel Aviv* 30:1 (2013), 66-82; W.L. Hildburgh, Cowrie Shells as Amulets in Europe, *Folklore* 53:4 (2012), 178-195; Christina Hole, 'Notes on Some Folklore Survivals in English Domestic Life' (1957), *Folk-Lore* 68:3 (2012), 412-23. Some pieces are even written to provide instruction as well as historical context, for instance Robert Dancik, *Amulets and Talismans: Simple Techniques for Creating Meaningful Jewelry*, (Cincinnati, OH: North Light Books, 2009).

¹³⁵ Cadbury, 'Amulets: The Material Evidence', 188-208.

In identifying these issues with the collection, cataloguing and categorisation of amulets, this chapter helps to refine the definition of early modern amulets through the examination of nine objects. By analysing the hare's foot and the following eight objects, this chapter sets out the key features of amulets. At the same time, it shows how an object-based study can add to our knowledge of what comprised early modern healing, and the variety of things used in health and illness. Read as a whole, these nine objects demonstrate the variety of contexts in which early modern healing happened, and help expand the available source base for historians of this period.

Gold angels

Around the same time that Samuel Pepys used the hare's foot to cure his colic, another healing practice that also drew upon hidden powers was taking place. The 'Royal gift of healing' had been used to cure 'Scrofula' or the 'King's Evil' in England and France since the eleventh century, and continued for around 700 years, although the practice was most popular (that is, most people were touched) under the Stuart monarchy (1603-1714).¹³⁶ This remedy centred around the invisible haptic powers of the sovereign and the belief that monarchs could heal by touch, though a tangible object also played a crucial role. In the medieval period this object was a penny, but Henry VII (1457-1509) replaced this with a coin of much higher value. From this time, monarchs used gold coins, often called angels. The angel would be strung through a ribbon and placed around the sufferer's neck after he or she had been touched, as 'a Token of His Sacred Favour, and Pledge of His best desires for them'.¹³⁷ Figures 9 and 10 show two examples. Charles I gifted both angels to sufferers between 1634 and 1649, and they are now in the collections of the Science Museum in London and Leeds

¹³⁶ Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 80-1. The phrase 'royal gift of healing' is from John Browne, *Adenochiradelogia or, An anatomick-chirurgicall treatise of glandules and strumae*, (London, 1684), [14]; [23] (Accessed from EEBO, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>, 11 October 2018). For a comprehensive overview of the practice from its origins to its endings, see Stephan Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2015); also see March Bloch, *The Royal Touch: sacred monarchy and scrofula in England and France*; originally *Les rois thaumaturges: étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (1924; trans. 1990).

¹³⁷ Indeed, the coins used in this remedy were merely referred to as 'gold' by contemporary authors. See for example, Browne, *Adenochiradelogia*, [237] et passim.

University Library respectively.¹³⁸ While the evidence is limited, Stephen Brogan suggests that Charles I touched to heal throughout the length of his reign (1625-49).¹³⁹



Figure 9 – Gold angel. Provenance unknown, 1634-49. London: Science Museum, A641050.
Source: Science Museum.

¹³⁸ Science Museum object A641050 is an example from Charles I's reign (1634-1649), but other Science Museum examples include A152330 (Henry VII, 1485-1509); A152329 (Elizabeth I, 1590-1603); A641046 (Elizabeth I 1582-1603); A125613 (Elizabeth I, 1582-1603).

¹³⁹ For evidence of the first cases, and a survey of Charles I's reign in relation to touching, see Brogan, *The Royal Touch*, 80-93; esp. 80-1; and for evidence of the last cases, see M. R. Toynbee, 'Charles I and the King's Evil', *Folklore*, 61:1 (Mar., 1950), 1-14, esp. 6.



Figure 10 – Angel. England, 1641. Leeds: University Library, CC/WC/MOD/ENG/2. Source: Leeds University Library.

Surgeon John Browne (1642-1702/3) was among those who cast doubt on the importance of the angel in curing the King's Evil. In theory, the royal touch alone held the curative power, and the angel was merely a token. Browne's *Adenochoiradelogia* (1684) for instance included a section entitled 'Many Cured without Gold given; this shewing that Gold is not the great Ingredient'.¹⁴⁰ Yet at the same time, Browne, like many of his contemporaries, provided numerous first-hand accounts of sufferers who were re-inflicted with the illness when they lost their angel, and only recovered once they repeated the entire process, or found the original coin. Browne listed several examples of this happening, with anecdotes carefully selected from people 'of Quality': esquires, 'honoured' doctors, members of Cambridge colleges, knights, and those of respected social standing, including:¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Browne, *Adenochoiradelogia*, Dd4.

¹⁴¹ See Browne, *Adenochoiradelogia*, Dd4, [243], [138-9]; [148-9]; [167]; [171]; [184] et passim.

One *Thomas Costland*, (as another remark of His Majesties favour) living near *Oxford*, and having many Strumous Swellings about his Neck, for which he had been touched and cured; but upon leaving off his Gold, his Swellings seized him afresh: the Gold being new strung, and put again about his Neck, his Swellings suddainly abated, and he to his dying day continued ever after in health, without any appearance of relapse.¹⁴²

It is interesting that Browne, while careful to discredit the sole power of the coin, nevertheless provides a multitude of testimonials in which this cure only worked if the gold remained in contact with the body. He eagerly notes the correspondent or patient's high social status, as if to legitimise the use of and belief in the material facet of this cure.¹⁴³ Indeed, Browne's very impetus for writing this treatise (to in part argue that gold was *not* the most important part of the remedy) indicates the widespread fervour of this very belief.¹⁴⁴ It is unlikely that he would have needed to argue with such ardour, if not vexed by the weight of power given to the gold angel in this cure for scrofula. Moreover, many angels were purportedly sold on in goldsmiths shops in London in the seventeenth century, perhaps indicating that contemporaries believed these objects to be potent and valuable beyond merely their worth as a precious metal.¹⁴⁵

The Science Museum records their angel as an 'amulet' belonging to the category of 'folk medicine'. In contrast, the angel from Leeds University Library forms part of the 'Coin Collection', with no reference given to its use as an amulet or a curative object. This shows the disparity in the context and classification given to two identical gold angels from Charles I's reign.¹⁴⁶ Regardless, what these angels demonstrate is that despite the elaborate nature of the ceremony, early modern people from the lowest to the highest strata of society made the journey to be touched. They were all granted an audience with the monarch, and given

¹⁴² Browne, *Adenochoradelogia*, [181].

¹⁴³ On testimonials, see Gianna Pomata, 'Sharing Cases: The Observations in Early Modern Medicine', *Early Science and Medicine* 15:3 (2010), 193-236, esp. 213.

¹⁴⁴ For instance, Browne, *Adenochoradelogia*, 71 discusses in this treatise the 'unresolved at the efficacy of the Gold put about the Patients neck'.

¹⁴⁵ Brogan, *The Royal Touch*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ 'Angel', COIN: CC/WC/MOD/ENG/2, Coin Collection, Leeds University Library <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/632519> (accessed 7 April 2019); 'Gold angel', object number A641050, Science Museum, <https://collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects/co106816/gold-angel-used-as-a-touchpiece-in-the-ceremony-of-healing-by-touch-touchpieces> (accessed 7 April 2019).

what they believed to be a powerful gold coin which played a crucial part in the process of healing.¹⁴⁷ In other words, the gold angel provides an example of an amulet used by all kinds of early modern people. At the same time, it also exemplifies a significant feature of the power of amulets: their relationship with the corporeal. As with Pepys' use of the hare's foot, the angel was efficacious only when kept on the body.



Figure 11 – Charles II touching a patient for the King's Evil (scrofula) surrounded by courtiers, clergy and general public, 1641. Engraving by R. White. Source: Wellcome Collection.

¹⁴⁷ For more on scrofula, see James F. Turrell, 'The Ritual of Royal Healing in Early Modern England: Scrofula, Liturgy, and Politics', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 68:1 (1999), 3-36; Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Monarchy and Miracles in England and France*, trans. J.E. Anderson, (Routledge: London, 1973 edn.); Brogan, *The Royal Touch*; Scrofula and the royal touch: Hope and Fear at KCL; 'The King's Evil', <https://recipesandmedicineinearlymodernengland.wordpress.com/2014/03/30/the-kings-evil> (accessed 28 February 2018); Daniel Fusch, 'The Discourse of the Unmiraculous Miracle: Touching for the King's Evil in Stuart England', *Appositions: Studies in Renaissance / Early Modern Literature & Culture* 1 (2008) 34–39.

A unicorn horn pendant

Extant museum collections show that amulets could consist of a great variety of materials, whether human, animal, vegetable or mineral, durable or fragile. Just like the hare's foot, the efficacy of many amulets depended on the inherent potency of the material. Our third amulet provides an example of this. [Figure 12]. This mid-sixteenth-century English pendant is set with a semi-circular section of unicorn horn, mounted in enamelled gold, and suspended from a ring by three gold chains. It formerly belonged to the Campion family, who in the seventeenth-century lived in an Elizabethan manor house named Danny Park in Sussex, explaining its nickname: 'The Danny Jewel'.¹⁴⁸



Figure 12 – The Danny Jewel. England, ca. 1550. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, M.97-1917. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.

¹⁴⁸ 'The Danny Jewel', Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O71730/the-danny-jewel-pendant-unknown/> (accessed 2 April 2019); Christopher J. Duffin, 'The Danny Jewel', *Jewellery History Today* 22 (Winter 2015), 6-7.

Unicorn horn was a hugely sought-after material in the early modern period, with Flemish physician Anselm de Boodt (1550-1632) noting that ‘it greatly surpasses the price of gold’.¹⁴⁹ Since antiquity, authorities including Pliny the Elder and Aelian (Claudius Aelianus, c.175-c.235 AD) had recognised its medical virtues. Likewise, early modern practitioners identified unicorn horn as a preservative against the plague, a remedy for issues of the heart and a large range of other diseases, but most of all for its ability to ‘recognise, prevent and cure every poison’.¹⁵⁰ Patients could use it in several ways: as a powder, a water, made into cups, or worn as jewellery.¹⁵¹ In 1653, the College of Physicians recommended that every apothecary keep unicorn horn in their shops. In fact, the coat of arms of the Apothecaries’ Society of London, founded in 1617, included two unicorns, testament to the medical importance of this material.¹⁵²

The V&A catalogue emphasises the fact that this object was a pendant, indicated by its central suspension loop, and notes that it is allegedly shaped like a ship, although the significance of this is not explained. Curators have identified the horn belonging to what we now know as a narwhal. They note that this pendant was ‘made...as a protection against danger’ and as a ‘detector of poison in food and drink’.¹⁵³ However, numerous scratch marks on the back of the Danny Jewel may also evidence an attempt to extract powder from the horn, and its shape, size (8.4x6.1x1.7cm) and design mean that it could have been dipped into liquids to cleanse them of poison.¹⁵⁴

This unicorn horn pendant exemplifies another popular feature of amulets; that they were often rarities or contained rare materials. Contemporaries

¹⁴⁹ ‘qu'elle surpasse de beaucoup le prix de l'or’. (Author’s own translation). Anselm de Boodt, *Le Parfait Ioaillier, ou Histoire des Pierres*, (Lyon, 1664), 552; Ettlinger, ‘British Amulets in London Museums’, 160; Guido Schoenberger, ‘A Golbet of Unicorn Horn’. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 9:10 (June, 1951), 284-88.

¹⁵⁰ Hermann Heyden, *Speedy help for rich and poor. or, certain physcally discourses touching the vertue of whey*, (London, 1653), 146; Gualtherus Bruele, *Praxis medicinae, or, the physicians practice vvherein are contained inward diseases from the head to the foote*, (London, 1632), 211; De Boodt, *Le Parfait Ioaillier*, 552.

¹⁵¹ Ettlinger, ‘Documents of British Superstition in Oxford’, 228; Schoenberger, ‘A Golbet of Unicorn Horn’, 284-88.

¹⁵² Nicholas Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis, or, The London dispensatory*, (London, 1653), 52-3; Ettlinger, ‘Documents of British Superstition in Oxford’, 228.

¹⁵³ ‘The Danny Jewel’, Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O71730/the-danny-jewel-pendant-unknown/> (Accessed 8 April 2019).

¹⁵⁴ Duffin, ‘The Danny Jewel’, 7.

prized unicorn horn for its scarcity, and described the importance of, and difficulty in, finding a real one. Writers went to great efforts to delineate the features of the real beast, where it lived, and how people could distinguish it from other animals; physician Sir Thomas Browne protested in 1646 that ‘many in common use and high esteeme are no hornes at all’.¹⁵⁵ The fourth chapter of this thesis will discuss in detail how, in the early modern period, ‘nature’s jokes’ were often collected in the form of flowers, seahorses, fossils, giants’ bones, unicorns’ horns, loadstones, zoophytes, shells and stones.¹⁵⁶ ‘Rich elements of the quotidian’ were revered, and material irregularities and rarities were recognised as ‘sophisticated deceptions played out by nature in her leisure.’¹⁵⁷ Their very scarcity meant that access to such objects was restricted. They therefore carried great weight both in terms of social value and healing power. The owner of a rare object such as this could possess and control that power.¹⁵⁸ The unique exoticism of the unicorn, combined with the horn’s virtues as an antidote and panacea, made unicorn horn a coveted early modern material, and helps explain why it was made into an amulet and used by the Campion family.

Hag stones

Like the unicorn horn, our fourth amulet, two ‘hag stones’, were rare objects prized for their potency. [Figure 13]. These stones had naturally-occurring holes through the centre, and protected against an affliction in which a witch or hag tormented a sufferer at night.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Alexander Ross, *Arcana microcosmi, or, The hid secrets of man's body*, (London, 1652), 127-8. Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths*, (London, 1646), 167-9.

¹⁵⁶ Paula Findlen, ‘Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge: The Playfulness of Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 43:2 (Summer 1990), 292-331; 292-3, 303.

¹⁵⁷ Findlen, ‘Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge’, 302-3.

¹⁵⁸ Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 81.

¹⁵⁹ Cited by various sources as giving protection against ‘witches, evil spirits and nightmare’, for instance in William Self Weeks, ‘Witch Stones and Charms in Clitheroe and District’, *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 27 (1910), 104-110; 107-9.



Figure 13 – Hag stones. England, undated. Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum, 1985.51.987 .1 & 1985.51.987 .2 Source: Pitt Rivers Museum.

Although he did not prescribe any remedy for it, Galen, like other Greek physicians, knew this disorder as ‘ephialtes’, a term which authors used from antiquity into the early modern period.¹⁶⁰ From around 1300 it was called the ‘Night Mare’, and from the early modern period it was also known as the ‘Hag’.¹⁶¹ The sufferer of this affliction could be human or equine. When horses were found ‘sweating, exhausted and frightened’ in the morning, early modern authors explained that they had been subject to nocturnal terror, often known as being ‘hag-ridden’.¹⁶² Similarly, when humans suffered the ‘night-mare’, this did not merely signify a bad dream, but a terrifying ‘disease’ in which ‘a sleeping man thinks he feels some heave weight lying on his brest, and holding him downe;

¹⁶⁰ Owen Davies, ‘The Nightmare Experience, Sleep Paralysis, and Witchcraft Accusations’, *Folklore*, 114:2 (Aug 2003), 181-203; Elena Carrera, *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700*, (London: Brill, 2013), 72-4.

¹⁶¹ "nightmare, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/127012. Accessed 25 November 2019; Edmund Gardiner, *Phisicall and approved medicines, aswell in meere simples, as compound obseruations*, (London, 1611), 55.

¹⁶² Guy Miegge, *A new dictionary French and English with another English and French*, (London, 1677), [508]; Roger L'Estrange, *The character of a papist in masquerade*, (London, 1681), 50; Stephen Roud, *The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, (London: Penguin, 2006), 225.

he groanes and strives to remove it, but he cannot'.¹⁶³ Some early modern writers understood this affliction to be caused by the Devil, who appeared in a form variously referred to as an 'Incubus' or 'Succubus'.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, certain medical physicians had their own theories, many affirming it to be a 'natural disease, caused by humors undigested in the stomach, which fuming up to the brain, do there trouble the Animal spirits'.¹⁶⁵

The provenance of this particular amulet is unclear because, as previously mentioned, the Pitt Rivers does not offer an original date for any of the objects in its catalogue, instead providing the date of collection (in this case 1908, from Whitby, North Yorkshire). While this sleeping disorder was attributed to the 'Hag' in the early modern period, evidence for people calling these objects 'hag-stones' has not been found before 1787. However, early modern English authors recorded the use of holed stones to prevent this nocturnal affliction from at least the sixteenth-century, referring to the objects descriptively: for instance, 'a Flynte stone that hath a hole of his owne kinde'.¹⁶⁶ These holed stones did not require any material alteration or preparation to render them efficacious. Those seeking cure strung them on a thread, and hung them close to the body in need, by beds or in stables.¹⁶⁷ The Pitt Rivers Museum, for instance, notes that these 'hag-stones' were originally connected with (now detached) loops of string, and 'hung inside a house door as an amulet'.¹⁶⁸ Similarly in 1654, Bishop Joseph Hall criticised this remedy as one of the practices which drew a 'secret pact' with the Devil, 'its effects invisibly seconded by diabolical operation'. In doing so, he recorded 'the use of an holed flint, hanged up on the rack, or beds head, for the

¹⁶³ Thomas Adams, *A commentary or, exposition vpon the diuine second epistle generall, written by the blessed apostle St. Peter*, (London, 1663), 217. Caroline Oates, 'Cheese Gives You Nightmares: Old Hags and Heartburn', *Folklore*, 114:2 (August 2003), 205-225; Roud, *Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, 437. For a thorough analysis of this practice, see Geoffrey Dent, 'The holed stone and its uses', *Folk Life* 3:1 (1964), 68-78 and Geoffrey Dent, 'The Witchstone in Ulster and England', *Ulster Folklife* 10 (1964), 46-8.

¹⁶⁴ John Asgill, *The reply to Some reflections on Mr. Asgill's Essay on a registry*, (London, 1699) 10; Blount, *Glossographia*, (1661), 171-2.

¹⁶⁵ Blount, *Glossographia*, (1661), 171-2; Henry Cockeram, *The English dictionarie: or, An interpreter of hard English vvords*, [141].

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Blundeville, *The foure chieftest offices belonging to horsemanship*, (London, 1566), 17-18; Nicholas Culpeper, *The English physitian*, (London, 1652), 23, 38, 193.

¹⁶⁷ Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary: With a Collection of Local Proverbs and Popular Superstitions*, (London, 1781), 57-8; Roud, *Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, 438.

¹⁶⁸ Object numbers 1985.51.987 .1 1985.51.987 .2, *Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford*, (Accessed 19 March 2019).

prevention of the night-mare in man, or beast'.¹⁶⁹ Thomas Browne, also condemning this treatment, argued, 'what natural effects can reasonably be expected, when to prevent the ephialtes or night-mare we hang up an hollow stone in our stables.'¹⁷⁰ Regardless of contemporary condemnation however, these 'hag-stones' were early modern healing objects. The naturally-holed minerals were rare and potent anomalies of nature, hung on the bodies of or beside the beds or stables of those suffering from the night mare.

A locket containing a caul

Following the animal unicorn horn and mineral hag stones, our next object provides an example of an amulet containing a human ingredient. This is a locket holding a caul, dated 1597.¹⁷¹ [Figure 14]. A tissue-like membrane enclosing the fetus in the womb, the caul is occasionally found around a child's head at birth. Throughout history, children born with cauls have been so infrequent as to be considered significant; in the twenty-first-century, they occur in less than one in every eighty thousand births.¹⁷² Cauls were considered curatively and protectively potent from antiquity until the nineteenth century.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Hall, *Cases of conscience practically resolved containing a decision of the principall cases of conscience of daily concernment and continual use amongst men*, (London, 1654), 177. Also see John Aubrey, *Miscellanies Upon the following Subjects*, (London, 1696), 111-12 and Blundeville, *The foure chiefest offices*, 18-19.

¹⁷⁰ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 272. Aubrey repeated this in his *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* of 1686, citing Browne: 'to prevent the ephialtes or night-mare, we hang up an hollow stone in our stables'. Others, such as physician Robert Bayfield, discounted the cause of ephialtes as supernatural attributing the affliction to natural means often stimulated by excessive drinking. Robert Bayfield, *Enchiridion medicum: containing the causes, signs, and cures of all those diseases, that do chiefly affect the body of man*, (London, 1655), 74-5.

¹⁷¹ Similar examples of cauls can be seen for instance at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, i.e. object number 1907.1.13. In her article 'Caul: A Sailor's Charm', Imogen Crawford-Mowday cited *The Observer* in 1916: "Before the war Mr Lovett was able to buy a child's caul for his collection for 1/6. Today owing to the submarine peril, the price for this charm against drowning is £2 or more." This was from the catalogue record for PRM object 1907.1.13, which has since changed. See <http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-sailors-charm.html> for the full article (Accessed 12 January 2018).

¹⁷² 'Caul', *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caul> (Accessed 2 February 2018).

¹⁷³ Roud, *Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, 71-2. Also known as a mask, baby's veil, silly-how(e) and haly-hood.



Figure 14 – Locket. England, ca. 1597. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, M.28-1981.
Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.

Sir Thomas Browne stated that ‘in the life of Antoninus delivered by Spartianus’ (a biography of the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius, part of the Augustan histories written around the 3rd century) this ‘natural cap’ was sold by midwives for its advantageous effects.¹⁷⁴ The belief in the caul’s power endured, and

¹⁷⁴ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1671 repr.), 314-5.

between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries writers noted various uses of the caul (also known as the ‘silly how’) whether for a specific healing effect, or more generally for good fortune and luck. Indeed, in 1616, bishop Alexander Roberts echoed ancient belief while decrying the use of amulets, stating that the:

naturall couer wherewith some children are borne, and is called by our women, the sillie how, Midwiues were wont to sell to credulous Aduocates and Lawyers, as a especiall meane to furnish them with eloquence and perswasieue speech, and to stoppe the mouthes of all, who should make any opposition against them.¹⁷⁵

Moreover, writing in 1777, John Brand noted that:

Various were the Superstitions, about half a Century ago, concerning a certain membranous Covering, commonly called the Silly How, that was sometimes found about the Heads of new-born Infants. It was preserved with great Care, not only as medical in Diseases, but also as contributing to the good Fortune of the Infant and others.¹⁷⁶

Many of those who wrote about the cauls’ supposed potency in the early modern period did so with contempt, Browne for instance noting that ‘great conceits are raised of the involution or membranous covering, commonly called the Silly-how’.¹⁷⁷ The reasons why Browne condemned certain healing objects will be explored further in the following chapter, yet regardless of learned criticism, the caul remained popular among contemporaries.

As time progressed, written information about the caul’s function changed. Those born with the caul in nineteenth- and twentieth-century England were considered immune from drowning, and writers reported incidences in which, if the caul was kept safe, the child to whom it belonged evaded a watery death.¹⁷⁸ If someone sold their caul, its potency transferred to the buyer. Notices

¹⁷⁵ Alexander Roberts, *A treatise of witchcraft Wherein sundry propositions are laid downe, plainly discovering the wickednesse of that damnable art*, (London, 1616), 65-6.

¹⁷⁶ John Brand, *Observations on the popular antiquities of Great Britain: Including the Whole of Mr. Bourne's Antiquitates Vulgares*, (London, 1777), 367-8.

¹⁷⁷ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 269.

¹⁷⁸ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 27-8; B.A., ‘Death and Burial Customs. Broughton, Hampshire’, *Folk-Lore*, 61:2 (1950), 104; Hole, ‘Notes on Some Folklore Survivals in English Domestic Life’, 412-23; R.L. Tongue, *Somerset Folklore*, (London: Folklore Society, 1965.

Science Museum Group, 2018, ‘Amuletic Caul’

<https://collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects/co104541/amuletic-caul-piece-of-tissue-like->

in newspapers and ‘dock-side shop windows’ abound advertising this popular amulet: in 1835, the *London Times* marketed ‘a Child’s Caul to be disposed of, a well-known preservative against drowning, &c., price 10 guineas.’¹⁷⁹ Others made direct appeals. In 1920, one notice read: ‘sailors will still buy cauls when they can, and have been known to give as much as £20 for one ... no ship that contains a caul will sink at sea.’¹⁸⁰

Thus despite an evolution in function, belief in the caul’s power persisted from antiquity until at least the nineteenth century, emphasising its place as a powerful natural healing object. Unlike the durable gold angel however, the caul was fragile. Many early modern authors noted how it was ‘preserved with great care’ by those who believed in its diverse power, and our fifth object provides an example of contemporaries protected the caul.¹⁸¹ The locket containing the caul from 1597, as seen in Figure 14, reportedly belonged to John Monson, son of an admiral, born in this year. On the locket (which shows signs of heavy wear) an engraving reads: ‘John Monson born.the.tenth of September at.12. of the klok. at night 1597’.¹⁸² Around the same time, a man named Sir John Offley made a bequest to his ‘loving daughter’ in his will, recording ‘one jewell done all in gold enameled wherein is a caul that covered my face and sholder when I first came into the world’.¹⁸³ Similarly, physician James Macmath (1648-96), although sceptical about the power of the caul, noted that:

[membrane-in-an-amulet-human-remains](#) (accessed 3 January 2018); John Fairfax-Blakeborough, ‘Folklore: Cauls’, *Notes and Queries* 12 (1923), esp. 9-10.

¹⁷⁹ Arthur William Moore, *The folk-lore of the Isle of Man: being an account of its myths, legends, superstitions, customs, & proverbs, collected from many sources*, (London: D. Nutt, 1891), 157; Roud, *Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, 72.

¹⁸⁰ Hole, ‘Notes on Some Folklore Survivals in English Domestic Life’, 412-13.

¹⁸¹ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 314-5; Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 27-8. Muir has also noted the ability for the child born with the caul to have ‘visionary powers’; citing the ‘benandanti’ in Italy.

¹⁸² ‘Locket’, object number M.28-1981, Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O11007/locket-unknown/>, (accessed 2 April 2019). For John Monson, see corresponding entries in Ashmole 230, f. 219r, and Ashmole 235, ff. 67v-69v (followed, after blank pages, by a nativity for William Monson, born two years later, ff. 72r-73v) which say he was born at midnight on 10 September 1597. Reference from Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, John Young, Joanne Edge, Janet Yvonne Martin-Portugues, and Natalie Kaoukji (eds.), ‘Casebooks’, *The casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596-1634: a digital edition*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk>, (accessed 11 October 2018). Also see ‘Locket’, *V&A Museum*, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O11007/locket-unknown/> (both accessed 22 September 2018).

¹⁸³ Frederick William Hackwood, *Staffordshire Customs, Superstitions and Folklore*, (Lichfield: Mercury Press, 1924).

Some will have Superstitiously kept to diverse Uses (yet Others instantly destroy it) and makes a presage of good Luck (or yet bad, for the Diversity of its Colour) to the Infant, and others who use it; assuring his Future Happiness, if he eats it, or Carries it with him all his Life in a Box (for he must not see it) else to prove Unhappy, or even Epileptick, and continually Haunted with Ghosts, Infernal Spirits, or other Frightfull Spectres.¹⁸⁴

Here, Macmath highlights the importance of keeping the caul enclosed, just as Monson and Offley encased their cauls in jewellery. Whatever the precise method of preservation, portability seemed pivotal; important when remembering that, like the gold angel, amulets were often only effective when worn on the body.

Whilst the contextual note given by the V&A catalogue states that ‘there was a strong belief in the medicinal or magical properties of various natural substances in Renaissance England’, the museum notes that this particular locket is ‘lucky, especially as a protection against drowning’.¹⁸⁵ Yet according to the textual examples above, the caul was only regarded as a prophylactic against drowning in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Moreover, the V&A do not identify this locket as an amulet even though museum collections often categorise extant cauls as such; for instance, the ‘amuletic caul’ preserved in an envelope at the Science Museum, dated 1880-1910.¹⁸⁶ [Figure 15].

This demonstrates two important things. Firstly, it provides an example of inconsistency and inaccuracy in museum catalogues. Where cauls are classified as amulets in some museum collections, in others they are not; just as sometimes the curative potency of an object is highlighted, and other times is not. Secondly, while not formally categorised as an amulet, the Monson locket displays many of the qualities of amulets we have seen so far with the hare’s foot, gold angel, unicorn horn and hag stones. While the caul has inherent prophylactic and

¹⁸⁴ James Macmath, *The expert mid-wife a treatise of the diseases of women with child, and in child-bed*, (London, 1694), 124.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Locket’, object number M.28-1981, Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O11007/locket-unknown/>, (accessed 2 April 2019).

¹⁸⁶ ‘Amuletic caul’, object number A132443, Science Museum, <https://collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects/co104541/amuletic-caul-piece-of-tissue-like-membrane-amulet-human-remains>, (accessed 2 April 2019).

curative capacities and an ability to protect and foster good fortune, its container is a locket, designed to be worn.



Figure 15 – Amuletic caul. Possibly English, 1880-1920. London: Science Museum, A132443.
Source: Science Museum.

The human caul inside a locket, the animal unicorn horn pendant, and the mineral ‘hag-stones’ exemplify the material variability of amulets. Yet these three objects are further united by one significant quality; their status as rarities. These marvels of nature help us to understand a defining attribute in curative and protective objects, and demonstrate that knowledge and use of them was widespread throughout society. Although early modern medical physicians may not always have prescribed these amulets, many contemporaries believed that these rare, prized, natural anomalies had curative and protective powers.

An astrological sigil

Whilst the value and potency of the amulets we have encountered so far lay in their very form and matter, others functioned due to the way people had materially modified them. Evidence for this lies most clearly in objects inscribed with symbols, words and pictures. The sixth object in this study is a circular metal disc, categorised by the British Museum as a ‘magical disc/ amulet’, but known in the early modern period as a ‘sigil’, invested with power due to the inscriptions made upon its surface.¹⁸⁷ [Figure 16]. The manufacture of sigils enabled the power of the stars to be represented and harnessed materially for curative and protective benefit. This object is vaguely dated ‘16thC-18thC (?)’, and aside from ‘Europe (?)’ there is no firm evidence of its provenance. However, physicians and astrologers like Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) created designs for sigils like this from at least the sixteenth century.¹⁸⁸ These amulets were often engraved with images or words and worn on the body, indicated in this example by a suspension hole.¹⁸⁹

According to both Galenic and Paracelsian theories of medicine, the malign powers of the stars and planets could cause disease, and a physician skilled in astronomy and astrology could identify the source of illness and devise a necessary remedy.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ See for instance Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Henry Cornelius Agrippa his fourth book of occult philosophy of geomancie, magical elements of Peter de Aban*, (London, 1665) and Johannes Angelus, *Esoptron Astrologikon. Astrological opticks*, (London 1665). ‘Numerical square/magical square/amulet’, British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=41160&partId=1&searchText=1885,0508.107+&object=24273&museumno=1885,0508.107+&page=1 (accessed 2 April 2019).

¹⁸⁸ For instance, see Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, J. Freake, (trans.), Donald Tyson (ed.), *Three Books of Occult Philosophy, Completely Annotated with Modern Commentary*, The Foundation Book of Western Occultism, Llewellyn’s Sourcebook Series, (St Paul Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications 1993); (original publication Antwerp/Paris 1531; first complete edition Cologne 1533. English trans. by Freake London 1651).

¹⁸⁹ See Lauren Kassell, ‘The Economy of Magic in Early Modern England’, in Margaret Pelling, Scott Mandelbrote (eds.), *The Practice of Reform in Health, Medicine, and Science, 1500-2000: Essays for Charles Webster*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 47-8 for the various values of a sigil in early modern England; ‘The value of a sigil was inherent to the object but it was not constant.’; Kassell, ‘The Economy of Magic in Early Modern England’, 43-57, esp. 43-4; Roos, ‘Magic Coins’ and ‘Magic Squares’, 271-28.

¹⁹⁰ Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London – Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, Physician*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6-8.



Figure 16 – Numerical square / magical disc / amulet. Europe, 16thC-18thC (?). Silver. London: British Museum, 1885,0508.107. Source: British Museum.

Paracelsian cosmology stated that sigils were one of several objects (along with rings, images and swords) that could operate via astral magic. As stated by the astrologer-physician Simon Forman (1552-1611), people believed sigils to enclose ‘som parte of the virtue of heaven and of the plannets according to the tyme that it is stamped caste or engraven or written in’.¹⁹¹ That is, the knowledge of astronomy and judgements of astrology came together in the creation of sigils. They were made according to particular positions of the heavens, at significant moments, with the virtues of the stars and planets imprinted and engraved upon them.¹⁹² The power of the stars could thereby be harnessed to remedy diseases,

¹⁹¹ Kassell, ‘The Economy of Magic in Early Modern England’, 50-1. Kassell cites Simon Forman here, Ashm. 392, fol. 46; (see also Ashm. 390, fol. 30). For Forman, like other astrologer-physicians, such practices were at the core of his medical practice; see Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London*, 225.

¹⁹² Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London*, 52.

enhance health, triumph over enemies, protect, or improve one's fortune, via the powerful markings on these objects.¹⁹³

Agrippa explained sigils' many functions in a book detailing different facets of *Occult Philosophy* (1533).¹⁹⁴ This work brought together Greek and Roman occultism drawn from classical sources and medieval Jewish Kabbalah, providing technical explanations and procedures for practising magic.¹⁹⁵ It explained in detail how to exploit the secrets of the natural world using stones, herbs, trees and metals; the celestial and mathematical world and the influence of planets, stars and numbers; and the intellectual world of pagan gods, spirits, angels and devils.¹⁹⁶ Astrological bodies were seen to move according to a strict mathematical and geometric relationship, and for Agrippa, like other early modern philosophers, magic and maths were intimately related.¹⁹⁷ As a result, astrologers usually cast sigils with magic squares: tables of numbers which correlated to each of the seven planets as they were known at the time.¹⁹⁸ The numbers in these magic squares would add up to the same number in four directions, relating to the consonants in a particular significant Hebrew name.¹⁹⁹

This sigil from the British Museum expressed and employed the power of Jupiter. Imprinted on one side are the planet's sign, seal and 'intelligence', the other revealing its table, surrounded by Hebrew names relating to Jupiter's numbers.²⁰⁰ Agrippa noted that if these symbols, words and numbers were impressed upon silver plate at a time when Jupiter was powerful and ruling, 'it

¹⁹³ Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London*, 48.

¹⁹⁴ Agrippa, Tyson (ed.), *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*.

¹⁹⁵ Tyson notes, 'The Kaballah was to Agrippa the magic of God.' Classical sources included Pliny the Elder, Ovid, Virgil and Hermes Trismegistus, as well as later writers such as Ficino; Jewish Kabbalistic sources derived from the writings of Reuchliun and Pico della Mirandola. Agrippa, Tyson (ed.), *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, xl-xli.

¹⁹⁶ Agrippa, Tyson (ed.), *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, xl-xli.

¹⁹⁷ Roos, 'Magic Coins' and 'Magic Squares', 278.

¹⁹⁸ Agrippa, Tyson (ed.), *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 318. The seven planets known at this time were Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sol (the sun), Venus, Mercury, and Luna (the moon).

¹⁹⁹ Roos, 'Magic Coins' and 'Magic Squares', 278-9.

²⁰⁰ Divine names answering to the numbers of Jupiter included '4 – Aba', Agrippa, Tyson (ed.), *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 320. Table of the 16 signs are found on 104; seal, intelligence and table on 322; full sigil on 329. On the magic square pattern like the one on this sigil, see Roos, 'Magic Coins' and 'Magic Squares'. The Latin inscription '*Confirma O Deus potentissimus*' approximately translates as 'Give me strength God Almighty' (authors own translation). Also Francis Barrett, Johannes Trithemisu, *The magus, or celestial intelligencer; being a complete system of occult philosophy. In three books: containing the antient and modern practice of the cabalistic art, natural and celestial magic, &c.*, (London: Lackington, Allen & Co, 1801), esp. 174.

conduceth to gain and riches, favour and love, peace and concord, and...appease enemies, confirm honours, dignities, and counsels'. Sigils relating to other planets had other functions, so that the one who wore the table of the Sun would become 'potent in all his works', and Mars would stop blood and chase away bees.²⁰¹

Sigils offer an early modern method of healing in which astrologers harnessed astral magic for cure and protection. As the British Museum catalogue shows, researchers have often classed objects utilising this form of healing power as amulets.²⁰² Yet most significantly, this sigil demonstrates how material alteration (in this case inscription in the form of words, numbers and symbols) helped imbue the object with power and significance. This is true for many different types of amulets. For instance, the Monson family (the owners of the locket containing a caul) were known to visit astrologer-physician Richard Napier (1559-1634), student and protégé of Simon Forman (1552-1611). Forman and Napier's casebooks show that Napier created a nativity (what would today be called a horoscope, created to understand a person's character and fortune) for John Monson, to whom the caul belonged.²⁰³ The family then had the locket engraved with the date and time of John's birth. Just as the Monsons inscribed the locket containing a caul to imbue it with a layer of astrological significance, the engravings on this sigil convey the astral power of Jupiter, making it a potent object used for cure and protection.

A wheel of fortune

Some amulets could target specific illnesses, like the gold angel that treated the King's Evil. Others could protect against potentially harmful events, like the 'hag-stones' preserving against nightmares. Similarly, an amulet created and used to propagate good fortune (or prevent misfortune), in the way that the caul did,

²⁰¹ Agrippa, Tyson (ed.), *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 319.

²⁰² On coins as magical objects, see 'Magic and money in the early Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 72 (1997) 1037-54. On stamping, see Katherine Park, 'Impressed images: reproducing wonders', in Jones, C.A. and Galison, P (eds.), *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 254-71. On sigils as items of curiosity, protective and curative objects, and amulets, see Roos, 'Magic Coins' and 'Magic Squares'.

²⁰³ 'CASE48466: Nativity for Mr John Monson (Person33306)', *The Casebooks Project*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/cases/CASE48466> (accessed 7 April 2019); on nativities, see 'Early modern astrology', *The Casebooks Project*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/astrological-medicine/early-modern-astrology> (accessed 7 April 2019).

might attend the common human desire to control one's own fate. Fortune has formed an important facet of healing and protection throughout European history, and people have often credited amulets with the ability to alter one's fate. There have historically been various ways in which to achieve this, and our next object may provide an example of one method. Figure 17 shows a French 'Wheel of Fortune', dated 1777 and catalogued by the Science Museum as an amulet.²⁰⁴



Figure 17 – Wheel of fortune. France, 1850-1920. London: Science Museum, A74800.
Source: Science Museum.

²⁰⁴ 'Wheel of fortune', object number A74800, Science Museum, London, <https://collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects/co103704/wheel-of-fortune-possibly-a-copy-french-dated-1-protective-amulets> (accessed 9 May 2019).

The wheel of fortune was a well-known concept stemming from ancient philosophy, representing the supposedly ungovernable nature of fate. In Greek and Roman tradition, the goddess Fortuna (Greek equivalent ‘Tyche’) could spin the wheel with the means to change a person’s position on it. [Figure 18]. Under her hand, some would suffer misfortune, whilst others would gain great fortune. Medieval and early modern authors made reference to this renowned allegory, from Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century; ‘Thus Fortune guides her wheel, and turns it so, / And Brings us all from happiness to mourning’ to William Shakespeare in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; ‘Fortune, good night; smile once more; turn thy wheel’.²⁰⁵



Figure 18 – Fortuna with her wheel. Hand-coloured woodcut, 1535. Gregor Reisch, *Margarita Philosophica*, (1535). Source: Science Museum/Science & Society Picture Library.

²⁰⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer; D. Wright (trans.), *The Canterbury Tales*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1387-1400; 1998), 190; William Shakespeare, G. Hunter (ed.), *King Lear*, (London: Penguin 1608; 2005), 170.

References to the wheel also abound in medieval art, from engravings and manuscripts, to the great Rose windows in many Gothic cathedrals including Beauvais and Amiens in France, and Minsters including York.²⁰⁶ [Figure 19]. Medieval and early modern people even created physical manifestations of wheels. A twelfth-century French abbot installed a mechanical wheel of fortune in his monastery, so that ‘his monks might ever have before them the spectacle of human vicissitudes’.²⁰⁷



Figure 19 – York Minster Rose Window, originally c.1500.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

²⁰⁶ H.E. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2013), 342-4.

²⁰⁷ Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography*, 342-4; Emile Mâle, *Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, (London: Harper, 1962), 95n.

People's reliance on fortune over knowledge was parodied by Welsh mathematician Robert Recorde in the frontispiece to his astronomical textbook on the sphere, entitled *The Castle of Knowledge* (1556) [Figure 20]. In this frontispiece, the sphere of destiny was posed opposite the lesser wheel of fortune. Plaster depictions of destiny and fortune were created in direct imitation of Recorde's frontispiece on the tympana at Tudor manor Little Moreton Hall in Cheshire, accompanied by Recorde's words: 'THE WHEELLE OF FORTVNE / WHOSE RULE IS IGNORAVNCE', as opposed to 'THE SPEARE [sic.] OF DESTINYE / WHOSE RVLER IS KNOWLEDGE'.²⁰⁸ [Figure 21].



Figure 20 – Frontispiece to Robert Recorde, *The Castle of Knowledge*, (London, 1556).
Source: EEBO.

²⁰⁸ Jeremy Lake and Pat Hughes, *Little Moreton Hall*, (London: National Trust, 1995; 2006, revised ed.), 18-21; Lionel Miller Angus-Butterworth, *Old Cheshire Families and their seats*, (Manchester: Sherratt and Hughes, 1932), 187; Peter de Figueiredo & Julian Treuherz, *Cheshire Country Houses*, (Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1988).



Figure 21 – Tympana depicting Destiny and Fortune. Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire. Allegedly copied from Robert Record, *Castle of Knowledge*, (London, 1556).
Source: author's own image.

Whilst perhaps not manifesting an attempt to control fortune, a physical wheel may have served as a material reminder of one's powerlessness against one's fate in the face of God, much like the decorated tympana in Little Moreton Hall. Our seventh object (the French wheel of fortune, dated 1777, see in Figure 17) was acquired by the Science Museum from a chapel called 'Notre Dame Du Riollou' in Brittany, near to St Nicholas-du-Pélem in the North West of France. This is a 'Roue saint à carillon, dite 'Roue de Fortune'' ('Holy carillon wheel, called 'Wheel of Fortune').²⁰⁹ [Figure 22]. Carillons principally function as musical instruments formed of 'at least 23' cup-shaped bells, and are often housed in bell-towers of churches or municipal buildings.²¹⁰ These wheels are said to have originated in Brittany and were once a widespread feature of churches in

²⁰⁹ Text from black and white image found at 'Holy wheel or Carillon, 'The Rose of fortune'', *Wellcome Collection* <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/pp35am5d?query=wheel%20of%20fortune>, (accessed 17 January 2019).

²¹⁰ Alan H. Nelson, 'Mechanical Wheels of Fortune, 1100-1547', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980), 227-233. The wheel is known in Breton dialect as 'Rod ar fortun' (wheel of fortune). 'Carillon', *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carillon> (accessed 17 July 2018).

France and across Europe, used during services, baptisms, celebrations and pardons.²¹¹ The craftsmanship of this carillon wheel is uncertain, with sources stating that the name 'Alain Le Roux' carved next to the date on the wooden frame of the wheel reference either the carpenter, or the rector of Botoha (the district encompassing St Nicholas-du-Pélem) from 1583-1638.²¹² 'Alain Le Roux's wheel also had therapeutic uses. Apparently offered by parents in ex-voto (a benefaction to a saint, which will be discussed more in a moment) after curing their child of muteness, this wheel went on to help other children with speech disorders. Secondary writers note how youngsters troubled with verbal ailments were led to the wheel, where its bells were turned above their heads to promote its curative effects.²¹³

This wheel has been known by many different names, and its history is somewhat ambiguous.²¹⁴ Different forms of power are brought together by its manufacture and use; created in the form of a musical instrument, it was apparently accorded holy status, perhaps donated as an ex-voto, and certainly used within a church. A material representation of the perennial wheel of fortune, this object drew upon long-standing beliefs in the capricious nature of fate and man's lack of command over it. In combination with the reputed ability to cure certain disorders, and housed within a religious setting, this object was potent. An amalgamation of forces integrated to evidence its supposed healing power. But is it an amulet?

²¹¹ It is not clear to which specific work by René Couffon this information is from. Original source: Jean-Yves Cordier, 'La Roue à carillon de Confort-Meilars, celle de Locarn et de Priziac', <http://www.lavieb-aile.com/article-la-roue-a-carillon-de-confort-meilars-90677670.html> (Accessed 21 June 2018).

²¹² All information from 'SAINT-NICOLAS-DU-PELEM', *infoBRETAGNE.com*, <http://www.infobretagne.com/saint-nicolas-du-pelem.htm>, (accessed 8 June 2018). The former theory about the rector is attributed to Yves de Boisboissel, but no work is referenced.

²¹³ Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *Le cheval d'orgueil*, (Paris: Plon, 1975), 124. On his blog, Jean-Yves Cordier notes somewhat cynically that this might sound like 'old nonsense...but today we even surround babies' cots with music and rattles!' (Author's translation): 'La Roue à carillon de Confort-Meilars, celle de Locarn et de Priziac', *Le blog de Jean-Yves Cordier*, <http://www.lavieb-aile.com/article-la-roue-a-carillon-de-confort-meilars-90677670.html> (Accessed 21 June 2018).

²¹⁴ The catalogue notes that this wheel was accorded a 'holy' status and known as 'The Rose of Fortune'. 'Holy wheel or Carillon, 'The Rose of fortune', *Wellcome Collection*, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/pp35am5d?query=wheel%20of%20fortune> (Accessed 4 February 2019).



Figure 22 – Holy wheel or Carillon, 'The Rose of fortune', Chapelle, N.D. Du Riollou. Bretagne. Photograph. Provenance unknown, undated. Source: Wellcome Collection.

This chapter has so far established that amulets have a clear relationship with or proximity to the body, can be materially varied (comprising of mineral, animal or vegetable), and can be humanmade or natural. While sometimes they are inherently potent due to their very material, and often valued as rarities, other times they are inscribed as a means of imbuing them with power. Yet most importantly, as described from Pliny in the first century CE through the early modern period, amulets were used primarily to heal and protect. Just as writers often uncritically label Pepys' hare's foot as lucky, did museum curators class this wheel of fortune as an amulet because it did not easily fit any other category? The 'Alain Le Roux' wheel of fortune helps us ask important questions about the seemingly arbitrary and uncritical categorisation of some object as amulets.

A ring for falling-sickness

The wheel of fortune provides an example of an object used in a religious context. The relationship between amulets and religion is significant, yet often inconsistent within museum collections. In the Science Museum collections, religious objects include items used by Hindu pilgrims, Jewish manuscripts, and skull-caps printed with Catholic saints.²¹⁵ Votive objects often form a significant proportion of religious objects in English museum collections. Yet this group of objects epitomises the problematic relationship between religion and amulets, highlighting potential mutual exclusivity between the two. Also known as ex-votos, votives are objects acting as offerings given to a saint or divinity in gratitude, devotion or fulfilment of a vow.²¹⁶ Henry Wellcome collected five hundred 4th-2nd century BCE terracotta votives alone, with several hundred more votive offerings in the Science Museum collections from a variety of collectors.²¹⁷ Of these, the museum only categorises some as amulets.²¹⁸

A similar pattern continues in other institutions. Within the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Horniman Museum, and British Museum, there are several hundred objects classified as votives or ex-votos. Only a small proportion are also recognised as amulets.²¹⁹ Of the votive objects that are not categorised as amulets, many are distinctly labelled as religious. Yet votive items only represent one facet of religious material culture. Religion has undeniably played (and continues to play) an important part in healing, exemplified materially by amulets from across different centuries, geographies and cultures. It is important to remember the association between religion and amulets, as both provide

²¹⁵ For instance, Science Museum catalogue numbers A641893; A665466 and A665699 respectively. For ties to smaller religious denominations, see for instance A657374.

²¹⁶ "votive, adj. and n.". OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/224725?redirectedFrom=votive> (accessed 29 May 2018).

²¹⁷ Natalie Coe, 'Object of the Month: Acts of Faith', (2013):
<https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/object-of-the-month-acts-of-faith> (Accessed 22 May 2018).

²¹⁸ One object classed as an 'ex-voto' is also an amulet (A665472), and of the votives, some ancient terracotta items also appear to be amulets.

²¹⁹ Pitt Rivers, Oxford: Votive = 876 objects; Votive + amulet = 14 objects. Ex voto = 287 objects; Ex voto + amulet = 101 objects. Ex-voto = 106 objects; Ex-voto + amulet = 89 objects. Horniman, London: Votive = 707 objects; Votive + amulet = 7 objects. Ex-voto/ex voto = 2 objects; Ex-voto/ex voto + amulet = 0 objects. British Museum, London: Votive = 5,559 objects; Votive amulet = 130 objects. Ex voto = 70 objects; Ex voto amulet = 0 objects. Ex-voto = 59 objects; Ex voto amulet = 0 objects. Figures correct at time of writing, 16 April 2018. Whilst catalogues are not completely accurate, this nonetheless this provides an interesting pattern.

analogous forms of curative and protective power. Our eighth object demonstrates this symbiotic potency.



Figure 23 – Amulet-ring. England, 15thC(late). London: British Museum, AF.1009.
Source: British Museum.

This ring from the British Museum is English, dated as ‘late 15th century’, and originally held a precious, potent stone [Figure 23]. Most significantly, this object, classified as an ‘amulet-ring’, is engraved with the powerful word ‘ananizapta’.²²⁰ This was one of God’s divine names, used from the medieval period to invoke protection and healing.²²¹ Late medieval and early modern authors like Robert Reynes (1445-1505) associated the name with being effective against the ‘falling sickness’ or ‘falling evil’, otherwise known (both then and

²²⁰ ‘Amulet-ring’, object number AF.1009, British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=50540&partId=1&searchText=ananizapta&page=1; ‘Pendant’, object number M.242-1975, Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33865/pendant-unknown/>, (both accessed 2 April 2019). See Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*, (London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), 2nd ed. 1971, esp. 102-114.

²²¹ Lea T. Olsan and Peter Murray Jones, ‘Middleham Jewel: Ritual Power and Devotion’, *Viator* 31, 249-90; 256.; Anna Somers-Cocks, *Princely Magnificence: court jewels of the Renaissance, 1500-1630*, (London: Debrett’s Peerage/Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981), 47-8, cat. 8.

today) as epilepsy.²²² Around a century later in *Discovery of Witches* (1584), witchcraft sceptic Reginald Scot stated that ‘There be innumerable Charms of Conjurers, bad Physitians, lewd Chirurgians, Melancholick Witches, and Coseners, for all diseases and griefs....whereof I will repeat some.’ One of the counterfeit charms he attacked included the word ‘Ananizapta’ for the ‘falling-evill’:

Ananizapta smiteth death,
Whiles harm intendeth he,
This word nanizapta say,
And death shall captive be,
Ananizapta O of God.
Have mercy now on me.²²³

As these texts and the engraved ring attest, sufferers could use the name of God to make a powerful amulet. A similar example is shown by Figure 24, a pendant now in the V&A, made in England between 1540-60. Enamelled in gold, it is set with a hessonite garnet and a peridot, and hung with a sapphire. Also noted as an amulet, this object is engraved with the same word, spelt ‘ANNANISAPTA’ and similarly cited by the museum catalogue as having the ability to ‘ward off epilepsy’.²²⁴

These amulets not only provide evidence of the potency of inscription, but also demonstrate how Christian words and images could invoke curative and protective power. Aside from the name ‘annanisapta’, both pieces of jewellery also contained other religious references, the V&A pendant engraved with other godly words including ‘DETRAGRAMMATA’, ‘IHS’ and ‘MARIA’, and the ring from the British Museum engraved with images of the Trinity, Virgin and Child, St George and St Christopher.

²²² For an early modern description of this disease, see for example B.A., *The sick-mans rare jewel wherein is discovered a speedy way how every man may recover lost health*, (London, 1674), 131.

²²³ Reginald Scot, *The discovery of witchcraft proving that the compacts and contracts of witches with devils and all infernal spirits or familiars are but erroneous novelties and imaginary conceptions*, (London, 1584; 1661 repr.), 130; 136.

²²⁴ ‘Pendant’, object number M.242-1975, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33865/pendant-unknown/> (accessed 9 May 2019).



Figure 24 – Pendant. England, 1540-1560. London: V&A Museum, M.242-1975.
Source: V&A.

The religious power invested within the pendant and the ring is not distinct from the physical devices of imagery, inscription, the inherent potency of the stones embedded in them, and the means of bodily suspension they use to convey and facilitate their amuletic potency. These different types of healing power were synonymous in the medieval and early modern periods, until people like John Browne (who contended that a gold angel was not a necessary part of the cure for scrofula) argued that they could be divided. The conflation of disparate sources of potency is common within amulets, as exemplified by our last object.

A breverl

Our ninth and final object combines many of the efficacious features of amulets discussed in this chapter. Currently in the collections of the Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University, this is an item thought to protect against the plague, made in Bavaria or Austria, and dated ‘after 1726’. [Figure 25]. Commonly known as breverl (Austrian/Bavarian), brevia (Latin), briefs (English) or brevi (Italian), and also by other vernacular expressions such as the Italian ‘lettera di preghiera’ (‘prayer letters’) or Latin ‘charta’ (paper), these objects were made formulaically and consisted of various religious or magical components, both humanmade or natural.²²⁵ Breverl were composite amulets acting as prophylaxes for their users and owners, often promising defence from diseases such as plague. Most followed a similar design: a religious statement of protection (a rubric) followed by short prayer formulas or holy names, a sheet showing images of several saints, and a central composite amulet consisting of a variety of small objects and materials.²²⁶ Produced in many different countries, breverl enjoyed widespread popularity among Catholics in eighteenth-century Bavaria and Austria, sold by convents to visitors.²²⁷ These objects were intended to remain sealed, not read or looked at, for fear that opening them would render their preservative potency ineffectual. Instead, the amulet was permanently folded (often into decorated paper cases) and worn on the person.²²⁸ Although no English briefs are known to exist, a similar object can be seen in the collections of the Science Museum, shown in Figure 26, cited as originating from Bavaria, Germany and dated 1690-1710. The Science Museum catalogue their example as an ‘amulet and charm’ while the Bridwell Library class theirs as an ‘amulet’.

²²⁵ For a concise description of this general formula, see Ettlinger, ‘The Hildburgh Collection’.

²²⁶ For work on Italian examples, see Katherine M. Tycz, ‘Material Prayers and Maternity in Early Modern Italy: Signed, Sealed, Delivered’ in Maya Corry, Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin (eds.), *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 244-71.

²²⁷ ‘Amulet’, Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University, <https://www.smu.edu/Bridwell/SpecialCollectionsandArchives/Exhibitions/ShapeofContent/ReadableObjects/Amulet> (Accessed 26 January 2018).

²²⁸ Tycz, ‘Material Prayers and Maternity in Early Modern Italy’, 250-60, esp. 250; Ettlinger, ‘The Hildburgh Collection’, 111.

The printed Latin text on this example from the Bridwell Library begins: ‘This brief shall be carried to the glory of God and his saints against demons’, suggesting this amulet would provide the wearer with saintly protection from demons, demonic possession, and/or harm from those who were possessed.²²⁹ However, it also contains a list of formulae, and names that were common to many different types of amuletic texts at this time, and states that the text was approved by Pope Urban VIII in 1635.²³⁰ The images on the underside of the sheet of paper include the Virgin Mary and saints including St Francis, St Ignatius, St Antony of Padua and St Francis of Solanus; the latter, canonised in 1726, helps date the amulet.²³¹ The central composite is affixed with metal pendants, crosses, cloth, coral, seeds, wax, silk, and perhaps even hair and plant materials. The Zacharias cross or ‘pestkreuz’ in the central portion was known to be effective against the plague, confirming the amulet’s multi-functional nature.²³²

Other materials embedded in the paper demonstrate this further: as seen in the Introduction, early modern people recognised coral for its magical, curative and protective effects.²³³ The reasons that other items such as seeds and plant fibres were included is not known, but perhaps suggests how the breverl drew upon several different types of healing power, combining religious potency with elements of magical power. Certain objects in the central composite may relate to a particular pilgrimage site. Pieces of bone or hair may indicate personal relic collections, with names of saints in each corner perhaps indicating a connection with the named figures.

²²⁹ Authors own translation: ‘Breve super se portandum ad gloriam dei, suorumque sanctorum contra daemones.’

²³⁰ Tycz, ‘Material Prayers and Maternity in Early Modern Italy’, 250-60; Don Skemer, ‘Magic Writ: Textual Amulets Worn on the Body for Protection’, in A. Kehnel & D. Panagiotopoulos (eds.), *Schriftträger - Textträger: Zur materialen Präsenz des Geschriebenen in frühen Gesellschaften*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2015), 127-50; Skemer, *Binding Words*.

²³¹ St Francis Solanus was canonized in 1726, and thereby provides the earliest possible date for the engraving and amulet in general. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Solanus (Accessed 26 September 2018).

²³² Skemer, *Binding Words*.

²³³ Handley, *Sleep in Early Modern England*, 98-9.



Figure 26 – Amulet and charm to protect against plague. Bavaria, 1690-1710. London: Science Museum, A666092. Source: Science Museum.

The breverl brings together many of the significant features of amulets that this chapter has explored. Its efficacy depended on several components. Like the gold angel, it was to be worn on and kept close to the body, manifest in its portability. Its use of humanmade, natural, animal, vegetable and mineral substances demonstrates the multiplicity of materials that could form amulets. Like the sigil, its words and images were potent, such that they even worked when never directly read or viewed. Like many amulets, different types of power were combined in the creation and function of the breverl, conflating religious with secular and magical forms of potency; demonstrated by the things affixed within the central composite. The variety of materials that make up this amulet and the several curative methods it draws upon render it multi-functional, reputedly protective against both demons and plague, and perhaps even more.²³⁴

Conclusion

These nine objects have shown how amulets are an important part of the history of early modern English healing. By examining them, this chapter has demonstrated the diversity of amulets in many ways. Their material composition could range from natural to humanmade, or from human, to animal, to mineral. Some amulets were made from commonly available materials, while the rarity of others determined their value. Some were inscribed and stamped, denoting symbols, images, numbers and words. Most were suspended from patient's bodies, while others were suspended from buildings. The primary function of some amulets was to heal or protect a body, animal, or home. In other cases, the curative or prophylactic role of an amulet was a secondary function, established and perpetuated by the owner, collector, possessor or wearer. Some were inherently potent, while others utilised religious and spiritual potency, astrology, magic, fate or fortune. Despite this great variety, no single material, feature or source of power was incompatible with another. In many cases, amulets gained potency and value precisely by combining several elements together, most evident in the falling-sickness ring and the breverl.

²³⁴ Ettlinger also notes that whilst originally a plague amulet, the breverl became a panacea over the course of time owing to its composite character. Ettlinger, 'The Hildburgh Collection', 111.

An analysis of these things also evidences disparity in the way that museums classify and contextualise early modern healing objects. As these objects do not explicitly align with modern understandings of medicine, many museums categorise them as amulets. This problematic relationship between early modern and modern categorisation is the first issue that this chapter has identified. Where once people recognised these objects as part of contemporary health and healing, now they do not, as museums often conceptually disassociate amulets and medicine. The second issue is that the classification of objects as ‘amulets’ is inconsistent across different institutions. The Science Museum, for instance, reference the gold angel in their collections as an amulet and a curative item, but in Leeds University Library, it is simply part of their coin collection. This lack of uniformity has led to very different understandings of amulets.

This chapter has therefore emphasised the importance of a clear, critical and unified definition of amulets, that allows for change over time. Through the analysis of nine objects, it has shown the main features of early modern amulets. They are materially varied, whether mineral, animal or vegetable. While sometimes they comprise naturally and inherently potent materials, often valued as rarities, other times they are inscribed with words and/or images to imbue them with power. They have a clear relationship with the body, often worn on or close to a body in need. They could draw upon one or more different types of power, whether natural or celestial. Most importantly, amulets were used primarily to cure and protect, as well as ensuring good fortune. It is important to remember that this revised interpretation of amulets concerns how early modern English people used and understood them, but that depending on the time period under study, this definition will change to reflect the inevitable changes in the way healing was understood. Within these contexts, however, we see the situation of early modern amulets as a real, potent facet of healing and well-being, and a valuable source-base for the study of contemporary health and illness.

In the following four chapters, this thesis will explore other objects used for healing, which museum and researchers have often labelled as amulets. It will examine the objects’ different powers and values, social and functional contexts, and situation within the history of early modern health and healing. This chapter

has thus provided crucial context for the thesis, introducing the scope, complexity and importance of objects, and the theme of collecting which is prevalent throughout each chapter. Yet it is important to understand that the attribution of curative and protective power to objects was also a hugely contentious issue in the early modern era. Just as Macmath condemned the use of the caul as superstitious, many elite and learned members of society took exception with objects' incorrect and 'superstitious' use, creating great catalogues of error to disseminate popular fallacies and substantiate their criticism. The following chapter interrogates how and why such remedies were 'erroneous'.

CHAPTER TWO

Popular Errors

Introduction

‘He must have more heads then Rome had Hills, that makes out half of those vertues ascribed unto stones, and their not only Medical, but Magical properties’.²³⁵ Writing *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* in 1641, Thomas Browne (1605-82), a physician mentioned in the previous chapter, detailed his ideas about ‘Mineral and Terreous Bodies’. This sentence encapsulates the attitude that framed Browne’s book. It was a comprehensive catalogue of popular medical fallacies which built upon similar works of the preceding decades.²³⁶ Most notable among his predecessors were Laurent Joubert (1529-82), who had composed the original work of medical errors in French in 1578, and James Primrose (1600-59), whose 1638 book of errors in ‘physick’ was translated into English from Latin in 1651.²³⁷ Part of the broader Counter-Reformation need to distinguish true from false belief, the genre of errors signalled a reaction by learned members of society towards certain aspects of popular culture which they considered erroneous.²³⁸

In direct opposition to the traditions of learned practice, the medical sphere was growing to include a large variety of practitioners and healers offering quick, cheap remedies. Moreover, whilst many early modern English people depended upon objects and practices for cure and protection, people’s

²³⁵ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, (1658 repr), 3rd ed., 74.

²³⁶ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, (1658 repr), 3rd ed., [A3r].

²³⁷ Laurent Joubert, *Erreurs populaires au fait de la médecine et regime de santé, corrigés par M. Laur. Joubert Conseiller et medecin ordinaire du Roy et du Roy de Navarre, premier docteur regent, Chancelier et iuge de l’université an médecine de Mompeleie...* (Bordeaux, Paris and Avignon, 1578); James Primrose, *Popular Errours or the Errours of the people in matter of Physick*, trans. Robert Wittie, (London, W. Wisson for Nicholas Bourne, 1651). The original Latin title of Primrose’s work was *De Vulgi in Medicina Erroribus*, published in 1638. The name ‘Primrose’ was also written as ‘Primerose’ and both have been used by historians, but for simplicity the former spelling will be used in this thesis. See the introduction in Gregory de Rocher (trans.), *Popular Errors - Laurent Joubert*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1989), xvi; also Reid Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 142.

²³⁸ Gentilcore, ‘Was there a “Popular Medicine” in Early Modern Europe?’, 151-2. Works that identified religious ‘superstitions’ noted alleged ‘pagan’ beliefs; for instance, Jean-Baptiste Thiers’ *Traite des superstitions qui regardent les sacramens* (1704). Gentilcore notes that this was part of what Peter Burke has referred to as the ‘reform of popular culture’. Burke, *Popular Culture*, 207-43.

relationships with things had been complicated by turbulent religious and societal changes. The previous chapter examined some of the things that people used for healing in this period; objects like unicorn horn, and practices such as touching for the King's Evil. The errors authors condemned them both, and many more besides. This chapter examines the reasons why. It interrogates the intentions of Laurent Joubert, James Primrose and Thomas Browne in creating their works of medical error. Specifically, it explores the situation of objects within these catalogues, and in doing so makes an intervention in the current scholarship about popular errors and medical politics.

This chapter is the first to examine the works of Joubert, Primrose and Browne together in the context of early modern medicine. In doing so, it furthers the discussion of the main themes of this thesis, including medical politics, domestic medicine, recipes and secrets, superstition, demonology and collecting. It builds upon Anne Gerritsen's theory that objects from the past appear to us both in their material form and in textual records where our imagination conjures their form, and that what matters for the study of history and our historical understanding is our reading of both types of artefacts.²³⁹ By adopting Gerritsen's notion of the material artefact, we see how the books themselves act as objects of interest from the past: as physical, textual symbols of the learned attack on popular error. Moreover, Claire Preston's analysis of *Pseudodoxia* as a 'cabinet of ideas' demonstrates how these literary works represent virtual cabinets filled with errors; the epitome of Gerritsen's second form of textual artefact whereby the books represent receptacles for erroneous but no longer extant things. Stored within these books are records of the processes, concepts and objects which were described, analysed and condemned by the errors authors.

This chapter asks: who were the errors authors, what objects did they consider erroneous, and why? It examines why Joubert, Primrose and Browne regarded patients and practitioners alike to be practicing medicine incorrectly, and the role of objects in these criticisms. It analyses how the authors' condemnations fit within broader theological debates concerning the problematic role of objects, and then what these objects can indicate about tensions within

²³⁹ Gerritsen and Riello (eds.), *Writing Material Culture History*, 5-6.

the medical sphere. The authors of popular error defended their power and prestige as elite, learned physicians, whilst condemning erroneous methods of healing and those that used and disseminated them. The significant role played by objects in their attacks on societal medical error remains a constant line of enquiry throughout.

Who were the errors authors?

Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, learned authors began to document the customs and sayings of the ‘people’. Included in this body of literature were theologians’ collections of ‘superstitions’, and the compilations of popular songs, fairy tales and folk tales by learned writers.²⁴⁰ Another significant strand, which will be the topic of this chapter, concerned the collection of popular beliefs and practices regarding health and illness. Whereas proverb collectors were initially appreciative of their popular material, the compilers of medical customs and practices were critical from the beginning.²⁴¹

Although medieval practitioners like fourteenth-century French surgeon Guy de Chauliac had berated patients and healers who used charms or amulets as cures, and condemned female healers, there was no real precedent for the early modern catalogues of medical error.²⁴² The first of its kind, *Erreurs Populaires au fait de la médecine et regime de santé* (Popular Errors in medicine and the regime of Health) was published in 1578 by French Protestant physician Laurent Joubert. [Figure 27]. It addressed a series of popular medical fallacies, documented and discussed in detail, and substantiated by personal practice. While the geographical focus of this thesis is on English healing, Joubert’s original work provides crucial context for this investigation.²⁴³ Throughout his medical

²⁴⁰ Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in early modern France*, 229.

²⁴¹ Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in early modern France*, 258.

²⁴² William Eamon also notes the lack of medieval precedent for the popular errors literature in terms of formal cataloguing. Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 258; Eamon, ‘Physicians and the Reform of Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe’, 616.

²⁴³ Throughout I use the only English translation and annotation of Joubert’s *Erreurs* by Gregory de Rocher, *Popular Errors: Laurent Joubert*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1989). Also see deRocher, xiii n1 and n2 for some French articles on Joubert and his work. Another significant contemporary work of medical error which will not be discussed in this thesis is by Italian physician Scipione Mercurio, *De gli errori popolari D’Italia*, (Verona, 1603). Another notable, although later, French example is Anthelme Richerand, *Erreurs populaires relatives à la médecine*, (Paris, 1810).

career, from his role as Chancellor of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Montpellier, to physician for members of the French monarchy, Joubert committed himself to correcting the medical errors made by the ‘ignorant laymen’ of sixteenth-century France.²⁴⁴ He aimed to collect and correct errors in health and illness from conception to death, and had originally proposed an ambitious attempt to catalogue these mistakes over thirty books, but only managed to complete two volumes before his death in 1582.²⁴⁵

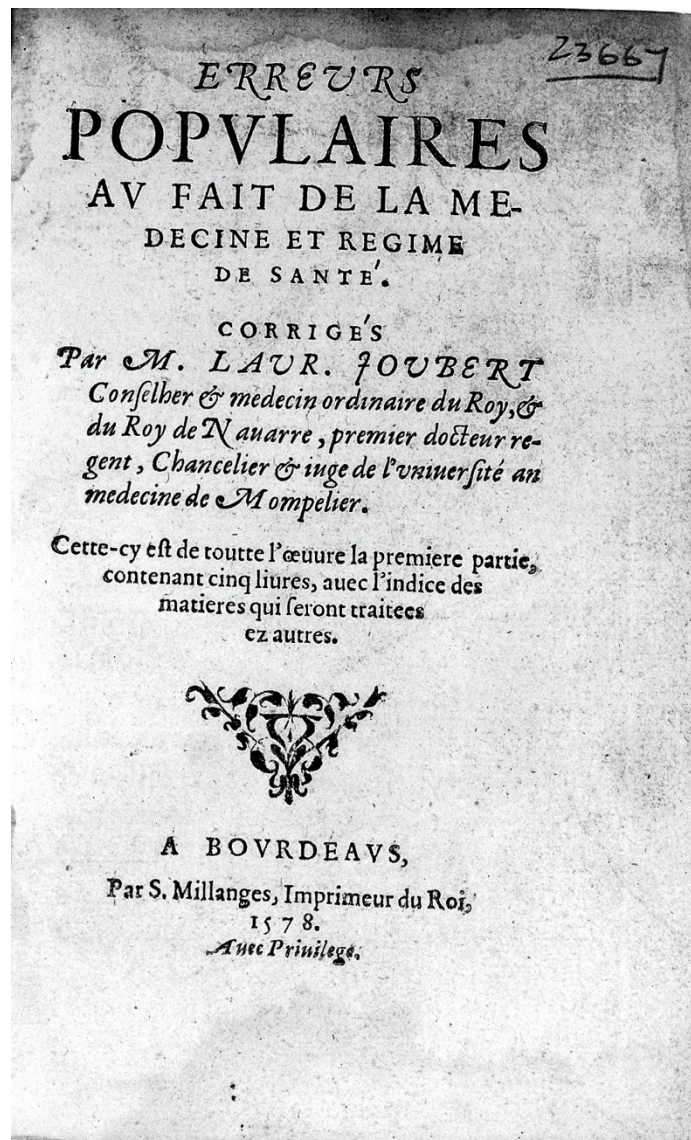


Figure 27 – Title-page to Laurent Joubert, *Erreurs Populaires au fait de la médecine et régime de santé*, 1578. Source: Wellcome Collection.

²⁴⁴ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 28.

²⁴⁵ Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*, 224; Laurent Joubert, Gregory de Rocher (trans.), *The Second Part of the Popular Errors*, (University of Alabama Press, 1995), xi.

Joubert split his first volume into five books: popular errors concerning medicine and physicians, conception and generation, pregnancy, childbirth, and children's nourishment. As well as detailing his ideas concerning air, complexion, clothes, and food and drink, the second volume included material projected for future volumes that was to comprise his entire *Erreurs Populaires*.²⁴⁶ The issues Joubert aimed to discuss were diverse: 'That one often can and should do without wine, since it is not as necessary as people think'; 'Whether or not oysters and truffles make a man more lusty in the venereal act'; 'against those who complain of hot nights in summer and yet sleep on a feather mattress with the windows closed'.²⁴⁷ He gathered common expressions and errors sent by 'various individuals', with many left as questions without answers; 'why is it that eight-month foetuses do not live?', and some merely as statements: 'A skinny woman is a tavern of blood'.²⁴⁸ Joubert dedicated space to explaining popular terms and phrases relating to medicine and illness, including 'suffocation of the womb', 'sciatica' and 'nosebleed'.²⁴⁹

Whilst Joubert did not live long enough to complete these thirty books, the legacy he left nevertheless continued to act as a source of stimulation for other European medical scholars over the following centuries.²⁵⁰ Notable amongst these writers were two seventeenth-century English physicians, James Primrose and Thomas Browne. Sixty years after Joubert's work was first published, Primrose wrote *De Vulgi Erroribus in Medicina*, translated into English as *Popular errors Or the errors of the people in physick* in 1651.²⁵¹ [Figure 28]. Primrose aimed to build upon Joubert's limited work, criticising him for unfolding 'but a few errors, and those not very grosse, and in my judgement little concerning the people'.²⁵² Born in Bordeaux, son of a Scottish minister, Primrose moved to Oxford after receiving his medical qualification in France. He then

²⁴⁶ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, xi-xii.

²⁴⁷ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 18-19.

²⁴⁸ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 140; 154.

²⁴⁹ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 177-181

²⁵⁰ For an early twentieth-century example of a work of errors that directly cites the influence of the seventeenth-century works of 'error', see A.S.E. Ackerman, *Popular Fallacies - A Book of Common Errors: Explained and Corrected with copious References to Authorities*, (London: Old Westminster Press, 1950) 4th edn. (1st edn. 1909).

²⁵¹ Primrose, *Popular Errors*.

²⁵² Primrose, *Popular Errors*, [B3].

gained a license from the College of Physicians in 1629, and later settled in Hull. Secondary sources thus refer to him as both English and French.²⁵³ Although Primrose had a reputation amongst his contemporaries as a prolific and highly regarded medical author, enjoying a wide European audience and numerous reprints of his many books, modern scholars have not dedicated any discrete studies to him and his work.²⁵⁴

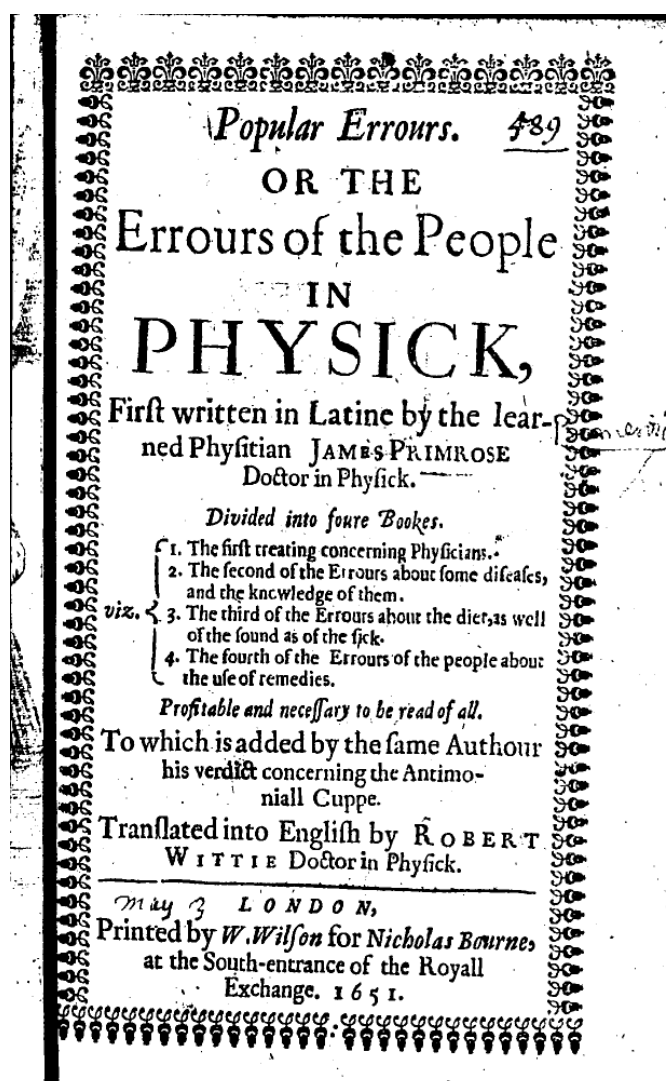


Figure 28 – Title-page to James Primrose, *Popular Errours or the Errours of the people in matter of Physick*, 1651. Source: EEBO.

²⁵³ William Birken, “Primrose, James (1600–1659), physician.” (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2004), accessed 26 Jul. 2019.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-22798>.

²⁵⁴ Except one short biography, John Ruhräh, ‘James Primrose 1580(?)–1659’, *American Journal of Diseases of Children* (January 1929), 37:1, 179–181.

Primrose divided his work of errors into four books. Like Joubert's, it began with errors 'which concernes Physitians', going on to discuss errors 'about some Diseases', errors 'about the Diet', and 'Errours of the People about the use of Remedies'.²⁵⁵ Similarly to Joubert, Primrose also cited many errors as 'superstitious', and emphasised the role of the Devil in fooling the people that certain remedies were efficacious.²⁵⁶

A few years later, Browne's compendium of errors, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica: or, Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths* (1646) signalled a departure from the more rigid structure of detailing solely medical error. [Figure 29]. Browne was educated and worked in Montpellier, Padua, Leiden, Oxford and Halifax, after which he settled in Norwich in around 1637, where he practiced medicine for the rest of his life. Reid Barbour has noted the nexus of reasons for Browne's decision to reside in Norwich, including the need for physicians in the area following the plague, Browne's family connections in the area, and the city's resemblance to Leiden; a city which he loved.²⁵⁷ The College of Physicians elected him as an honorary fellow in December 1664.²⁵⁸ Browne distinguished himself from Joubert and Primrose, arguing that *Pseudodoxia* excelled by examining not merely physiological problems, but also addressing fundamental epistemological concerns, for example: 'Of mistake, misapprehension, fallacy or false deduction'; 'Of credulity and supinity'; 'Of some Relations whose truth we feare'.²⁵⁹ Moreover, Browne discussed his personal experience with certain diseases, remedies and objects, their reputed effects, and even their existence in a detailed way that the earlier authors had not.

²⁵⁵ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, title page.

²⁵⁶ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 429.

²⁵⁷ R.H. Robbins, "Browne, Sir Thomas (1605–1682), physician and author." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. May 24, 2008. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3702> [Accessed 27 December 2018]; Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne*, 257–310.

²⁵⁸ Robbins, "Browne, Sir Thomas", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [accessed 26 July 2019].

²⁵⁹ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, [6–10]. Also see Robin Robbins (ed.), *Sir Thomas Browne's Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, Volume I: Text, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), ix–xix.

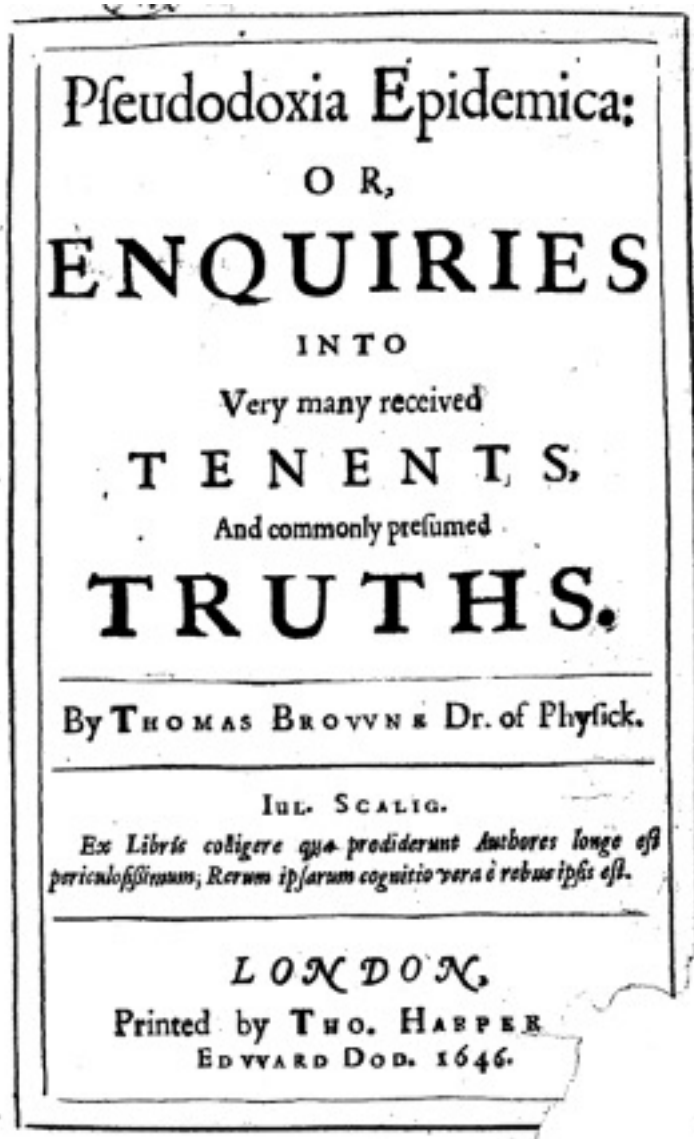


Figure 29 – Title-page to Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or, Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths* (1646). Source: EEBO.

Following eleven chapters dedicated exclusively to the cause of errors, Browne divided *Pseudodoxia* into a further six books covering minerals and vegetables, animals, man, pictures, geography and history, and scripture. It is possible that in dividing natural and human history, Browne was deliberately emulating the structure of philosopher Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605), or perhaps he was following the characteristic division of cabinets of curiosity and their catalogues into categories of 'naturals' and 'artificials'; a topic

which will be discussed further in Chapter Four.²⁶⁰ Significantly, Browne did not limit himself to discussing solely health and illness, and instead chose to treat the epidemic of error in society more broadly. As a result, he did not analyse erroneous remedies in a distinct chapter, but sporadically across different sections.

Browne has been the subject of a significant amount of examination and re-evaluation, especially in the past decade following the quatercentenary of his birth.²⁶¹ Some studies have highlighted the role of style and mode in his works, whereas others have noted the effects of religious change evident in Browne's writing.²⁶² Scholars have also studied Browne's works alongside material culture. Kevin Killeen, for instance, has discussed the relationship of *Pseudodoxia* with post-Reformation iconoclasm, and Claire Preston has situated Browne's work firmly within the early modern culture of collecting objects and ordering knowledge.²⁶³ Labelling him as an 'arch-curioso' and recognising the 'virtual, or intellectual, equivalent of the seventeenth-century cabinets' in his works, Preston highlights the 'encyclopedic collections of things' in Browne's texts, concluding that *Pseudodoxia* occupies a 'medial position between a genuinely ordered

²⁶⁰ Robbins (ed.), *Sir Thomas Browne's Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, xxxi. Within his 'natural' section, Books Two to Four progress with Aristotelian progression from the lower to the higher things and beings. Preston, 'In the Wilderness of forms', 178.

²⁶¹ Claire Preston, *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early-Modern Science*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Kathryn Murphy and Richard Todd (eds.), *'A man very well studied' - New Contexts for Thomas Browne*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

²⁶² C.A. Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne: the Ann Arbour tercentenary lectures and essays*, (London: University of Missouri Press, 1982). Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). John R. Knott, 'Sir Thomas Browne and the Labrynth of Truth', in Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne*, 19-30. Also see Pebworth's discussion of *Pseudodoxia* and truth; Ted-Larry Pebworth, 'Wandering in the America of Truth: *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* and the Essay Tradition', in Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne*, 165-177; also see William N. West, 'Brownean Motion: Conversation within *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*'s 'Sober Circumference of Knowledge'', in Reid Barbour and Claire Preston (eds.), *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 170; Robin Robbins, 'Browne's Cosmos Imagined: Nature, Man and God in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*', in Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne*, 155-165. Leonard Nathanson, 'Sir Thomas Browne and the Ethics of Knowledge', in C.A. Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne - The Ann Arbor Tercentenary Lectures and Essays*, (London: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 12-18, esp. 12. For further reference, see Leonard Nathanson, *The Strategy of Truth: A study of Sir Thomas Browne*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

²⁶³ Kevin Killeen has detailed *Pseudodoxia*'s relationship with iconoclasm in 'The Politics of Painting: *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* and Iconoclasm', in Barbour and Preston (eds.), *Sir Thomas Browne*, 188-205.

encyclopedic enterprise...and a random collection of oddities'.²⁶⁴ Browne's 'cabinet of ideas' is therefore similar to Sean Silver's *The Mind is a Collection*, discussed in the Introduction.²⁶⁵ This very notion of the work as a textual collection of ideas, objects, observations and practices can be extended beyond Preston's distinct study of Browne, to include the works of Joubert and Primrose.

Natalie Zemon Davis and William Eamon have examined the works of Joubert, Primrose and Browne together, as a means of discussing popular culture in early modern Europe.²⁶⁶ Aside from this, the bias lent to Browne's work has meant that scholars have rarely examined popular errors texts comparatively.²⁶⁷ The omission of a standalone analysis of popular errors is significant, and any discipline would benefit from an assessment of multiple catalogues together. A comparison would demonstrate changes and continuities across geography and chronology, and elucidate similarities or disparities between the errors listed by each author. For the medical historian, the findings of such examinations could answer important questions regarding which beliefs, objects and practices were considered erroneous by each author, thereby elucidating information about contemporary medicine and society more generally. This chapter takes the first steps towards this necessary work, by focusing on what we can learn from the objects within these three errors texts.

Which things were erroneous, and why?

Joubert, Primrose and Browne discussed a range of problematic healing objects. Occasionally, they wrote about the same things. All three, for instance, debated

²⁶⁴ Claire Preston, 'In the Wilderness of Forms: Ideas and Things in Thomas Browne's Cabinets of Curiosity', in Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday (eds.), *The Renaissance Computer - Knowledge technology in the first age of print*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 170-183; 170. Also see Preston, 'The jocund cabinet and the melancholy museum in seventeenth-century English literature', in Evans and Marr (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder*, 87-106; Preston, *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science*, 108; 113. For the works cited by Preston, see Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, (London, 1643) and Browne, *Hydriotaphia, Urne-Buriall, or, a Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk*, (London, 1658).

²⁶⁵ Preston, 'In the Wilderness of forms', 177. Silver, *The Mind is a Collection*.

²⁶⁶ Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*; William Eamon in 'Physicians and the Reform of Popular Culture in early modern Europe', *Acta Histriae* 17 (2009), 615-26.

²⁶⁷ For an example of a literary study that has examined the errors works comparatively, see Edwina L.N. Penge, *The Particularisation of Error within the 'Culture of Fact'*, M.Litt Thesis, English Language and Literature, (University of Oxford, 2004). The works of early modern errors are referred to as a genre by Eamon in 'Physicians and the Reform of Popular Culture in early modern Europe', 616.

the usefulness of lodestone, and the various medical functions that contemporaries believed it to have. [Figure 30]. Both Primrose and Browne criticised the use of the weapon salve, the bezoar stone, the eagle stone, the unicorn horn, and the antimonial cup.²⁶⁸ Similarly, Joubert and Browne both attacked those who kept and wore the caul for protective benefit or good fortune.²⁶⁹ Other times, only one author took exception to a particular object. Primrose for instance cast doubt on the efficacy of applying young whelps, pigeons, dogs and ram's lungs to the soles of the feet, as a remedy for various diseases or for 'revulsion'.²⁷⁰ Joubert discussed several 'poor', 'extravagant', 'superstitious' and 'useless' remedies used by laypeople, such as applying cold tin plates for stomach-ache, applying a wet towel on the belly for colic, and using 'banners', 'lint candles', and 'conjured lard' for the healing of wounds and ulcers.²⁷¹ Browne criticised those who hung up hollow stones to prevent the 'Ephialtes', used the 'chips of Gallows' for amulets against agues, and powdered up the fifth rib of roast beef as a remedy against 'Fluxes'.²⁷²

The three men sometimes agreed on which objects were erroneous, and sometimes opposed things which the others did not. However, the central issues they had with the items they condemned corresponded, and manifested in two main ways. Firstly, the authors questioned the very existence of some objects, and raised issues about the creation and use of counterfeits. Browne, for instance, voiced his suspicions about unicorn's horn, an object which was discussed in Chapter One, stating that 'Great account and much profit is made of Unicornes horne, at least of that which beareth the name thereof wherein notwithstanding, many I perceive suspect an Imposture, and some conceive there is no such animall extant.'²⁷³ Primrose agreed; 'Many bragge, that they have great pieces of it. But it is a thing doubted of by many not without good reason'.²⁷⁴ The errors authors

²⁶⁸ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*; Primrose, *Popular Errours*.

²⁶⁹ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 178-9; Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1672 edn.), 314-5.

²⁷⁰ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 397-400.

²⁷¹ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 264.

²⁷² Brown, *Pseudodoxia*, (1672 edn.), 99, 319-20.

²⁷³ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1646 edn.), 166.

²⁷⁴ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 360. Odell Shepard also notes Joubert's disdain of unicorn's horn, a contemporary in a later version of his errors: Laurent Joubert, *La première et seconde partie des Erreurs populaires touchant la médecine*, (Rouens, 1601), i; Odell Shepard, *The Lore of the Unicorn*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 139, 291.

raised similar concerns about the bezoar stone, an object central to Chapter Four of this thesis. Browne noted that his contemporaries were ‘daily gulled’ by the ‘Antidote Bezoar; whereof though many be false’, while Primrose complained about how people misidentified several different substances as this one precious stone.²⁷⁵ Primrose conceded that whilst a true stone may exist, it would be very rare, arguing that some physicians had made convincing yet fake versions of the bezoar, ‘a hundred grains’ of which ‘can never produce the least moment of health.’²⁷⁶



Figure 30 – Small loadstone with scalloped metal mounts, bound with string, with ring for suspending. English, 1551-1700. Loadstone: 35 mm x 16 mm x 13 mm, .014 kg; string: 105 mm. London: Science Museum, A212079. Source: Science Museum.

The second point of contention concerned power and function. The errors authors argued that practitioners and patients alike assumed too much of certain

²⁷⁵ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, (1672 edn.) 185; Primrose, Wittie (trans.), *Popular Errours*, 346.

²⁷⁶ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 353-356.

objects. People wrongly believed that some things had the power to cure or protect against a particular disease, or could heal many different diseases. Stones epitomised this problem, as seen in the quotation with which this chapter opened.²⁷⁷ Contemporaries held the bezoar in high esteem for its wondrous and curious qualities and its virtuous healing properties, but Primrose argued that people ‘attribute too much’ to the stone. He noted that it was purportedly effective for ‘corroborating the heart’, as ‘a very strong Cordiall’ and a ‘preservative against Poyson’, as well as for ‘plague, jaundice, and all obstructions of the body and bowels’, melancholy, and several other purgative functions.²⁷⁸ ‘It can scarce be said’, Primrose scorned, ‘whether to the Bezaar stone, or to the Unicornes horn the common people attributes greater vertues, for those are thought to be the prime Antidotes of all.’²⁷⁹

Joubert, Primrose and Browne had a problem with patients and practitioners holding incorrect beliefs about what healing objects were capable of doing. People not correctly educated in the art of physic were erroneously recommending and using things which they did not sufficiently understand, either in form or function. However, these issues were intimately bound up with two much more complex contemporary matters. One concerned superstition and demonology, while the other concerned medical practice and competition. Further examination of objects in the errors texts helps us unpack both.

Superstition and demonology

All three errors authors condemned what they referred to as ‘superstitious’ remedies. Amongst those in Joubert’s text were needles used to stop bleeding, a brass chain on the ankle to alleviate gout, a feather worn on a necklace to aid teething, and a brass ring for the colic.²⁸⁰ Similarly, in a section concerning ‘red cloths [which] are not to bee preferred before others, for the voyding of the measils’, Primrose lamented ‘yea amongst us there are some so superstitious’, stating that ‘the colour of the cloath seemes to me to be superstitious, for the

²⁷⁷ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, (1658 edn.), 74.

²⁷⁸ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 346-7; 352-3; 355.

²⁷⁹ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 359-60.

²⁸⁰ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 191-4.

colour operates not unlesse it be by accident'.²⁸¹ 'Superstition' also appears several times in Browne's *Pseudodoxia*, both about remedial objects, and also concerning practices, customs, opinions, pictures, and emblems.²⁸²

What were the broader contextual implications of these 'superstitious waies in the cure of common diseases?'²⁸³ The introduction to this thesis discussed how, following the Reformation, certain superstitious practices became deeply problematic for theologians and intellectuals, and any act categorised as superstitious could signify diabolical involvement.²⁸⁴ When laypeople erroneously assumed too much of certain objects, they could unwittingly engage with complex demonolgocial power. Whilst nature's limits restricted what real effects the Devil could produce, there were no such limits on what he appeared to do, and laypeople were easily deceived by demonic effects, mistaking the potency of particular objects and practices as natural or godly due to their ignorance.²⁸⁵ So when the 'vulgar' were too 'credulous', this meant improperly educated people confusing natural phenomena with diabolical mischief.²⁸⁶ The errors authors seized upon this point in their justification of societal fallacies.

Dedicating an entire chapter in the first book of *Pseudodoxia* to 'the last and common Promoter of false Opinions, the endeavours of Satan', Browne fulminated against the Devil's tendency to speciously 'wrought cures upon the sick', describing 'the danger and delusion that is in cures by Charms, Amulets, Ligatures, Characters &c.'²⁸⁷ The Devil, he argued, 'being a natural Magician...may perform many acts in ways above our knowledge, though not transcending our natural power...Many secrets there are in Nature of difficult discovery unto man, of easie knowledge unto Satan'.²⁸⁸ Giving examples of how the Devil fooled the vulgar that certain materials were medicinally effective, Browne noted:

²⁸¹ Primrose, Wittie (trans.), *Popular Errours*, 108; 193.

²⁸² Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 82 et passim. For instance, 'paganish superstitions about the Mistletoe of the Oak', 78.

²⁸³ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 33.

²⁸⁴ Such theological problems were also previously raised in the medieval era. See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 285.

²⁸⁵ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 161-5.

²⁸⁶ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 434.

²⁸⁷ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 29; 33

²⁸⁸ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 30.

That there is any power in Bitumen, Pitch, or Brimstone, to purifie the air from his uncleanness; that any vertue there is in Hipericon to make good the name of *fuga Dæmonis*, any such Magick as is ascribed unto the Root *Baaras* by *Josephus*, or *Cynospastus* by *Ælianus*, it is not easie to believe.²⁸⁹

Primrose also mentioned the Devil concerning many of the erroneous medical objects he referenced in his Fourth book, ‘Of the Errours of the People about the use of Remedies.’ Describing the weapon-salve, he asked: ‘who sees not that this may be also a sort of Witchcraft? If he that doth this by the help of the image douse the Devill (who is the spirit of this world) as an instrument to set on the charm, it is likely, that this magneticall cure (as they call it) hath the very same Author.’²⁹⁰ Of the ‘curing of the Kings-evill by touch of the Seventh-Sonne’ (a practice examined in Chapter One in relation to the gold angel), Primrose contended that ‘questionlesse these fellowes doe either not at all cure this disease of the Kings-Evill which daily experience testifies, or else the Devill (as hee uses to doe in other diseases) doth incontinently cure it with naturall meanes.’²⁹¹ Whilst not dedicating any distinct space to the justification of error in his incomplete second volume, the fact that Joubert allocated an entire future section to discuss ‘superstitious, vain and ceremonious objects’ suggests an aligned belief. In using superstitious objects and performing superstitious practices, the vulgar were not just the ignorant corrupters of medical knowledge, but were also, however unwittingly, implicated in diabolical activity. By casting these theological judgements, Joubert, Primrose and Browne emphasised their superior knowledge of the natural world, and set themselves apart from the misguided practitioners and incognisant laypeople who fell for the Devil’s tricks.

²⁸⁹ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 31.

²⁹⁰ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 429.

²⁹¹ For more on the King’s evil, see Chapter 1. Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 411.

The CHEAPEST & SAFEST
*Way of bringing forth y^e Venom of y^e
 Secret Disease, and Perfectly Cu-
 ring it in Man or Woman, By on-
 ly y^e Paris Pill, & a Balsamick
 Electuary, without Prejudice to the
 Body, or Hindrance of any Bu-
 siness, & that so Privately
 that a Friend in Bed
 shall not know it*

*The Price of a Box of the Pills is 2. 4/6
 and a Pot of the Electuary 1. 6/6 of w^h Pills
 and Electuary two Boxes & one Pot will
 be sufficient for any one not very far
 gone in the Distemper and Double the
 Number will heal the Patient if in great
 Extremity. Sold by J. Sherwood
 Book Seller at Popings aley Gate fleet
 Street With a paper of Directions.*

Figure 31 – Advertisement for 'The Paris pill and a Balsamick electuary'. England, c. 17th century. Source: Wellcome Collection.

Medical competition

By criticising the incorrect use of superstitious remedies by both patients and practitioners, the errors authors intellectually distanced themselves both from these vulgar people, and from theologically dangerous healing practices involving objects. At the same time, in the medical sphere, these three men attempted to disassociate themselves from the erroneous practice of physic. Before discussing the part played by objects in these efforts, it is worth pausing for a moment to contextualise the changes happening in the early modern medical sphere as the errors authors wrote their texts.

In the creation of their works of error, Joubert, Primrose and Browne were responding to fundamental shifts in the delivery of early modern medical care. Learned, university-trained physicians in Europe saw the practice of physic not just as an art of therapy alone, but also as a philosophy of health. They gave counsel to each individual patient on how to remain healthy according to their unique temperament. When the patient became ill, the physician aided nature in its fight to restore health, using theoretical learning, knowledge and experience, but the main weight of their practice was in the advice they gave.²⁹² In contrast, non-university-educated practitioners practiced medicine rather than physic; that is, they favoured therapeutic experience over academic learning and theory.

Joubert practised physic in France in the second half of the sixteenth century, just as a 'hierarchically organised and decentralised corporative' medical community was taking shape.²⁹³ The climate in which Joubert wrote his errors was one in which physicians were creating pamphlets to lament the 'insubordination and temerity' of the growing subordinate groups; namely surgeons, apothecaries and midwives, those empirical healers who plagued the contemporary medical scene.²⁹⁴ Joubert's resentment is evident in his frequent castigation of ignorant midwives and apothecaries, calling the latter 'stupid louts', 'presumptuous charlatans, arrogant braggarts and dangerous schemers, who have nothing but recipes', and noting that 'the physicians, who are more consummate in their knowledge, are hindered by them.'²⁹⁵

²⁹² Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime*, 62-5.

²⁹³ Brockliss and Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France*, 214.

²⁹⁴ Brockliss and Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France*, 174-205, 214-15.

²⁹⁵ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 93.

Primrose and Browne both practiced physic in mid-seventeenth-century England. Historians of the medical marketplace have argued that, during this century, patients increasingly wanted quick, immediate cures rather than traditional, prolonged discussions about health and well-being. Physicians tried to maintain the dignity of learned medicine through regulation, as irregular practitioners proliferated in a rapidly growing commercial economy.²⁹⁶ Focus shifted to therapy rather than wellness; onto disease, rather than the patient; and pressure grew to provide service to the sick, rather than the healthy. This shift led to explicit competition between traditional physicians and other practitioners of all kinds regarding the provision of medical services. The errors authors, like other regular physicians, felt threatened. Their currency of individual consultations and learned practice was superseded by the practical foundation of ‘irregular’ practitioners and empirics. There were those who increasingly sold objects, pills, powders and waters promising instant and universal effects, which patients could easily obtain from shops and, in due course, coffee houses.²⁹⁷ Often the cures they offered were commodities and proprietary medicines, which were packaged, advertised, and sold at a fixed price.²⁹⁸ [Figure 31]. Regular physicians could no longer maintain themselves as a learned group, and were forced to compete with other practitioners and make public and substantiated claims of their expertise.

In making their catalogues of errors, Joubert, Primrose and Browne simultaneously asserted their authority and attacked their competitors. They believed that there were far too many people attempting to lay claim to a portion of their profession with practical, unlearned and ignorant approaches.

²⁹⁶ Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime*, 28-69; Harold Cook, ‘Good Advice, Little Medicine: The Professional Authority of Early Modern English Physicians’ *Journal of British Studies*, 33:1, (Jan 1994), 1-31; 5; Kassell ‘Medical Economy’, 90; Alisha Rankin, ‘Empirics, Physicians, and Wonder Drugs in Early Modern Germany: The Case of the “Panacea Amwaldina”’, *Early Science and Medicine*, 14:6, (2009), 680-710; 683; Roy Porter, *Health for Sale: Quackery in England 1660-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); French and Wear (eds.), *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*.

²⁹⁷ Cook, ‘Good Advice, Little Medicine’, esp. 5.

²⁹⁸ Cook, ‘Good Advice, Little Medicine’, 5

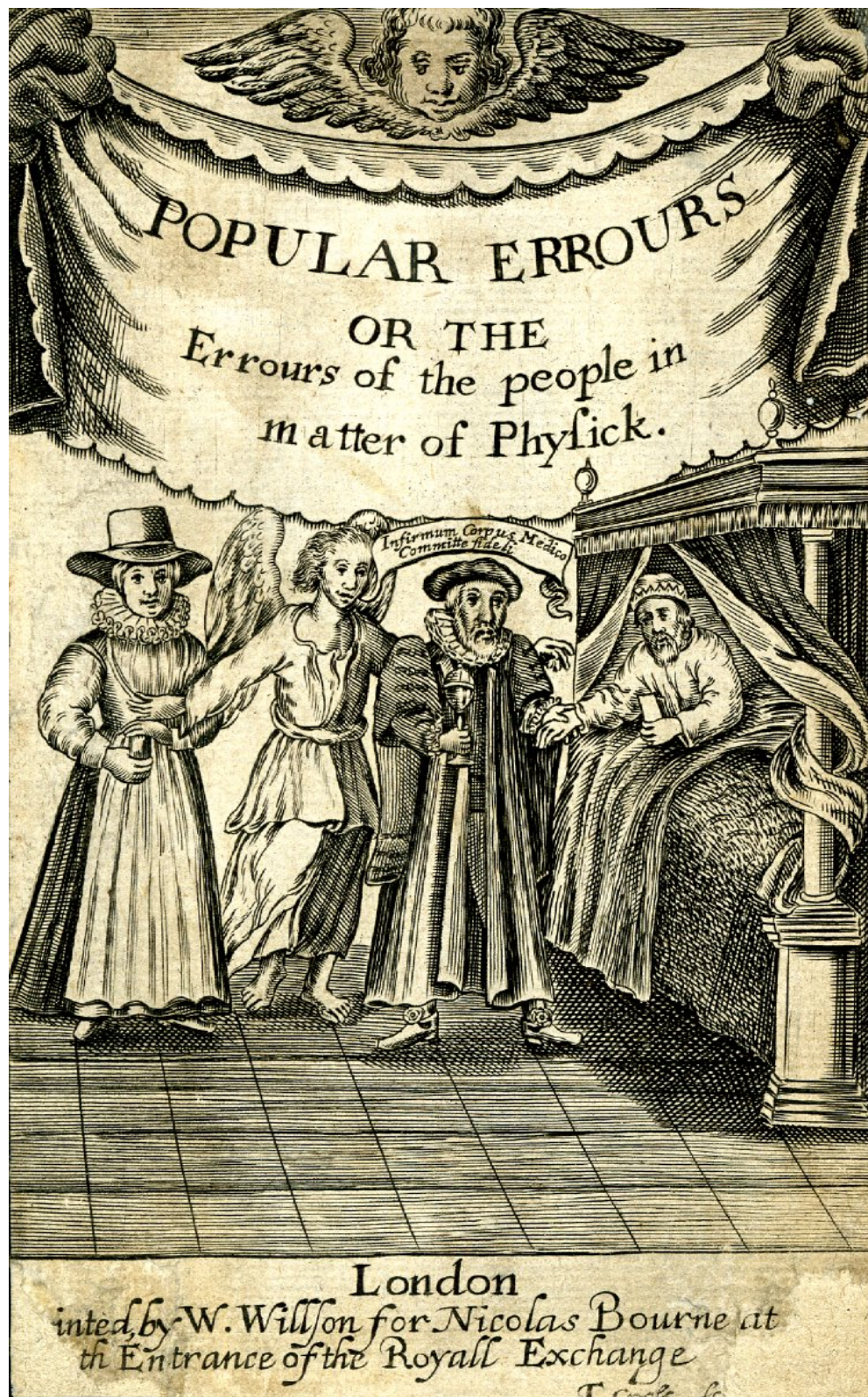


Figure 32 – Frontispiece to James Primrose, *Popular Errours or the Errours of the people in matter of Physick*, 1651. Engraving. London: British Museum, 1860,0211.272.
Source: British Museum.

They took exception to the profusion of ignorant intruders into the domain of official medicine, and argued that too many acted as physicians.²⁹⁹ Their fulminations are evident in the words, images and content of their texts. Claire Preston has noted the emblematic significance of the frontispiece to the English edition of Primrose's *Popular Errors*. [Figure 32]. This image depicts an angel shunning an empiric who holds an antimonial cup, being favoured over an academically-dressed physician, accompanied by the phrase 'infirmum corpus medico commito fideli' ('I commit the sick body to the trustworthy doctor').³⁰⁰

The errors authors used a plethora of names to denote erroneous medical practitioners, testament to their view that they were among the exclusive few who practiced medicine properly. They condemned 'empiricks', 'mountebanks', 'quacksalvers', 'charlatans', 'saltimbancoes', 'astrologers', 'fortune-tellers', 'geomancers', 'midwives', 'apothecaries', and 'physitians....who make judgement in phisic based primarily upon urine'.³⁰¹ Sometimes, erroneous practitioners were merely described by their improper application and practice of medicine, illustrating that it was not any one group of people at fault, but rather an entire culture of medicine. Indeed, Primrose noted that even university-educated physicians could be guilty of practicing erroneous medicine, by reason of their improper instruction in the 'Rules of Physick'. He likened these 'meanly furnished' physicians to mere 'Stage-Players', adding that 'there are many Physicians in name, but in performance very few'.³⁰² Browne agreed: universities, whilst 'many times full of scholars', were 'oftentimes empty of learning'.³⁰³ The exclusive and advanced method for the study and practice of medicine that the errors authors believed they possessed was rooted not in blind adherence to, but in the proper comprehension of appropriate texts, Galenic Humoralism, and the diagnostic, prognostic and therapeutic parts of phisic. God had only approved this one 'art', and only ordained an exclusive few with the proper comprehension

²⁹⁹ Eamon, 'Physicians and the reform of popular culture', 617.

³⁰⁰ Claire Preston, "An Incomium of Consumptions": *A Letter to a Friend* as Medical Narrative', in Barbour and Preston (eds.), *Sir Thomas Browne*, 213-4.

³⁰¹ Browne, *Pseudodoxia* (1658 edn.), 8-9; Joubert, *Popular Errors*, on midwives. xv-xxii, 171-6, 208-11, 292 and on apothecaries esp. 87-98; Primrose, *Popular Errours*, esp. 5-8, 22-4.

³⁰² Primrose, *Popular Errours*, B3r, B3v; 5.

³⁰³ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 14.

of physic.³⁰⁴ As summarised by Joubert, there were so many ‘meddlers’ that those with true medical knowledge constituted a number ‘so small that it would be quicker to write the names of those who are not so presumptuous than to make a list of so many meddlers (an almost infinite undertaking).’³⁰⁵

The blame for errors in health and healing lay not just with practitioners, but also with patients. While irregular practitioners disseminated fraudulent and fallacious cures, many laypeople ignorantly and uncritically accepted these erroneous remedies. All three authors referred to these people as the ‘vulgar’. In the early modern period, this word could signify those ‘belonging to the ordinary or common class in the community’, especially ‘the uneducated or ignorant’.³⁰⁶ But when the errors authors referred to the ‘vulgar’, they did not denote any particular social order or level of wealth. Rather, the vulgar encompassed any who uncritically and unquestioningly accepted medical cures and advice: ‘the most deceptable part of mankind...ready with open arms to receive the encroachments of error.’³⁰⁷ Consequently, even the upper strata of society fell for the ‘tricks’ which abound in medicine, and Primrose reported that he knew a gentleman who paid twenty pounds for an alleged secret that he could have obtained from an apothecary for a portion of the price.³⁰⁸ Joubert noted that any recovery the vulgar might experience after having tried one of the ‘remedes vains et inepts’ (vain and inept remedies) was merely coincidental.³⁰⁹ The fact that the vulgar continued to employ erroneous remedies with no proper medical grounding served to condemn not only their character as individuals, but the character of the population at large, for the errors authors believed that ‘being erroneous in their single numbers once huddled together, they will be error it self.’³¹⁰

In these contexts, we can understand why the errors authors’ point of contention was rarely an object itself, but the incorrect use of an object. Even

³⁰⁴ Eamon, ‘Physicians and the reform of popular culture in early modern Europe’, 620; Primrose, *Popular Errors*, B3; 3.

³⁰⁵ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 69.

³⁰⁶ OED, 2a, “vulgar, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2018. Web. (Accessed 7 January 2019).

³⁰⁷ Primrose, *Popular Errors*, [4]; Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 6.

³⁰⁸ Primrose, *Popular Errors*, 18.

³⁰⁹ ‘Vain and inept remedies’. (Author’s own translation).

³¹⁰ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 7.

licensed, university-trained physicians like the errors authors recommended curative items, remedies that operated magically, and practical, empirical methods where necessary; see, for instance, the discussion of the weapon salve in Chapter Five.³¹¹ Yet Joubert, Primrose and Browne instead drew a distinction between those who were properly educated with a theoretical understanding of physic (and thus knew which objects to use, and how to use them) and those who were not. So, although the errors had voiced real, theological concerns, and while even university educated physicians could be implicated, principally at fault in escalating medical error were the practitioners who peddled empirical remedies without proper understanding, and the vulgar who ignorantly believed in their effects. In short, the distinction was between those who were involved in the trade of words, and those who were involved in the trade of things.



Figure 33 – G. Walker, Portrait of Hans Buling, Quack on stage with ape and medicines. England, c. 17th century. Source: Wellcome Collection

³¹¹ Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, 21; Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime*, 62.

Errors and secrets

The objects in the errors texts provide clear evidence for this censure. Things with secret or unexplained power were particularly at fault. As will be discussed further in Chapter Four, early modern people associated secrets with wondrous objects and events which often drew upon the occult properties of natural substances.³¹² Secret and wondrous remedies could vary widely in form and functionality. Some were simple herbals, minerals or animal substances, while others were compound cures. Some guaranteed their efficacy as cure-alls for any ailment, while others primarily functioned as antidotes to poison or plague, but were also purported to have other uses.³¹³ Although writers had claimed the existence of such wondrous, secret remedies and panaceas since antiquity, from the sixteenth-century enterprising individuals promised marvellous cures, named and sold remedies, and flooded the medical market with an ‘unprecedented number’ of cures. These were the ‘empirics’, ‘quacks and charlatans’ who Joubert lamented were meddling in healing with ‘bold assurance, accompanied by overblown promises’.³¹⁴ [Figure 33].

Secrets could also represent a set of procedures and technical instructions known only to a select group of people.³¹⁵ In most cases, secrets of this nature took the form of a recipe; a list of ingredients and an accompanying set of instructions, combined for a specific effect, that disclosed previously hidden or valuable knowledge. In fact, Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin have argued that to contemporaries there was ‘virtually no distinction’ between secrets and recipes.³¹⁶ Across the early modern period, recipe books and books of secrets (collections of remedies, recipes, formulae and experiments from a broad range of trades, associated with one of the crafts or with medicine) were created, and increasingly printed, as tradeable and useable commodities.³¹⁷ A secret thus could

³¹² Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, n.129.

³¹³ Rankin, ‘Empirics, Physicians, and Wonder Drugs in Early Modern Germany’, 682.

³¹⁴ Joubert, *Popular Errors*, 69.

³¹⁵ Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin, ‘Introduction: Secrets and Knowledge’ in Rankin and Leong (eds.), *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science*, 13-27.

³¹⁶ Leong and Rankin, ‘Introduction: Secrets and Knowledge’, 20.

³¹⁷ Jo Wheeler, *Renaissance Secrets - Recipes and Formulas*, (London: V&A Publishing, 2009), 7; Eamon, ‘Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Science’, 27.

be a physical object (a remedy), as well as the knowledge required to make that object, which often itself took a physical form.

Joubert, Primrose and Browne attacked secrets and recipes throughout their texts. Sometimes they condemned objects with hidden potency, like the loadstone. Like the eagle-stone in the Introduction, contemporaries giving birth used the loadstone (alternatively spelt 'lodestone' by Primrose, Browne and their English contemporaries, and termed 'l'aimant' (magnet) by Joubert) to ensure easier delivery.³¹⁸ Joubert explained how the stone was known to attract iron, and that midwives tied it to the thighs or arms of a woman in labour, 'and because of this the remedy is transferred to childbirth, as if the magnet were able to draw unto itself the child'.³¹⁹ Yet Joubert condemned the use of the lodestone, arguing that:

a child is not made of iron, and a magnet does not attract flesh and bones. It is not possible to say that because it attracts iron it will attract something else...the comparison is in no way fitting, for there is no way by any stretch of the imagination that the little magnet tied to the arm or thigh can attract a piece of iron as heavy as the child is.³²⁰

The powers of objects that operated magnetically and at a distance, like the loadstone, could not be easily explained within natural philosophy. Many, like the classical author Gaius Julius Solinus (c.3AD), believed that the powers of such objects should simply be accepted:

Certain things are to be believed only by experience, without reason, for they are concealed from people; others are to be believed only by reason, because we lack sensations of them. For although we do not understand why the lodestone attracts iron, nevertheless experience shows it, so that no one should deny it...One should not deny any marvelous thing because he lacks a reason for it, but should try it out [experiri]; for the causes of marvelous things are hidden.³²¹

³¹⁸ On the loadstone in the works of Browne and Primrose, see Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1646 edn.), 56-78 and Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 408-422.

³¹⁹ Joubert, *The Second Part of the Popular Errors*, 189.

³²⁰ Joubert, *The Second Part of the Popular Errors*, 189.

³²¹ Daston and Park, *Wonders and the order of Nature*, n.129.

Yet the errors authors did not agree. Browne discussed the several ‘ill contrived’ conceits associated with the loadstone and ‘its secret power to draw unto it selfe magneticall bodies’.³²² Primrose noted the limits of the loadstone, and that ‘Wee daily see that the Loadstone drawes not iron, but within a certaine distance’ and how when it was ‘rubbed over with Garlick, doth not draw iron’.³²³

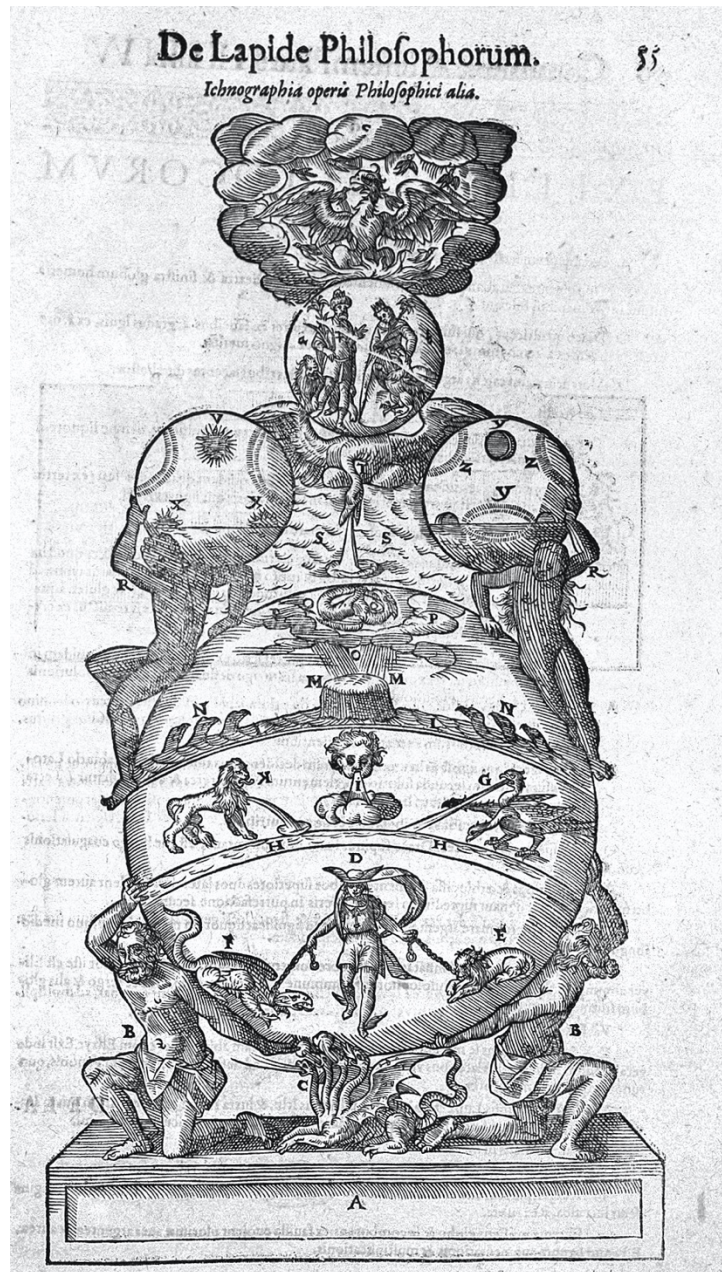


Figure 34 – 'De Lapide Philoforum' (The Philosopher's Stone) in Andreas Libavius, *Alchymia Andreae Libavii, recognita, emendata, et aucta, tum dogmatibus et experimentis nonnullis* (1506). Source: Wellcome Collection.

³²² Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, 66-78.

³²³ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 414.

Another type of object with secret powers attacked by the errors authors were panaceas, which they called ‘universal’ or ‘sovereign’ remedies. The hidden potency of these medicines purportedly enabled them to cure an extensive range of diseases. For instance, Browne condemned those, like Paracelsus, who believed that philosopher’s stone could make men immortal. [Figure 34].³²⁴ Paracelsus, he noted, had died at the age of forty seven.³²⁵ Similarly, Primrose argued that ‘Mountibanks’ only had three sorts of remedies: ‘the antidote against poysons; the Balsam for wounds, and the Oyntment for burnings’, occasionally supplemented with perfumed balls and purging remedies bought from apothecaries.³²⁶ He condemned ‘the deceitfulnesse of the Mountibanks Antidote’, contending that ‘it is not universall, as they report’.³²⁷ Moreover, in a satirical poem that accompanied the frontispiece to his *Popular Errours*, Primrose mocked that:

They talke of *Rubarb*, *Sene*, and *Agaricke*,
 Of *Cassia*, *Tamarinds*, and many a tricke,
 Tush, give the *Doctors* leave to talk, I've brought
 A *pepper posset*, nothing can be bought
 Like this i'th *Pothecaries* shoppe; alone
 It cures the Fever, Strangury, and Stone;
 If not there's danger, yet before all faile,
 Ile have a *Cawdle* for you, or *Mace-ale*:
 And Ile prepare my *Antimoniall Cuppe*
 To cure your *Maladie*, one little suppe
 Will doe more good, and is of more desert
 Then all *Hippocrates*, or *Galens* Art.

Ridiculing the rare remedies that purportedly cured several diseases at once, Primrose derided how some people considered the antimonial cup (an object discussed in the Introduction) to be superior to traditional humoral remedies. He saw the antimonial cup as a fraudulent product of a dangerous and duplicitous empiric, dedicating an entire chapter to its censure, and its supposed ability to

³²⁴ No known early modern philosopher’s stones survive today.

³²⁵ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1658 edn.), 110.

³²⁶ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 23-4.

³²⁷ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 26.

cure, by purge, ‘falling sickness’, ‘king’s evill’ and ‘French pox’.³²⁸ Although praising the virtues of antimony when properly prepared and used by a knowledgeable physician, Primrose noted how the ‘founder’ of the cup claimed it to be a ‘very Sovereign Medicine’, but that ‘in some diseases it doth more hurt than good, and in those wherein it may doe good, it must not yet be alwayes used; and therefore the founder of the Cup is mistaken, when he saith that, that the Cup is good for all the diseases which stand in need of purging’.³²⁹ The founder, moreover, exploited patients by charging great sums for the cup, when in its raw form antimony could be bought cheap from a ‘Druggist’, and by claiming the cup did not work when it was broken, which Primrose was eager to point out was untrue.³³⁰

Finally, Joubert, Browne and Primrose denounced secrets in their written form. Medieval health regimens, plague remedies, and books of arcane medical knowledge in both Latin and the vernacular acted as a catalyst for the secrets genre. In their early modern form, books of secrets comprised collections of covert information of the experiential knowledge of craftspeople and practitioners, of things hidden within nature, or in the objects these practitioners created.³³¹ Some were written and compiled by physicians, although many were not. One of the most famous was the eponymous *The Secrets of Alexis Piedmont* (1555). This Italian physician collected recipes not only from learned noblemen, but also ‘poore women’ and ‘Pesants’.³³² Elite members of early modern society, such as German noblewoman Anna of Saxony (1544-77) and natural philosopher Robert Boyle (1627-91), also used books of secrets. However, they were not intended exclusively for an elite or university-educated audience, and were increasingly available to a much wider, non-specialist and general readership with the rise of print.³³³

³²⁸ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 457-8.

³²⁹ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 448-9.

³³⁰ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 443-461.

³³¹ Pamela H. Smith, ‘What is a secret? Secrets and craft knowledge in early modern Europe’, in Rankin and Leong (eds.), *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science*, 51-67; 52.

³³² Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 259. Also see Tessa Storey, ‘Face Waters, Oils, Love Magic and Poison: Making and Selling Secrets in Early Modern Rome’, in Rankin and Leong (eds.), *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science*, 128-44.

³³³ Rankin and Leong (eds.), *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science*, 13-14; 44; Eamon, ‘Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Science’, 36.

Joubert, Primrose and Browne did not extol their virtues. To the errors authors, books of secrets epitomised medical error; they contained secret knowledge, created and compiled by ignorant practitioners and laypeople, and were disseminated in both manuscript and, increasingly, print form, thereby propagating error within society.³³⁴ Joubert, for instance, entitled a chapter of a future book on ‘Abuses and Remedies’ as: ‘Concerning those who keep recipes of remedies that have served them well all their lives and who share them with others.’³³⁵ Primrose also dedicated a chapter to ‘them that are thought to have some secrets’, criticising the ‘ridiculous’ remedies which were not worthy of being called secrets.³³⁶ He denounced the English men and women who were beguiled into gathering ‘receits, (as they call them) when oftentimes those remedies are of no worth at all, and did at the first come from some physician, who himselfe had nothing that was secret.’³³⁷ Browne similarly attacked the authors:

who pretend to write of secrets, to deliver Antipathies, Sympathies, and the occult abstrucities of things, in the list whereof may be accounted, Alexis Pedimont: Antonius Mizaldus, Trinum Magicum, and many others; not omitting that famous Philosopher of Naples, Baptista Porta, in whose workes, although there be contained many excellent things, and verified upon his owne experience; yet are there many also receptary, and such as will not endure the test³³⁸

The errors authors thus condemned secrets in their many forms. In some cases, they did not deny the value of secrets, but instead appropriated the knowledge, claiming that all such information originally came from ancient learned physicians.³³⁹ Yet at the same time, Joubert, Primrose and Browne argued that as long as the physician rationally understood the causes of diseases and the methods for treating them, he should have no need for secrets. The remedies of the true physician matched or exceeded the efficacy of secrets, and were confirmed with ‘more certaine experience’.³⁴⁰ Joubert, particularly contemptuous

³³⁴ See Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, 244.

³³⁵ Joubert; *Popular Errors*, 264.

³³⁶ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 43-6.

³³⁷ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 45.

³³⁸ Browne, *Pseudodoxia*, (1646 edn.), 34.

³³⁹ Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 263.

³⁴⁰ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 44.

of midwives, said they made extravagant but foolish claims for secrets they alone supposedly knew.³⁴¹ The problem lay here: this knowledge, which originally belonged to the respected authorities of medicine, had fallen into the wrong hands. Like all objects in the errors texts, the issue with secrets was thus not their existence per se, but incorrect understanding and use of them. As succinctly summarised by Primrose in his censure of secrets, 'Remedies are the finger of God, but as a sword in the hand of a mad man'.³⁴²

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the situation of objects in catalogues of early modern popular error, to make an intervention within histories of medical politics. Historians have demonstrated the role of errors texts as markers of deep-seated conflicts between elite and popular culture, specifically between learned medical physicians and the rest of society. They have placed emphasis on the role of empiricism within this contention, and how this is indicative of the struggles of learned, traditional physicians at odds with growing consumerism and practical medicine. This chapter argues that historians of the medical marketplace have focused too little on things, instead favouring an examination of one-off sales. An analysis of objects within the errors texts of Joubert, Primrose and Browne builds upon the existing arguments about medical identity, to show the fundamental situation of things in the fraught relationship between errors and empiricism.

What can we learn from the place of objects within books of popular error? Firstly, the main issues errors authors had with things centred upon the improper belief in their power. This might mean distinguishing between the real and fake versions of an item, or determining what an object's curative powers actually were. Secondly, this chapter helps define the broad range of things that could constitute material culture in early modern medicine. The errors authors collected and compiled a range of societal fallacies concerning healing. When the authors indicated the true and false effects of items such as the eagle-stone, we gain an insight into the wide versatility of objects as devices for healing.

³⁴¹ Eamon, 'Physicians and the Reform of popular culture in early modern Europe', 617.

³⁴² Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 43.

Moreover, drawing upon Gerriten's account of the two types of material culture, the errors texts can be seen both as records of curative objects that are often no longer extant, like virtual cabinets filled with errors, and important objects in their own right. Thus although museums do not figure in this examination, this chapter nevertheless contributes to the theme of collecting that runs throughout this thesis.

Thirdly, the errors authors lived in a time where complex contemporary debates over the theological and religious acceptability of objects and their practices were ongoing, and the occurrence of objects in the books of popular error reveal how these men's diatribes fit into these debates. Similar to their contemporaries, Joubert, Primrose and Browne attributed part of the cause of error to superstition. Far from condemning objects outright, the main point of contention for Joubert, Browne and Primrose once again concerned the distinction between real and fake, where people believed an object could do something which it could not possess. This erroneous belief was caused by the Devil, who made it seem as if objects had power which they did not. This concept is crucial to the following chapter, concerning the complex power of the bent pin, and its role within contemporary health and illness.

Finally, although engaging with these contemporary theological debates, the point of departure for the errors authors was that their fundamental dispute centred around medical politics. Throughout their texts, Joubert, Browne and Primrose defended their roles as elite, university-educated physicians. They launched assaults on the practical, materially-based culture of empiricism, and attacked the secret knowledge and things which fell into the hands of unlearned, untrustworthy practitioners and ignorant patients. By examining objects within the early modern errors literature, this chapter has shown more about who healed; what was used for healing; the diseases that were being healed; and the tools and methods employed in order to do so. Most importantly, this study has built upon extant secondary literature to provide evidence of the central role of objects in the struggle for power and the dissemination of knowledge in the early modern medical sphere.

Just as the errors authors criticised many things as 'superstitious', the following chapter analyses a mundane yet complex object, the use of which in

healing was similarly condemned by contemporaries. Through a study of bent pins, it asks questions about how everyday objects could be imbued with the power to both heal and harm, and contributes to our knowledge of early modern demonology, witchcraft, superstition and ritual, as well as domestic medicine, medical politics and collecting.

CHAPTER THREE

Bent Pins

Introduction

In the early eighteenth century Jane Wenham (d. 1730), a widow from Walkern, Hertfordshire, was convicted of the bewitchment of a young maid named Anne Thorn. Thorn suffered from many afflictions, including being tormented by bent pins, which appeared and disappeared beside her, apparently without human interference. In accounts of Wenham's witchcraft, authors record several 'evidences' in which 'crooked pins' were 'convey'd to Anne Thorn' either by visible or invisible means.³⁴³ Thorn also vomited, swallowed and ingested them. Observers noted that Wenham procured bent pins as if from nowhere, one man stating that 'a Pin came into her fingers... he knew not how, for he was very sure she pluck'd it out nowhere, nor had it in her Hands before.'³⁴⁴

Wenham's case provides an example of the complex power of the bent pin in early modern England. Pins acquired an unusual force when bent, and when either kept in proximity to the human body, or cast away from it. That such a mundane, everyday object could be imbued with the potency to heal or harm was neither uniformly understood nor agreed upon, but bent pins nevertheless formed a significant and renowned part of contemporary English culture. Just as the authors of popular errors studied in the previous chapter labelled certain objects and practices as superstitious, the bending of pins and their complicated relationship with the body straddled the fine line between the natural and the unnatural, the accepted and the rejected. Yet despite bent pins being theologically unstable and potentially dangerous, people continued to use them to affect good and ill health throughout the early modern period, enough to warrant their widespread discussion, promotion and condemnation as a cure.

³⁴³ Physician in Hertfordshire, *A full confutation of witchcraft: more particularly of the depositions against Jane Wenham, lately condemned for a witch; at Hertford*, (London, 1712), 8-9; 35 et passim.

³⁴⁴ Francis Bragge, *A full and impartial account of the discovery of sorcery and witchcraft, practis'd by Jane Wenham of Walkerne in Hertfordshire, upon the Bodies of Anne Thorn, Anne Street, &c*, (London, 1712), 19.



Figure 35 – Post-medieval dress pin of bodkin type, transverse slit at top and attachment loop, the other end tapering to a point, bent along its length. Hertfordshire, England, c. 17th century. 44.1 mm x 4.8 mm. PAS, Unique ID: BH-247297. Source: PAS.

Often overlooked by historians and museums due to their low social and economic value, I argue that bent pins are items worthy of study. Examining them allows us to unpack intricate debates about the place of objects within healing, objects' relationships with the body, and theological, demonological and metaphysical arguments about things. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how the very mundanity of the bent pin constitutes its significance. The notion that an object could acquire socially-constructed value and be imbued with the power to affect health and illness is a theme that continues into the next chapter, where the quotidian bent pin is juxtaposed with the rare and coveted bezoar stone. The simple act of bending a pin and moving it to a particular location accorded it with a power far beyond its ordinary, domestic capacity.

This chapter asks: How were pins imbued with the power to heal and harm? In what ways were bent pins an important part of domestic health and illness? How were they used for both curative and vexatious means? What did the act of bending a pin represent and/or effect? What was the relationship between bent pins and the human body, and did this alter the object's purpose? Why were bent pins in their materially transformed state not considered objects worthy of collection, despite their increased value and power? In answering these questions, this chapter furthers the analysis of the main themes in this thesis, including collecting (both early modern and modern), domestic medicine, and

medical politics. At the same time, this chapter demonstrates how an object-based focus can contribute to our knowledge not only of early modern medicine, but also demonology, witchcraft, superstition and ritual.

I begin by explaining the primary functions of early modern pins, showing that whilst they fulfilled crucial societal roles, particularly in dress, they were nonetheless relatively worthless. Next, I explore the various strands of research that inform this study, including histories of medieval ritual and early modern demonology, anthropological theory and archaeological research. An analysis of the material and textual record of bent pins follows, where I discuss the source bases of extant items, and ask what we can infer from extant bent pins and the texts that discuss them. The rest of the chapter provides three examples of the power of bent pins. In the first, holy wells and ‘witch-bottles’ show the curative removal of bent pins from the body, where they were dropped down wells and included in a recipe to cure bewitchment. The second examines bent pins worn on the body for healing, in this case around the neck. The final example offers a functional antithesis, exploring the vexatious use of bent pins and their relationship with the body as a facet of bewitchment. Throughout, this chapter will examine how the bent pin acted as a paradigm of the early modern notion of signs, and what this can tell us about the complex place of objects within domestic health and illness.

Early modern pins

Pins were the principal tool for keeping clothes fastened together in early modern Europe.³⁴⁵ Every household would have possessed them in significant quantities, as they functioned as ‘essential’ everyday objects, used by men and women from all social strata.³⁴⁶ Used in tailoring and mending, pins held together collars, ruffs and stomachers.³⁴⁷ The fashionable Elizabethan woman, it was said, was a

³⁴⁵ On pins as a facet of research in histories of dress, fashion and costume, see Jenny Tiramani, ‘Pins and Aglets’, in Hamling and Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects*, 85-94, esp. 88.

³⁴⁶ Tiramani, ‘Pins and Aglets’, 65; Barbara Bettoni, ‘Fashion, Tradition, and Innovation in Button Manufacturing in Early Modern Italy’, *Technology and Culture* 55:3 (July 2014), 675-710; 677n. For more on the origins of buttons and their place in early modern society see also Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1980), esp. 6-30.

³⁴⁷ Mary Carolyn Beaudry, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 13-14; Tarnya Cooper and Jane Eade, ‘Thimbles and Pins,

walking pincushion, liable to shower pins at any sudden movement.³⁴⁸ Men used them to fasten the sleeves of their doublets if they did not have or could not afford buttons; and as an example of their ubiquity, archaeologists recently recovered over one and a half thousand pins from the sixteenth-century all-male Free Grammar School in Coventry.³⁴⁹



Figure 36 – Pin, silver-gilt. England, post-medieval c.1500-c.1600. 46.35mm x 8.18mm. PAS, Unique ID: SF-CCCCES. Source: PAS.

late 1500s and early 1600s', in Tarnya Cooper and Jane Eade (eds.), *Elizabeth I and her People*, (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2013), 168; Abigail Shinn, 'Cultures of Mending', in Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock & Abigail Shinn (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture Early Modern England*, (London: Ashgate, 2014), 246.

³⁴⁸ Shinn, 'Cultures of Mending', 246; Liza Picard, *Elizabeth's London: Everyday Life in Elizabethan London*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), 133.

³⁴⁹ Beaudry, *Findings*, 10, 13-14, 22; 'A country fellow plaine in russet clad / His doublet mutton-taffety sheep-skins / His sleeve at hand button'd with two good pins.' From Samuel Rowlands, *Democritus, or Doctor Merry-man his medicines, against melancholy humors*, (London, 1607).

Some pins could be more ornate than others, decorated with silver-gilt and designed to display on the exterior of clothing, or in hair. [Figure 36]. Due to their significance in everyday life, pins would also have been available in plain and affordable forms, and demand for them was enormous.³⁵⁰ The 1588 inventory of shop-keeping chapman William Davis from Winslow in Buckinghamshire demonstrates their low price, where 3000 ‘pyns’, were valued at only 1s9d, when a standard labourer’s wage could have been around 8d a day.³⁵¹ Aside from clothing, pins were also used by secretaries and other writers to highlight a particular passage in the absence of a pen, to ‘prick out’ lines in page margins to guarantee straight handwriting, or to fasten documents together.³⁵² [Figure 37] Pins, then, were used not only by both genders, but also in professional as well as domestic settings.

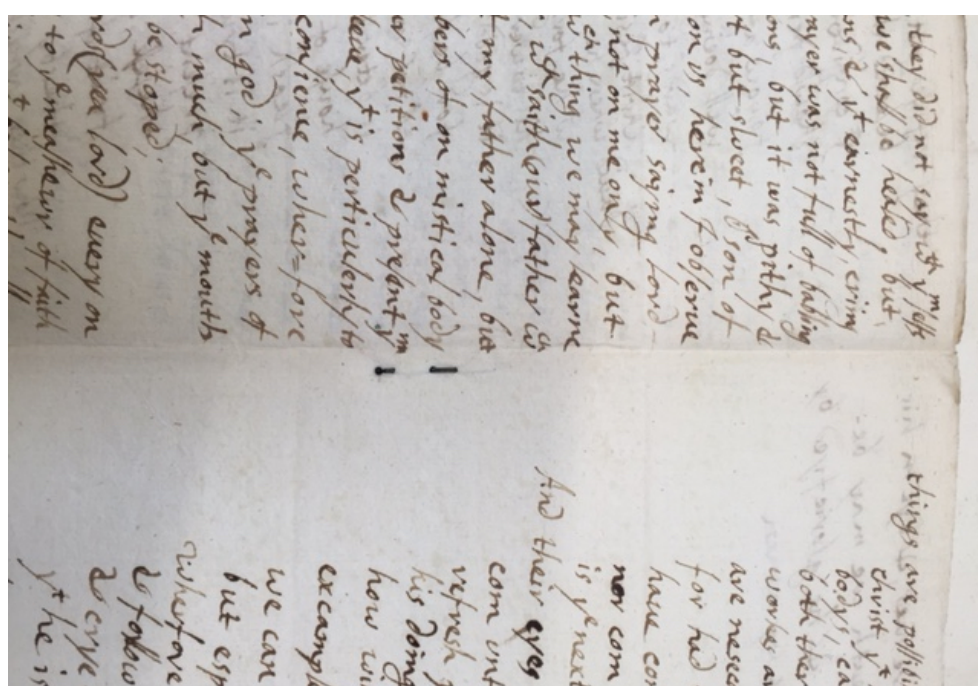


Figure 37 – Pin in notebook, from the note books and lesson books of Lady Rachel Fane (1623-33), Kent History and Library Centre, U269/F38/1.
Source: Personal image from Leah Astbury.

³⁵⁰ Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 79.

³⁵¹ Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their wares in the Seventeenth Century*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), 76; Alfred Hassell Smith, ‘Labourers in late sixteenth-century England: a case study from north Norfolk [Part I]’, *Continuity and Change* 4:1, (May, 1989), 11-52; 27.

³⁵² Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender and Literacy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 62.

Pin-makers originally used bronze to make pins, but in the medieval and early modern periods they used mostly copper-alloys (brass wire), or less frequently iron, individually forging pins by hand.³⁵³ Mary C. Beaudry has described the technical process of making pins in her archaeological and historical survey of the material culture of needlework and sewing. A pin-maker would make a point in a special peg to avoid bending the pin during manufacture, and would usually fashion a head from another section of wire soldered onto the pin using tin. While several guilds of pinners were active in England by the fifteenth century, the quality of pins fell short of those made by French rivals, mostly because of problems with brass wire production in England. Despite several acts prohibiting importation, and moves to improve the quality of manufacture, England imported large quantities of fine pins from France over the course of the early modern period, as Paris was the leading centre for pin-making until about 1700.³⁵⁴ Before the mid-eighteenth century, pins were sold in loose lots rather than in boxes or attached to papers, as was done later. Consequently, pincushions played a vital role in containing and transporting pins, and were available in an array of shapes and materials.³⁵⁵ [Figure 38].

Two of the examples in this chapter focus primarily on bent pins, whilst one centres upon on bent nails. Both of these objects had highly significant if unremarkable and quotidian functions, and just as pins were primarily used to attach clothing, nails were often used to support buildings or affix horses' shoes.³⁵⁶ Pins and nails were essential parts of everyday domestic labour, and 'household stuff'; a term which Natasha Korda noted was coined in the sixteenth century, demonstrating that the household was defined as much by objects as by people.³⁵⁷ In this investigation, pins and nails will be treated synonymously, as

³⁵³ Beaudry, *Findings*, 15-16.

³⁵⁴ Beaudry, *Findings*, 16. For an earlier history of the craft behind pin making, see Barbara Megson (ed.), *The Pinners' and Wiresellers' Book 1462-1511*, (London: London Record Society, 2009). A petition by the pin-makers of London in 1597 claimed that £40,000 worth of pins and needles were illegally imported every year. R.H. Tawney and Eileen Power (eds.), *Tudor Economic Documents*, (London: Longmans, 1951), vol. 1, 126-7; T.S. Willan (ed.), *A Tudor Book of Rates*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), li.

³⁵⁵ Beaudry, *Findings*, 29-31; Sylvia Groves, *The history of needlework tools and accessories*, (London: Country Life, 1966), 51.

³⁵⁶ Tiramani, 'Pins and Aglets', 88-92; Shinn, 'Cultures of Mending', 246.

³⁵⁷ Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 1; Shinn, 'Cultures of Mending', 245n.



Figure 38 – Pin cushion. England, 1670s. Maker: Martha Edlin. Plain woven silks bound with ribbon and metal thread. Pictured alongside other pin cushions and an embroidered casket. 23.5 cm x 22 cm x 11.5 cm. London: V&A, T.448-1990. Source: V&A.

small, pointed metal objects similar in form, and some of the cheapest and most ubiquitous items in early modern England.³⁵⁸ I will mostly refer to pins throughout, allowing for the slight variation in function and form that occurred between the pin and the nail. Like pins, coins also commonly feature in early modern rituals involving bending, and the religious or curative pilgrimage to wells, as will be discussed more in a moment. However, due to their much higher socio-economic value and distinct function, coins will not be analysed within this chapter. The study of pins and nails clearly demonstrates how, when people bent them, and held them close to or removed them from the body, these items with meagre social and monetary worth became imbued with significant social value and healing power.

The study of bent pins

Despite their contemporary significance, no distinct historical studies have been dedicated to early modern bent pins as curative or vexatious items. Practices of bending and binding, and rituals associated with pins, have however formed important parts of other research. These include historical studies of medieval disease and religious change, nineteenth-century antiquarian studies of folk belief, and archaeological surveys.³⁵⁹ The actions associated with bent pins – both their physical alteration, and how these pins, once bent, were situated in relation to the body – are central to their functional transformation from everyday, domestic items, to objects used to heal and harm. These performative actions

³⁵⁸ Modern archaeological and museum databases that categorised these objects also often label small pointed metal items as pins, even where their uses varied and they may have been recognised by more specific contemporary names, likely due to ambiguity surrounding their original form and function. See for example this ‘copper alloy possible pin’, dated 1500-1600, *Portable Antiquities Scheme*. <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/751762>. [Accessed 7 September 2018]. This trend is also noted by archaeologist Mary C. Beaudry in *Findings*, 22.

³⁵⁹ On medieval bending and binding, see for instance Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*; Stephen Gordon, ‘Disease, Sin and the Walking Dead in Medieval England, c. 1100-1350: A Note on the Documentary and Archaeological Evidence’, in Effie Gemi-Iordanou, Stephen Gordon, Robbert Matthew, Ellen McInnes and Rhiannon Pettitt (eds.), *Medicine, Healing and Performance*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014; Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Medieval Finds from excavations in London*, (London: Boydell, 2010). For nineteenth-century studies on folk belief, see for example Charles Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions and Folk-Lore, (chiefly Lancashire and the North of England:)* *Their Affinity to Others in Widely-distributed Localities; Their Eastern Origin and Mythical Significance*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1872); William George Black, *Folk Medicine: A Chapter in the History of Culture*, (1883; reprinted New York: Burt Franklin, 1970).

have their roots in an era much earlier than the focus of this thesis, and extend to more than just pins, including a wide range of other objects including pilgrim badges and coins. The chronological focus of this study means bent pins are analysed as a facet of early modern health and illness. Yet the work of medieval historians who have examined similarly potent, curative objects and their related actions provide important context.

Regarding material alteration for remedial effect, Stephen Gordon has explored the Anglo-Saxon and medieval act of ‘binding disease’, in which knotting and wrapping (often of copper wire bandages) worked as a ‘medical miscellany’, an apotropaic technique, and a cure to relieve pain.³⁶⁰ Galenic physicians such as John of Gaddesden (c.1280-1360) were aware of the common belief in the power of ‘knots’, specifically the use of ligatures to alleviate discomfort.³⁶¹ In medieval England, it was common for people to alter objects to effectuate therapeutic gain. Indeed, performative actions and healing were closely related, and Hilary Powell has noted that at least in the West, they were inextricably linked. Medical procedures could involve reciting written or verbal charms or ‘grand apotropaic rituals performed by entire communities.’³⁶² Powell argues that the most noteworthy performance was the pilgrimage, in which visits to shrines were undertaken to obtain the saintly healing powers.

Pilgrimage has received much scholarly attention, and Brian Spencer has analysed the ritual significance of bending objects in his major catalogue of medieval pilgrim souvenirs. Here he notes that people may have bent things to ‘take [them] out of circulation’.³⁶³ Spencer argues that this might parallel the practice of someone folding a penny at the moment they made a vow of pilgrimage, where the coin was appropriated as an offering to the shrine or saint in question. A notice in the annals of thirteenth-century English Augustinian house Dunstable Priory read: ‘In this year we took of the bent pennies of Saint Fremund to the weight of one hundred shillings, and bought oats with the

³⁶⁰ Gordon, ‘Disease, Sin and the Walking Dead’, 65-6.

³⁶¹ Gordon, ‘Disease, Sin and the Walking Dead’, 65.

³⁶² Hilary Powell, ‘Pilgrimage, Performance and Miracle Cures in the Twelfth-Century *Miracula* of St Aebbe’, in Gemi-Iordanou, Gordon, Matthew, McInnes and Pettitt (eds.), *Medicine, Healing and Performance*, 71-85.

³⁶³ Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 18.

same.³⁶⁴ In these examples, coins were part of medieval customs in which diseased people travelled to shrines containing the relics of saints and performed curative practices, including bending silver pennies. In his seminal work on ‘traditional religion’ in late medieval England, Eamon Duffy explored the symbolism of bending metals during pilgrimage, and similarly argued that coins often represented a relationship between client and saint, acting as a medium through which to attract a saint’s attention and appeal for his help with domestic or health-related issues. To signify a ‘deal’ made with the saint, the person in need would bend a silver coin and hang it over or next to the afflicted part of their body, indicating a formal promise to offer this same coin at a shrine.³⁶⁵

Following the Reformation, however, such saintly deals were no longer doctrinally acceptable. Moreover, even the most innocuous actions could, however unwittingly, represent a much more theologically sinister kind of agreement. The examples provided later in this chapter will demonstrate how, when someone bent a pin, it was imbued with power, and could both represent and physically effect either a curative or a vexatious action. The issues surrounding this complex functional bifurcation constitute one facet of a much larger early modern debate concerning superstition, the Devil, and the limits of the natural world, parts of which have been discussed in previous chapters. Key to understanding the problematic power of bent pins are contemporary debates about ritual, superstition and signs.

The introduction to this thesis discussed the complexities of defining early modern ritual. As we have seen, the idea of ‘ritual’ was only conceived in the sixteenth century, when Protestant reformers began to question the limits of traditional religious rites. Reformers’ beliefs in the laws and limits of nature rooted their arguments about what defined a superstitious ritual. Whereas Catholicism allowed more room for human operations to manipulate divine power, Protestants deemed such rituals utterly ineffective.³⁶⁶ Where superstitious means were devoid of natural, godly efficacy, Protestant authorities argued that they must be tokens or signs of a different kind of efficacy; namely, demonic

³⁶⁴ The word ‘bent’ here is ‘plicatis’, perhaps better translated as ‘folded’. Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 18.

³⁶⁵ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 183-5.

³⁶⁶ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 106.

power.³⁶⁷ Thus whenever someone took an action that assumed natural power which did not in fact exist, they invoked the Devil, who was capable of acting in a way that appeared to be miraculous, easily fooling vulgar and ignorant people.³⁶⁸

These changing theological beliefs had profound implications for common magical practices and healing rituals, like those involving bent pins. Just as Protestant reformers argued that Catholic rites were naturally inefficacious, the healing practices in which people bent pins to imbue them with curative and protective power were also deemed ineffective, and, moreover, dangerous. As discussed in the previous chapter, without even being aware, practices that represented and effected healing to the laity, signalled a pact with the Devil and a sign of diabolical entanglement to theologians and intellectuals. This, though, was an argument proposed by the scholarly elite (like Joubert, Primrose and Browne), and did not represent laypeople's reliance on healing rituals which continued throughout early modern society. In his discussion of magic and superstition in Europe, Michael D. Bailey has argued that the majority of laypeople, whether Protestant or Catholic, saw magical healing rituals as 'absolutely essential', especially in the absence of official ecclesiastical rites performing similar functions to those eliminated by religious authorities.³⁶⁹ So, when the reformed clergy condemned certain practices as unacceptable and superstitions, laypeople often adapted them to suit a Protestant climate.³⁷⁰

Stuart Clark has similarly discussed the changing early modern beliefs around signs and things. He has argued how, regardless of intellectual controversy and debate, many contemporaries still believed in a causal connection between signs and things, and that manipulating them would produce concrete effects.³⁷¹ Fundamental to Clark's *Thinking With Demons* (1997) are the semiotics of the early modern world; that language and signs, utterances and actions could have both communicative and performative functions. Clark presents the Foucauldian argument: that there was a change in belief concerning

³⁶⁷ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 199.

³⁶⁸ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 165.

³⁶⁹ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 197.

³⁷⁰ For examples of adaptations, see Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 198.

³⁷¹ Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 284; 287-8.

words and things in the seventeenth century. Whereas previously the doctrine of signatures (the view that natural objects could resemble body parts, and these objects could thereby remedy the diseases of their corporeal associate) demonstrated the God-given belief in the inherent power of words, from the time of this shift, signs were instead humanmade.³⁷²

However, Clark argues against the rigidity of Foucault's thesis, stating that this 'ideal typical' does not acknowledge that both the old and the new theories co-existed.³⁷³ Regardless of intellectual controversy and debate, many contemporary people still believed in a causal connection between signs and things, and that manipulating them would produce concrete effects, despite the argument proposed by Foucault. Clark substantiates his argument with the example of late sixteenth-century Lutheran Germany, noting that people continued to engage with signs for effect even though authorities regarded these actions as superstitious.³⁷⁴ While rituals involving bending pins had their roots in the contexts of medieval Catholicism, and were later labelled as superstitious by intellectuals and reformers, this chapter shows how laypeople continued to use them for curative and vexatious effect.

How and why bent pins and their associated rituals could be powerful, and in what way their power existed at all, was part of this broader early modern philosophical and metaphysical debate. Throughout this thesis I investigate how sick people used objects comprising different materials, forms and socio-economic values for healing. Chapter One considered nine different amulets, and the various sources of power they drew upon in order to provide cure and protection. The following chapter examines the bezoar stone, an object that in contrast to the bent pin had a high social, economic and antiquarian value, but like the bent pin was also used to heal. The work of social anthropologist Mary Douglas is helpful in understanding how a mundane, quotidian object like a pin could acquire the power to heal or harm. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas

³⁷² English physician and botanist William Coles for instance believed that 'the mercy of God... maketh Grasse to grow upon the mountains; and Herbes for the use of men, and hath not onely stamped upon them (as upon every Man) a distinct forme, but also given them particular Signatures, whereby a Man may read, even in legible Characters, the use of them.' William Coles, *Art of Simpling*, (London, 1656), 88.

³⁷³ Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 286.

³⁷⁴ Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 284; 287-8.

discusses the notion of dirt as ‘matter out of place’, arguing that matter is relational, and that any discussion of dirt and disgust is contextually defined. Douglas presents cleanliness and uncleanness in terms of the compliance with, and disruption of, a shared symbolic order.³⁷⁵ According to this axiom, impurity can therefore present itself differently according to a specific social system. In early modern England, a pin used to fasten a sleeve to a dress would be in a typical place, whereas a bent pin found in a well, around a neck, or unexpectedly in one’s vomit was a sign of matter out of place. In these instances, even seemingly innocuous and insignificant objects like bent pins could assume great value and power, and represent threats to the established social and theological order.

Although no known work has been done on the role of pins in health and illness, many of the secondary studies that have been done on early modern bent pins stem from nineteenth-century antiquarianism and studies of folk belief. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century authors built upon texts from the 1800s which documented ‘Traditions, Superstitions and Folk-lore’, like Charles Hardwick’s survey of the north of England, and William George Black’s study of ‘Folk Medicine’.³⁷⁶ The customs, stories and practices collated by these authors serve as an important source base for curative and vexatious practices involving people bending pins. Moreover, these works that investigate the ‘legendary lore’, the ‘supernatural’, and ‘folklore, myths’ and ‘legends’ demonstrate that the bending of pins cut across, and continued regardless of, religious distinctions and debates of the early modern period.³⁷⁷

Finally, archaeological research has heavily informed this study. Following the Treasure Act of 1996, two significant archaeological databases were set up. The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) was created to function as an online database, on which any member of the public can report items and

³⁷⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: an analysis of concept[s] of pollution and taboo*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

³⁷⁶ Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions and Folk-Lore*; Black, *Folk Medicine*. Twentieth- and twenty-first- century accounts include Walter Clifford Meller, *Old Times - Relics, Talismans, Forgotten Customs & Beliefs of the Past*, (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1925) and Tony Liddell, *Supernatural North East: Folklore, Myths, Legends and Ghosts*, (Otherworld North East Research Society, 2009).

³⁷⁷ See for instance John Brand, *The History and Antiquaries of Town and Country of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, 2 vols. (London, 1789) Vol. II; Robert Charles Hope, *Legendary Lore of the Holy Wells of England: Including Rivers, Lakes, Fountains and Springs*, (London: Stock, 1893); Liddell, *Supernatural North East: Folklore, Myths, Legends and Ghosts*.

record information such as objects' find-locations, material descriptions and imagery.³⁷⁸ Similarly, the Archaeological Data Service (ADS), was established as an open-access digital archive for archaeological research outputs. Find-reports on online databases such as the PAS provide physical and chronological information of extant objects alongside empirically-focused archaeological accounts and, more increasingly, short conjectural analyses such the paragraphs dedicated to 'Altered Coins as Treasure'.³⁷⁹ Some archaeologists have gone further to provide more extensive examinations. As part of a long-standing project on the archaeology and history of folk magic in pre-modern Britain, Brian Hoggard has discussed the process of bending metals prior to their addition into 'witch-bottles', arguing that this act of bending was done ritually to 'kill' the pins, thereby activating a 'ghost pin which would be effective against spiritual enemies coming into contact with the bottle.'³⁸⁰ Hoggard argues that this concept involves 'the perception of an invisible supernatural or spirit world including the dead, magical forces and perhaps divine forces'. While this is reminiscent of Spencer's argument that medieval pilgrim badges were perhaps bent to remove them from circulation, Hoggard does not expand upon or provide references for this argument.³⁸¹

While it is difficult to assess Hoggard's theory in the absence of material or textual sources, it seems likely that the earlier work of Ralph Merrifield inspired his theory. In *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987), Merrifield argued that the bending of metals derived from the 'ancient pagan' practice of 'killing' an object intended as a 'devotional offering'.³⁸² Here we are reminded of the annals of Dunstable, in which a coin was bent in order to invoke a saint. This constituted a vow to take the coin on a pilgrimage to the saint's shrine. Significantly, Merrifield continues to state that laypeople bent coins with the belief that the action would cure illness, whether to accompany a prayer asking

³⁷⁸ See <https://finds.org.uk/getinvolved> (accessed 1 February 2019).

³⁷⁹ 'Altered Coins as Treasure' – see, specifically, the paragraph on 'Other alternations to coins'. *Portable Antiquities Scheme*, <https://finds.org.uk/treasure/advice/piercedcoins> (accessed 14th August 2018).

³⁸⁰ Hoggard, 'Witch Bottles: Their contents, contexts and uses', 91-105; 'Brian Hoggard: Research', <http://www.brianhoggard.co.uk/research.html> (accessed 28 January 2018).

³⁸¹ Hoggard, 'Witch Bottles: Their Contents, Contexts and Uses', 100.

³⁸² Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 91.

for the aid of a saint, where a coin would be bent above an ill animal or person, or at a time of danger to attempt to avert hazard such as the spreading of a fire.³⁸³ Whilst conceding that later instances occur sporadically, Merrifield contends that this practice was brought to an end in England ‘only by the Reformation’.³⁸⁴ As this chapter shows, the bending of metals and the belief in their potency to heal and harm continued long after England’s break with Rome, and continued to retain powerful symbolic meaning. The following section examines how and why pins exist in collections today, and their location and significance within literary records.

Material and textual records of bent pins

It is possible that laypeople could have bent pins whilst they were being used for their primary, domestic, purposes, although historians such as Jenny Tiramani have noted how straight pins were used in dressing, referencing the painful pricks people often sustained as a result.³⁸⁵ Yet these pins could also have been bent for reasons not related to their intended functions, but as a means of cure, prophylaxis or vexation. Generally, when an early modern text references a bent pin, no further material details are given except to occasionally note significant length: ‘casting eyes on the Sheets, she saw a large crooked Pin, but would not touch it’.³⁸⁶ Although contemporary literature does not elucidate any connection between patterns of bending and the function of pins, a study of the language used to describe bent pins is nevertheless revealing.

Whilst today we may use the words ‘bent’ and ‘crooked’ synonymously, this was not the case in the early modern era. A search of contemporary literature on EEBO and ECCO for the word ‘bent’ returned few results of relevance, and instead ‘crooked’ often signalled material alteration. Although not linked directly to the Devil, the King James Bible (first published in 1611) evidences the pejorative connotations of the word ‘crooked’, in which there are several instances of crooked things made straight as an act of reform: ‘Every valley shall

³⁸³ Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 91.

³⁸⁴ Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 92.

³⁸⁵ For an instance of bending, see William Bullein, *Belleins bulwarke of defence against all sicknesse, soareness, and vvoundes that doe dayly assaulte mankind*, (London, 1562), 2nd ed., 1579, FO.19; Tiramani, ‘Pins and Aglets’, 89.

³⁸⁶ Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, 23.

be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth'.³⁸⁷ The word 'crooked' could therefore signify something both physically and figuratively abnormal, the latter denoting something dishonest, corrupt, or awry.

Indeed, most of the primary textual evidence that cites the use of crooked pins does so with chiefly negative connotations, concerning torment, poison and fear. In early modern literature, the crooked pin often took on both the literal and metaphorical meanings of the word. For instance, a Puritan comedy from 1691 by 'A Person of quality' makes reference to one being 'as contemptible an one as ever dy'd of a crooked Pin'.³⁸⁸ Likewise, in a play by Ben Jonson from 1600, one character notes: 'Sblood poyson him, make him away with a crooked pinne'.³⁸⁹

Bent pins therefore represented more than just defunct or broken objects. A commonly recurring contemporary metaphor – 'the crooked pin in the pudding' – substantiates this. Bishop William Lloyd stated in 1699 that 'Religion having taught the people to say Grace, there was no more danger of the crooked Pin in the Pudding', while a seventeenth-century translation of a work by Philostratus the Athenian (c.170-247/50 AD) notes that:

The humour of this Age is such, that a Dedication or Preface before a Book, and a Grace before a Meal, are thought to be equally necessary, and useful: As if the one was no less a Preservative against the succeeding folly in the Author, than the other against the crooked Pin in the Pudding.³⁹⁰

The latter example may demonstrate either that the symbolic significance of the crooked pin had existed since antiquity, or that the translator considered it such an inherent part of the early modern lexicon that all who read it would understand its figurative implications. This highlights not only the power of the crooked pin, but also the knowledge of its incongruous place in the pudding, in dangerous proximity to the body, and the real fear of ingesting it. In short, an

³⁸⁷ King James Bible, Luke 3:5.

³⁸⁸ Person of quality, *The bragadocio, or, The bawd turn'd Puritan a new comedy / by a person of quality*, (London, 1691), 7.

³⁸⁹ Ben Johnson, *The comicall satyre of every man out of his humor*, (London, 1600), Hiiij.

³⁹⁰ William Lloyd, *A chronological account of the life of Pythagoras*, (London, 1699), xliii; Philostratus, the Athenian; Charles Blount (ed.), *The two first books of Philostratus, concerning the life of Apollonius Tyaneus*, (London, 1680), A2

examination of primary literature shows that the crooked pin represented an easily understood sign, and was renowned as a dangerous and significant object in this period, epitomizing matter out of place.

Yet while the word ‘crooked’ and the situation of the crooked pin within contemporary literature primarily signalled something dangerous and disquieting, in practice the power of the bent pin was harnessed not only to harm, but also to heal. As this chapter examines how pins were used for cure and protection, as well as for vexatious purposes, it will therefore use the word ‘bent’ rather than ‘crooked’ to allow for the role of bent pins in both good and ill health.

Despite the significant power of bent pins, with functions that far transcended their everyday power and value, early modern people did not collect these objects. The reasons for this could be multifarious. Perhaps these objects were not desired due to a deterioration in their already low social and functional value, simply viewed as objects defunct for their primary use. This was, after all, a period in which early modern people began to collect objects that were deemed socially valuable due to their unusual, wondrous or curious antiquarian qualities; a theme which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.³⁹¹ Likely, pins were not collected due to their very ubiquity. Yet perhaps these bent pins were intentionally undisturbed precisely due to their renowned and potentially dangerous power, and left so that they may continue to perform their curative or vexatious function. This is a notion that will be examined further in the first example in this chapter.

Until only recently, bent pins have mostly not been considered worthy of preservation within English heritage. Those that researchers have collected are often decorated or ornamented in some way.³⁹² In the last fifteen years however, academic trends towards the study of the everyday and the domestic have meant that researchers increasingly highlight the historical worth of commonplace items, and archaeologists and museums have begun to recover and/or catalogue

³⁹¹ See Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, and Chapter Four of this thesis.

³⁹² As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, the culture of early modern collecting heavily informed modern museum collections, and these institutions inherited many early modern objects. For an example of a decorated or ornamented pin, see ‘Pearl ship pin’, Museum of London object number A14205, late 16th century – early 17th century, <https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/69194.html> (accessed 22 January 2019).

these objects.³⁹³ Scholars have used items of a lower social or economic value to examine day-to-day life, and museums have been increasingly interested in collecting things such as the low-value pin.

Mostly, local and regional institutions acquire these types of objects. Norfolk Museums Collection, for instance, has a database of over three million objects encompassing mundane yet culturally valuable finds, including bent pins and nails.³⁹⁴ The PAS hold many records of bent pins, although the broad chronological categorisation they employ does not enable early modern pins to be easily identified. Periods are demarcated as early medieval, Roman, post-medieval, medieval, Iron Age, Bronze Age and modern, although sometimes details of a particular object will identify its date range more specifically, such as ‘seventeenth century’, ‘early modern’, or ‘AD.1600-1800’. The spatial metadata is often similarly vague, usually stipulating the discovery method (for instance ‘metal detector’) and type of land (such as ‘cultivated’).³⁹⁵ Despite an inevitable lack of specificity regarding the objects’ provenance, the establishment of the PAS has encouraged people to collect and catalogue objects that would otherwise have been disregarded.

The contemporary textual record provides evidence of pins being deliberately bent in the absence of verification within the material record. Often, extant bent pins have been found bent in two opposing directions; see for example Figures 39 and 40, a post-medieval silver head-dress pin and a post-medieval copper-alloy nail recorded on the PAS. It is very unlikely that this was accidental, especially as this shape mirrors those sometimes found in ‘witch-

³⁹³ For instance, Hamling and Richardson (eds.), *Everyday Objects*; Richardson, Hamling and Gaimster (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*; Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500-1700*, (London: Yale University Press, 2017); Cavallo and Storey, *Healthy Living in Renaissance Italy*.

³⁹⁴ Norfolk Museums Collection, <http://norfolkmuseumscollections.org> (accessed 4 February 2019).

³⁹⁵ For example, see <https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/bent+pin/objectType/PIN/broadperiod/POST+MEDIEVAL>. (accessed 1 February 2019).

bottles', objects that were part of a cure for bewitchment in which bent pins often played a crucial part. The first example examines this in more detail.



Figure 39 – Pin, silver-gilt or silver plated, shaft bent twice. England, post-medieval c. 1500-c.1600. 68 mm x 8.8mm, Weight: 3.64 g. PAS, Unique ID: SUR-237365. Source: PAS.



Figure 40 – Nail, copper-alloy, shaft bent twice. England, post-medieval, c. 1650-c.1900. 45.6 mm x 2.9 mm, Weight: 3.3 g. PAS, Unique ID: SUSS-B41305. Source: PAS.

Example 1: Wells and ‘witch-bottles’

In the early modern period, if your infant was sick and you lived in Jarrow near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, you might take them to Bede’s well. Here you could follow common practice and immerse your child in the waters three times, throwing a bent pin into the well after each dipping. Eighteenth-century antiquarian John Brand recorded that as many as twenty children went to the well on Sundays, and that the ritual occurred as late as the year 1740, indicating that it was a ‘prevailing custom’ in the decades or centuries beforehand.³⁹⁶ Bede’s was one of many wells at which people practised this curative procedure, and provides an example of how the sick materially-altered pins, deliberately placed them at a distance from their afflicted bodies, and deposited them at a site of significance in order to stimulate therapeutic effect.

Wells had been prominent centres of healing since the medieval period. They acted as important facilities for those who could not afford, or sought an alternative to, the treatments available from medical practitioners and physicians. In this era, wells often had associations with particular saints who acted as ‘celestial doctors’, some even appropriating distinct medical specialisms, with shrines frequently forming to honour a site’s divine patron.³⁹⁷ Those who journeyed to holy wells seeking medical relief often carried out rituals and left physical tokens as a symbol of the divine intercession that the patient had requested or received. These material tokens often included bent pins.³⁹⁸

Inextricably linked with Catholicism due to their connection with particular saints, these wells and the rituals carried out there caused problems after the Reformation. Whilst people abandoned some wells following the most severe part of the religious upheaval in the 1530s and 40s, many were reappropriated as important sites of healing, and others remained in use throughout. However, there were those for whom the practice of visiting wells and depositing objects breached theological boundaries. Theologians believed

³⁹⁶ Brand, *The History and Antiquaries of Town and Country of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, Vol. II, 54; Hope, *Legendary Lore of the Holy Wells of England*, 54; 92; 109; Liddell, *Supernatural North East*, 29-30; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 458.

³⁹⁷ Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 50-1; 395.

³⁹⁸ Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 52.

laypeople who continued to undertake journeys and deposit pins at wells to be guilty of superstition and idolatry.³⁹⁹ Moreover, some physicians, including James Primrose (whose work we examined in the previous chapter), also repudiated therapeutic waters in their campaigns against popular societal fallacies.⁴⁰⁰ For ‘errors’ authors such as Primrose, the credulous rituals and beliefs associated with holy wells clashed with the proper tenets of learned medicine, just as they were incompatible with the reformed doctrine of Protestantism. Likewise, many of the authors who recorded customs associated with wells in the nineteenth century instinctively described them as ‘hangovers’ from the Catholic past, condemning these acts as ineffective therapies.⁴⁰¹

Scholars have debated the reasons why people continued to use wells and springs for healing into the early modern period, and Alexandra Walsham has argued that earlier historians often subscribed to a Whiggish narrative of progressive secularisation in their analysis of holy wells and their associated customs. Yet, as Walsham contends, the continued use of wells did not signal the triumph of rationality over vulgar superstition, where Protestantism was merely the ‘able and enthusiastic midwife’.⁴⁰² While people increasingly referenced natural causes to explain the potency of wells, many still believed in God’s power.⁴⁰³ Several wells underwent a ‘medical makeover’ following the Reformation, with physicians, ministers and laymen alike praising wells as the laudable creation of a benevolent deity.⁴⁰⁴ Indeed, irrespective of some condemnation, most critics did not comprehensively repudiate the effects of wells. Cartographer John Norden conceded in 1593 that although much was ‘fabulouslie reported’ about wells, he nonetheless ‘dared not’ absolutely deny that the spring of Our Lady of Muswell in Middlesex had cured the King of Scotland

³⁹⁹ Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 397; 456.

⁴⁰⁰ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, (1651), 133-6.

⁴⁰¹ For instance, Black, *Folk Medicine*; Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 460.

⁴⁰² Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 431.

⁴⁰³ Walsham notes how John Aubrey, in his investigation of spas, wrote the words ‘Deo gracias’ whenever he located one. Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 435; Michael Hunter, *John Aubrey and the Realm of Learning*, (London: Duckworth, 1975), 109.

⁴⁰⁴ Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 401; 433; John Jones, *Benefit of Auncient Bathes of Buckstones Which Cureth Most Greeuous Sickneses, neuer before published*, (London, 1572); William Turner, *Booke of the Natures and Properties of the Baths of England as of other bathes in Germany and Italy*, (Collen, 1562); Edward Jorden, *A discourse of natural bathes, and mineral waters wherein, the original of fountains in general is declared*, (London, 1669).

before the Reformation, acknowledging that ‘the high God hath given virtue unto waters, to heale infirmities.’⁴⁰⁵ Evidencing a continued belief in the healing powers of wells, in 1626 the Principal of St. Edmund’s Hall erected a notice over a well in Crowell Street, Oxford. The waters of this well had long been reported to cure bad sight, and so the sign read: ‘There’s none will hurt this well that’s wise, / For it hurts none but helps the eyes.’⁴⁰⁶

The power that people attributed to healing wells and the practices they carried out there continued into the early modern period, albeit in a fundamentally altered religious and political landscape.⁴⁰⁷ The ADS holds records of several wells across Britain in which people deposited pins, including Alderly Edge in Cheshire, Pembrokeshire in Wales and Northumberland.⁴⁰⁸ Like the PAS, in many cases it has not been possible for the ADS to trace extant items specifically to the early modern period. However, it is clear from primary textual accounts that the practice of dropping pins into wells took place in this era. Instances abound from across the British Isles. A well in Wooler, Northumberland for example was known locally as ‘Pin Well’, where people often dropped ‘crooked pins’ into the water; whereas a particular site in Wales was alleged to be ‘under the especial patronage of the Virgin Mary’ as late as 1872, and a ‘crooked pin’ comprised the offering of every visitor.⁴⁰⁹ Many nineteenth-century authors writing of this ‘curious class of superstitions...formerly of ordinary occurrence’ record wells in which people dropped crooked pins across England, Wales, Ireland, and even in the Scottish Highlands and Hebrides.⁴¹⁰

By dropping bent pins down wells, sick people removed an object from the body to effect a cure. This action is paralleled in other early modern healing

⁴⁰⁵ John Norden, *Speculum Britanniae, The first parte an historicall, & chorographicall discription of Middlesex*, (London, 1593), 36-7; Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 432.

⁴⁰⁶ Meller, *Old Times*, 148-9.

⁴⁰⁷ Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 60; 456; 459-60. Also see Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, 380n.

⁴⁰⁸ See Archaeological Data Service, ‘ARCHSEARCH’ and search ‘bent pin’ for further information. <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archsearch/> (Accessed 23rd January 2016). Also searched for: bent nail, crooked pin.

⁴⁰⁹ Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions and Folk-Lore*, 270-1. The Welsh site was Cefyn Bryn or the Holy Well at Brindle, in the peninsula of Gower. According to the author, it was believed that if this pin be dropped in ‘with fervent faith’, all the many pins previously thrown in would rise to greet the new one. Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions and Folk-Lore*, 270-1.

⁴¹⁰ For examples, see Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions and Folk-Lore*, 273-4.

practices. In Chapter Five we will explore a group of objects commonly known today as ‘witch-bottles’, which people in the seventeenth-century used to cure themselves of bewitchment. The patient would add several ingredients to stoneware bottles, and contemporary literature often noted the addition of metals including pins, nails and needles as a crucial part of the process. Only one known author stipulated the necessity of specifically ‘crooked’ pins for this remedy. However, the material record shows that many were bent; at least nine extant ‘witch-bottles’ have been found containing pins or nails that were clearly and deliberately materially altered, of around 48 bottles with pins inside.⁴¹¹ For instance, a seventeenth-century bottle from the Museum of London contained eight pins bent in two directions, four bent in one direction, and one straight pin.⁴¹² [Figure 41].

Why did many people who used this cure for bewitchment choose to bend the pins which they added to the bottle, especially in the absence of common textual instruction? Perhaps patients deliberately chose already defunct items, and did not wish to use new, straight pins that they could still use for their primary function. Or perhaps the action of bending (of deliberately altering the pins’ materiality) drew upon a renowned contemporary device believed to invest these objects with power. Moreover, in order to initiate this curative procedure, the filled ‘witch-bottles’ were corked up, then burnt, buried under floors, or built into walls. Whatever the architectural location, an important consideration was that the jugs and their contents should remain undisturbed, and were transferred to a safe location away from the afflicted body.⁴¹³ As with pins dropped into wells, this act evidences an early modern healing practice in which people deliberately bent pins, and moved them away from their bodies.

⁴¹¹ Richard Chamberlain, *Lithobolia: or the Stone-Throwing Devil*, (London, 1698); Pers. comms. Nigel Jeffries AHRC award no. AH/S002693/1.

⁴¹² Frechen stoneware miniature jug, 1600-1650, accession no. 25437, found at Museum of London Collections, <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/115689.html> (accessed 4 February 2019).

⁴¹³ These primary texts include Blagrove, Glanvill, Aubrey, and the pamphlets of Joan Buts and Elinor Shaw. See Chapter Five for further discussion.

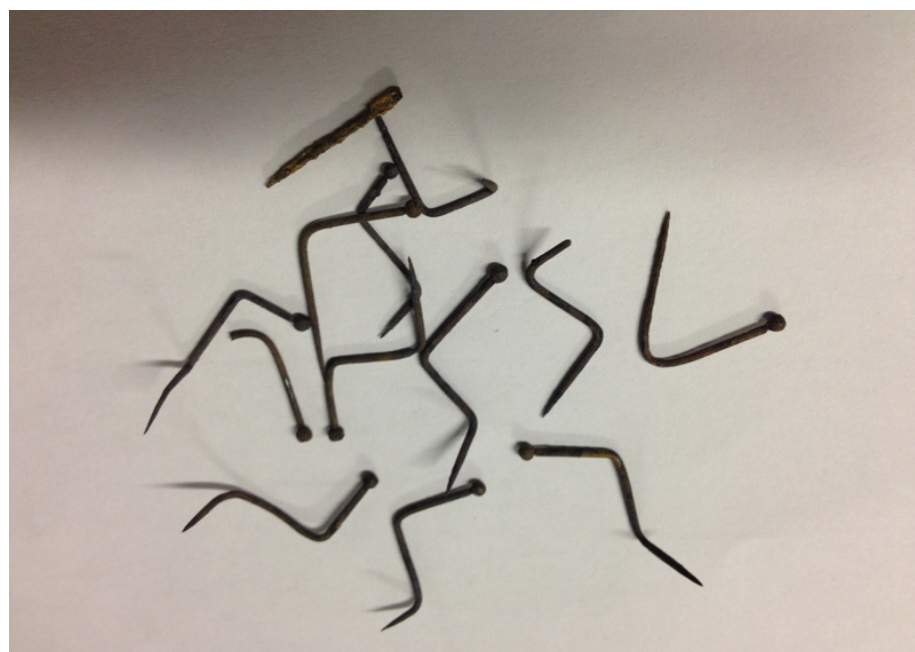


Figure 41 – Jug containing bent pins. England, post-Medieval 1600-1650. Ceramic; stoneware. 118 mm x 72 mm. London, Museum of London, ID: 25437. Sources: Museum of London [1]; author's own image [2].

It would be difficult to argue that the curative act of bending pins and dropping them down wells did not carry a debt owed to its Catholic origins, yet the perpetuation of this practice in a reformed religious climate serves to demonstrate its importance as a facet of post-Reformation domestic healing.⁴¹⁴ People still visited wells and employed rituals for curative and protective reasons, despite doctrinal changes. Instead, they often made practices fit new religious and social environments. Crucially in this case, a cure was instigated when a sick person removed a physically-altered object from their body. Similarly, bent pins that were added to ‘witch-bottles’ to cure bewitchment required deliberate removal from the body to effect the remedy. Just as Clark identified the ongoing causal connection between signs and things, these practices evidence the resilience of the powerful belief that symbolic material actions could yield healing power in post-Reformation Britain. The bent pin became a powerful object when moved out of place.

Example 2: A crooked nail necklace

In other cases, cures functioned as a direct result of the proximity of crooked pins to the afflicted body. Sick people keeping potent healing objects close to their bodies had been common practice in domestic healing since antiquity, instances of which we saw in the discussion of amulets in Chapter One.⁴¹⁵ There could be various ways of facilitating this, including wearing rings engraved with potent words (like the falling-sickness amulet), or keeping a powerful object in one’s pocket (as Pepys did with his hare’s foot). Yet often, healing objects were hung around a person’s neck. Evidence for this abounds in art and literature. In the thirteenth-century, an aged knight on his deathbed told his wife to take the gemstone he wore around his neck and give it to his eldest son and heir, ‘for while I wear it, I cannot die, neither will he die nor anyone else who chances wear it’.

⁴¹⁶ Coral, gagate and wolves’ teeth were often worn around children’s necks as a

⁴¹⁴ Walsham convincingly argues that they survived in popular culture as much because of the advent of Protestantism, as in spite of it. Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 461.

⁴¹⁵ Pliny wrote in his *Natural History* that ‘branches of Corall hanged about the neckes of infants and young children, are thought to be a sufficient preseruatiue against all witheraft and sorcerie’. Pliny the Elder, *The historie of the vvorlde: commonly called...Translated into English by Philemon Holland Doctor of Physicke. The first Second tome.* (London, 1634), 430.

⁴¹⁶ Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), esp. 13; 17.

popular method of preservation whilst sleeping; ancient practices that continued in early modern England.⁴¹⁷ And, as noted by Duffy, the action of bending coins and hanging them on the body as a preventative and curative method had its roots several decades or even centuries earlier.⁴¹⁸

Bent nails also formed a part of this curative practice, with laypeople wearing them around their necks in the early modern period. In his historical survey of Britain and Ireland first published in 1586, English antiquarian William Camden referenced a contemporary prophylactic Irish practice:

Now if this infant fortune to bee sicke, they all to besprinckle it with the stalest urine they can get; and for a preservative against all misfortunes, they hang about the childrens neckes, not onely the beginning of Saint Johns Gospell, but also a crooked naile taken out of an horses shooc⁴¹⁹

The same practice was noted by another author named ‘G.H.’ almost a century later, in a book detailing *Choice Memoirs of the History and Description of the World* (1670). G.H. referenced this act as ‘superstitious idolatry’ which was common among the ‘Wild Irish’, explaining that they also held the hooves of dead horses as sacred.⁴²⁰ The two men criticised this practice, G.H. scornfully remarking that ‘so far they wandred into the ways of error, in making these arms the strength of their health’, yet at the same time they record people wearing the crooked nail around their necks as a contemporary form of healing.⁴²¹ Moreover, the very act of condemning this practice suggests that it was relatively common in Ireland at this time.⁴²²

The St John’s Gospel and the crooked nail are likely to be connected facets of this curative act. This section of the Bible emphasizes the Holy Trinity and

⁴¹⁷ Gagete was another name for stone-coal or jet. Pliny, *Natural History*, Book XI, Ch. 63. Handley, *Sleep in Early Modern England*, 99.

⁴¹⁸ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 11.

⁴¹⁹ William Camden, *Britain, or A chorographick description of the most flourishing kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the ilands adjoyning, out of the depth of antiquitie beautified vvith mappes of the severall shires of England*, (London 1637), 2nd ed., 143.

⁴²⁰ G. H. *Memorabilia Mundi, or, Choice memoirs of the history and description of the world by G.H.* (London, 1670), 113.

⁴²¹ G. H. *Memorabilia Mundi*, 113.

⁴²² The same practice is recorded by John Speed in *England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland described and abridged with ye historic relation of things worthy memory from a farr larger vouldume done by Iohn Speed*, (London, 1627), 183. Likewise, in his section on ‘Ireland’, Nicholas Samson noted that ‘Its Native Inhabitants were extreemly rude and barbarous... about their Childrens Neckes they hung the beginning of St. Johns Gospel, or a crooked Nail of a Horse-shoe’. Nicholas Samson, *Cosmography and geography in two parts*, (London, 1682), 198.

Jesus' miracles of healing, and includes an account of the crucifixion, explicitly referring to the nails in Christ's hands.⁴²³ Until the Reformation, images of nails often featured on indulgences. These were means by which Catholics could reduce the amount of punishment due for sins, available for purchase and often taking physical form, where they comprised contractual documents, often decorated, signed and sealed by ecclesiastical authorities. Indulgences therefore constituted a material guarantee of a spiritual promise.⁴²⁴ One fifteenth-century English example states that Pope Innocent spared whomever carried and worshipped the images of the nails (proportionate in length to Christ's height) from a variety of deaths, including by sword, poison, pestilence, wicked spirits or fevers, or from dying without the sacrament. In this context, we can see why the 'crooked naile' discussed by William Camden and G.H. was said to be a 'preservative against all misfortunes'.⁴²⁵ When the 'Wild Irish' chose a nail instead of a pin, this may have signalled a preference of form; a nail would perhaps have been easier to attach to a cord than a pin. But just as when sick people bent pins and placed them on their bodies this indicated a shift from the objects' primary to secondary function, the choice of a nail may have added a deliberate layer of spiritual significance for these 'superstitious people', and the idolatry of which they were accused.⁴²⁶

This account provides an example in which, as with pins, people materially altered nails and kept them on the body to ensure their efficacy. This followed a long tradition of keeping potent materials in contact with the body for cure or protection, often as a facet of domestic medicine. The nail had a prophylactic effect not because of any inherent material value or power, but because someone had physically altered it. When bent and moved out of place,

⁴²³ John 20:25, King James Bible, <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/John-20-25/>, accessed 28th January 2019.

⁴²⁴ 'Two indulgences', University Library, University of Cambridge <https://exhibitions.lib.cam.ac.uk/reformation/artifacts/two-indulgences/> [accessed 16 May 2019].

⁴²⁵ Lea Olsan, 'Exhibit 11: A Medieval Birth Girdle', in Nick Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming and Lauren Kassell (eds.), *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 672. For the prayer roll, see 'Harley Ms T.11 Magic figures and the Wound of Christ from a prayer roll (vellum)', *Bridgeman Images*, <http://www.bridgemanimages.com/fr/asset/217323/english-school-15th-century/harley-ms-t-11-magic-figures-and-the-wound-of-christ-from-a-prayer-roll-vellum> (accessed 4 February 2019).

⁴²⁶ G. H. *Memorabilia Mundi*, 112.

this effected a transfer in function from the nail as a domestic object, to the nail as a healing object. Moreover, this ritual had complex and problematic power. To its users, it both signified and implemented an effective healing practice, but to others, it represented demonic entanglement, evidenced in the way it was condemned as ‘superstitious’ by those who documented it.

Example 3: Jane Wenham and witchcraft

Diabolical power was more explicit in cases of bewitchment. The excerpt with which this chapter opened described how, in the early eighteenth century, Jane Wenham was accused of bewitching Anne Thorn. Bent pins played a central role in the vexation. Wenham had conveyed them in harmful proximity to Thorn’s body, and Thorn swallowed, vomited, and choked on them. Indeed, two observers noted that Thorn:

often had crooked Pins in her mouth, with what Design, or to what Purpose, they knew not: but...we may reasonably conjecture when we consider the Condition of the Unhappy Maid, who continued finding Pins where-ever she cast her eyes.⁴²⁷

Victims of early modern witchcraft and possession often vomited pins. A century or so earlier, Anne Gunter, born in Berkshire in 1584, brought forth pins from several orifices and found them stuck into her breasts and other body parts after being bewitched.⁴²⁸ In many cases of witchcraft, pins were notably bent. Seventeenth-century French theologian Simon Goulart noted a case in which, after medicine had failed, one girl apparently ‘possessed of an euill spirit’ began to ‘vomit long crooked Yron nailes’.⁴²⁹ In Lowestoft in 1662, a bewitched woman was reported to have vomited crooked pins daily, and was found to have several pins held in her hands.⁴³⁰ Similarly, in his 1698 tract on the ‘sorceries and witchcrafts exercis’d by the Devil and his instruments upon Mrs. Christian Shaw’;

⁴²⁷ Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, 20.

⁴²⁸ James Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A horrible and true story of football, witchcraft, murder and the King of England*, (London: Profile Books, 1999), 3.

⁴²⁹ Simon Goulart, *Admirable and memorable histories containing the wonders of our time*, (London, 1607), 163.

⁴³⁰ Gary F. Jensen, *The Path of the Devil: Early Modern Witch Hunts*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield), 202; Gilbert Geis and Ivan Bunn, *A trial of witches: a seventeenth-century witchcraft prosecution*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 72.

Scottish judge Lord Francis Grant Cullen recorded an instance in which a woman ‘voided at her Mouth a crooked Pin’, which had been ‘forc’t into her Mouth, and design’d to Choak her’ through bewitchment.⁴³¹ And, in his treatise of diseases, apothecary and physician William Drage (d. 1668) discussed how to identify bewitched people, explaining that:

those that vomit, or void by stool, with greater or less torments, Knives, Scissors, Bryars, Whole Eggs, Dogs Tails, crooked Nails, Pins, Needles, sometimes threaded, and sometimes with Hair, Bundles of Hair, pieces of Wax, pieces of silk, live Eels, large pieces of Salpeter; conclude they are bewitched; and that such have been vomited, or voided by stool, and that from witchcraft.⁴³²

According to Drage, the ‘signs diagnostical’ used to identify the bewitched included them excreting bent pins and nails from a bodily orifice.⁴³³

The extent to which, and the mechanisms by which the Devil could manipulate witches was the subject of ongoing debate in the early modern period. Discussing Wenham’s case, philosopher Francis Bragge noted in 1712 that pins seemed to appear and disappear, being ‘strangely convey’d’.⁴³⁴ It was widely believed that the Devil, apt at manipulating and deceiving, could produce a wide range of illusory phenomena. Just as the errors authors argued that erroneous medical objects and practices powered by diabolical forces easily fooled the ‘vulgar’, there were no limits to what the Devil appeared to do. Consequently, he was able to displace or replace an object with such speed that transmutation seemed to occur, a concept which Foucault called ‘le mode de vérité d’illusion’.⁴³⁵

People vomited bent pins so frequently in the early modern period that we find several instances of physicians and healers using bent pins as a means of

⁴³¹ Lord Francis Grant Cullen, *Sadducimus debellatus: or, a true narrative of the sorceries and witchcrafts exercis’d by the devil and his instruments upon Mrs. Christian Shaw*, (London, 1698), 33.

⁴³² William Drage, *Daimonomageia a small treatise of sicknesses and diseases from witchcraft, and supernatural causes*, (London, 1665), 4-5.

⁴³³ Drage, *Daimonomageia*, 4-5.

⁴³⁴ Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, 20.

⁴³⁵ Translated as ‘the mode of the illusion of truth’. Michel Foucault, ‘Les Déviations religieuses et le savoir médical’, in Jacques Le Goff (ed.), *Hérésies et sociétés dans l’Europe pré-industrielle 11-18 siècles* (Paris, 1968), 20. Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, 170n.

procuring a type of psychosomatic cure. In Michel de Montaigne's chapter on 'The Force of Imagination' (1580) he explained:

A Woman fansying she had swallow'd a pin in a piece of Bread, cry'd out of an intolerable pain in her Throat, where she thought she felt it stick: but an ingenious Fellow that was brought to her, seeing no outward Tomour nor alteration, supposing it only to be conceit taken at some Crust of Bread that had hurt her as it went down, caus'd her to vomit, and cunningly, unseen, threw a crooked Pin into the Bason, which the Woman no sooner saw, but believing she had cast it up, she presently found her self eas'd of her pain.⁴³⁶

Mirroring the modern notion of the placebo effect, this type of action had been well-established since antiquity, as demonstrated by the story of Galen astutely dropping a snake into the vomit of a patient who was convinced that she had swallowed a serpent.⁴³⁷ Yet Montaigne's example of the 'crooked pin' in the patient's vomit evidences the sincerity with which ordinary people recognised the powerful force of this object; the extent to which they recognised signs as potent, and the bent pin as meaningful when out of place.

The Wenham case confirms the bent pin as an clear sign of bewitchment. The Devil, via a witch, was capable of moving bent pins with confounding speed, in dangerous proximity to people's bodies, for vexatious effect. This explicit reference to the bent pin as a renowned sign of diabolical power demonstrates how people would have feared this object, representing matter out of place. Yet examples like the one involving Montaigne suggest that, regardless of theological condemnation, some physicians were either perfectly unperturbed in allowing their patients to believe in such superstitious processes and cures, or that they simply saw the bent pin as another facet of everyday illness and health.

Conclusion

When an early modern person bent a pin, whether for curative or vexatious means, this action signalled to that person that then pin was now invested with

⁴³⁶ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays of Michael, seigneur de Montaigne in three books....made English by Charles Cotton*, (London, 1700), 137.

⁴³⁷ Peter E. Pormann (ed.), *Epidemics in Context: Greek Commentaries on Hippocrates in the Arabic Tradition*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 190-1.

extraordinary power. For some, bending a pin followed traditional practices of invoking spiritual aid for curative and protective gain. As the examples in this chapter have shown, bending a pin and wearing it around your neck, dropping it down a well, or including it in a 'witch-bottle' could signify a healing ritual. For others, a bent pin in dangerous proximity to the body signalled matter out of place, and was a common sign of bewitchment. Regardless of the function for which someone used it, the bent pin represented a complex and potent object. For the laity, this was demonstrated not only by the continuation of popular healing practices involving bent pins well into the early modern period, but also by the recurring contemporary phrase, 'the crooked pin in the pudding'. For Protestant reformers, who espoused the belief that objects could not mediate between humans and God, nor invoke Godly power for curative effect, these practices – whether for curative or vexatious means – signalled diabolical power, and however unwittingly, a pact made with the Devil. This seemingly innocuous, quotidian object took on power and acquired complex meaning. It transcended its everyday, putative capacity when it was deliberately bent and either kept on or moved away from the body.

This examination of bent pins has elucidated several themes central to this thesis. Firstly, the bent pin evidences a healing object of low socio-economic value, that was imbued with both curative or vexatious power and thus social worth, through ritual actions. Laypeople used bent pins in curative practices, and in domestic contexts, without any known consultation with medical practitioners or healers. Moreover, the bent pin acquired great and complex power, enough to warrant its condemnation and situation within contemporary literature. Secondly, despite such contemporary renown, these items were not collected by contemporaries, and only recently have they begun to be conserved in modern museum collections and archives. The theme of collecting (especially regarding what people have and have not collected, and why) recurs throughout this thesis, and the bent pin offers an example of an object not usually favoured by museums and archives, yet still worthy of historical study. Thirdly, the bent pin contributes directly to the ongoing discussion about the relationship of healing objects to the body in this period. The examples in this chapter showed how the bent pin could be placed in either deliberate proximity to the sufferer, like the objects in previous

chapters, or conversely at a distance from them. The bent pin therefore complicates what we have learnt so far about healing and the body, raises significant questions about how its power worked.

Finally, this chapter shows how the power of the bent pin played directly into contemporary arguments about the complex, ambiguous, and potentially diabolical power of objects. Some intellectuals and reformers condemned those who dropped bent pins down wells, wore them around their necks, and used them to help cure bewitchment as superstitious, idolatrous, and diabolical. Conversely, crooked pins also featured as a vexatious facet of bewitchment, as well as a means of curing it, and those who suffered torment from crooked pins were known to be under the influence of the Devil. ‘Crooked pins’ operated as a well-known contemporary sign, that could be manipulated for real effect, and in curative and vexatious situations they represented matter out of place both physically and metaphorically. Whether as a literary trope indicating malaise, or to critics who abhorred the bent pins’ presence in curative rituals or vexatious incidents, these were theologically complex, dangerous and powerful objects.

Often overlooked by historians and museums, I have argued that the early modern bent pins elucidate contemporary discussions about the place of objects in medicine, their relationship with the body, and theological and metaphysical arguments about things. The notion that an object could acquire socially-constructed value and be imbued with the power to affect health is a theme that continues in the next chapter, where the commonplace bent pin is juxtaposed with the coveted bezoar stone – an object that was both inherently medically virtuous, and also acquired another layer of value on account of its rarity and exoticism. For the bent pin however, the simple act of bending and placing this object accorded it a power far beyond its normative capacity. That people used it in rituals of health and illness, despite its complex and dangerous power, is typical of many objects in this period. Perhaps, many in early modern England simply shared the view of the late medieval intellectual Jean Gerson, in his caricature of popular sin: ‘what do I care as to who heals me...let it be God or the devil, just so long as I get what I want’.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁸ Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 62.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bezoar stones

Introduction

In 1680 Sir Thomas Page, Provost of King's College, Cambridge, wrote his will. Whilst little is known of Page himself, it is clear from his inventories that, like many of his contemporaries, he collected rare, curious and wondrous objects. Amongst ebony standishes and gold rings set with onyx and ruby, Page left a fascinating and complex object to his college: a 'cabinet or Box of drawers'.⁴³⁹ Cabinets of curiosity – collections of extraordinary objects – were increasingly popular with early modern European antiquaries; people who were driven by a deep curiosity and desire to explore, collect, document and display physical remains of the past.⁴⁴⁰ The items in Page's cabinet included three pieces of 'porcupine stone' and a 'skeleton of a salamander', 'all sent mee from East India for Great rarities'.⁴⁴¹ In explicitly noting that he gathered unusual and valuable objects acquired from exotic lands, Page was situating himself within the contemporary culture of collecting, in which items such as these signified one's appreciation, understanding of and involvement with 'wonder'; a concept that encompassed both enquiry and astonishment.⁴⁴² Yet many of the objects in Page's cabinet were prized in another way, as they were also believed to hold inherent medicinal and/or magical powers, adding a further layer of value. One such item lay in a box in Page's cabinet. It was an 'Orientall Bezar stone of an extraordinary magnitude weighing neare Twoe ounces and an halfe', accompanied by a document noting that this particular stone was from 'a Hog'.⁴⁴³ The bezoar was

⁴³⁹ Ledger Book 7 (KCAR/3/3/1/7) Folio 6r.

⁴⁴⁰ Marjorie Swann has noted how, by the seventeenth-century, 'cabinet' could refer not only to the cupboard with shelves that held objects, but also any architectural space that held such curiosities and rarities, and was even used to designate any collection in its entirety. *Curiosities and Texts: the culture of collecting in early modern England*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 2001), 1. Alicia Marchant, 'Antiquarianism', in Susan Broomhall (ed.), *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 254-7.

⁴⁴¹ Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*, 1; Ledger Book 7 (KCAR/3/3/1/7) Folio 6r.

⁴⁴² Peter G. Platt (ed.), *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 15; Evans and Marr (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder*.

⁴⁴³ Tom Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems: Precious Stones in Early Modern Britain - Society, Culture and Belief*, (Devon: Medieval Press, 2012), 230; Ledger Book 7 (KCAR/3/3/1/7) Folio 6r.

known to cure a wide range of illnesses, and was famous for both preventing and curing poisoning. Figure 42 provides an example from the Science Museum.



Figure 42 – Spherical bezoar stone, 1551-1750. London: Science Museum, A635026.
Source: Science Museum.

Besides the cabinet, Page bequeathed other precious items and money to friends, family members and colleagues at King's, and even to his medical physicians as an 'acknowledgement of thour great buisnes to mee and my servante in our severall sicknesses'.⁴⁴⁴ To 'Doctor Paman', who also acted as Orator of the University of Cambridge from 1674-81, Page gifted another 'Orientall Bezar stone', not from the cabinet, 'of somewhat a round forme and weighing one ounce more or less'.⁴⁴⁵ Not only was Paman one of the Provost's trusted physicians, but his office as Orator was also one of 'considerable prestige'

⁴⁴⁴ Ledger Book 7 (KCAR/3/3/1/7) Folio 6r. The patient-practitioner relationship is an important part of the study of early modern medicine. See for example Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*.

⁴⁴⁵ Ledger Book 7 (KCAR/3/3/1/7) Folio 6r. For dates and more info on Doctor Henry Paman, see 'Henry Paman (1623-95) – Professor of Medicine, Gresham College' on 'Every Man's Companion: Or, An Useful Pocket Book – The Travel Journal of Dr Martin Lister', University of Oxford, http://lister.history.ox.ac.uk/index-page_id=293.html (accessed 3 June 2017).

at this time.⁴⁴⁶ The bezoar was thus deemed an appropriate gift for someone of high status. But why was the bezoar inside Page's cabinet of such importance that he felt it necessary to note its 'extraordinary magnitude', while the stone he gave to Doctor Paman was not? What powers did Page assume of this the hog bezoar when he noted this magnitude? What was the significance of the stone's weight, the animal from which it purportedly originated, and the fact that it was 'Orientall'? These details were considered relevant, and the fact that Page bequeathed two stones in his will – one within a cabinet, and one outside of it – situates bezoars as items of contemporary importance.

This chapter asks: how does the bezoar stone tell us about the relationship between medical virtuosity and antiquarian curiosity? To answer this question, I examine the bezoar's position within early modern medicine and collecting. I begin by surveying the historiography of wonder and antiquarianism, early modern stones, and anthropological and archaeological theory concerning the value of objects, before interrogating the importance of the word 'virtue'. Next, the bezoar will be introduced, explaining how contemporaries viewed this object and analysed its disputed origins and classifications. Whilst much work has been done on early modern curiosity and stones as distinct fields, there is a significant absence of work which connects the bezoar as a medical object to the bezoar's involvement in curiosity and collecting. The following sections unite these conceptual discussions. Interrogating the stone as a revered medical object demonstrates its situation as a powerful yet unstable object. This theme continues as we analyse the several objects that could be classified as, or equated to, a bezoar, exploring unwavering medical potency despite variable geography, material and classification. Finally, this chapter situates these stones within the culture of wonder and collecting, asking why the bezoar was revered as an exotic, precious and coveted item of curiosity, and how its instability confounded classification both in the early modern period and today. In doing so, this chapter furthers the main themes of this thesis, in particular secrets, empiricism, medical politics and collecting.

⁴⁴⁶ 'Speaking, Writing and Teaching: Herbert as Orator and Priest', Cambridge Authors, Faculty of English, <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/cambridgeauthors/herbert-orator-and-priest/> (Accessed 2 June 2017).

Literature review

Early modern stones, cabinets of curiosity, the culture of collecting, wonder, and contemporary medicine and magic have mostly been studied independently from one another. By examining this one stone, this chapter will assess how these strands of research can be united to elucidate important notions concerning the material culture of early modern healing. A revival of interest in the cabinet of curiosities and culture of collecting is currently ongoing by both historians and museum-based researchers. Within the discipline of history, recent works have built upon Arthur MacGregor and Oliver Impey's seminal publication on early modern cabinets, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe* (1985).⁴⁴⁷ Of particular relevance to this chapter, MacGregor has discussed British collectors and how they differed from their European counterparts. Explaining the scholarly bias lent to continental cabinets, he has argued that collectors like John Tradescant the elder (1570-1638) and Ralph Thoresby (1658-1725) were perhaps merely more curious and less ambitious than their continental peers in terms of their scientific and didactic purposes, or that the absence of recorded detail may have hindered the scrutiny afforded to British cabinets.⁴⁴⁸ Notable English collections did exist; Elias Ashmole (1617-92), a collector in his own right, inherited Tradescant's

⁴⁴⁷ Impey and MacGregor (eds.), *The Origins of Museums*. More recent works of note include Paula Findlen, 'Inventing nature: commerce, art, and science in the early modern cabinet of curiosities' in Pamela Smith and Paula Findlen (eds.), *Merchants and Marvels - Commerce, Science and Art in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2002), 297-323; Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*; Jan C. Westerhoff, 'A World of Signs: Baroque Pansemioticism, the *Polyhistor* and the Early Modern *Wunderkammer*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62:4 (2001), 633-650; Steven Lubar, 'Cabinets of Curiosity', *Medium*, (Oct 1, 2018) <https://medium.com/@lubar/cabinets-of-curiosity-a134f65c115a> (accessed on 28 January 2019). For significant work contemporary to Impey and MacGregor, see Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious - Looking back at Early English Museums*, (London: Routledge, 1970).

⁴⁴⁸ Arthur MacGregor, 'The Cabinet of Curiosities in Seventeenth Century Britain', in Impey and MacGregor (eds.), *The Origins of Museums*, 147-158. For an excellent historiographical overview of the historiographical evolution since the publication of this book, see the inaugural Rosalind and Arthur Gilbert lecture by Paula Findlen at the V&A, 2016. Together with a five-day conference held to celebrate the Ashmolean Museum's tercentenary in 1983, both events heralded a current resurgence of interest in cabinets of curiosity. For a transcript and recording of the lecture, see: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/national-art-library/the-cabinet-of-curiosities-reflections-on-modern-art-historical-thinking> (Accessed 26 June, 2017). Works of note in intervening years include Findlen's *Possessing Nature*; see also see her book with Henrietta McBurney, Caterina Napolitano, Ian Rolfe et.al, *The Paper Museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo: A Catalogue Raisonné. Series B ~ Natural History, Parts IV and V. Birds, Other Animals, and Natural Curiosities. Volume Editor: Martin Clayton* (London: The Royal Collection in association with Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), 2 vols.

collection and gifted both their collections to the University of Oxford in 1677 to form the Ashmolean Museum.⁴⁴⁹ Similarly Thomas Browne, one of the errors authors examined in Chapter Two, owned what John Evelyn described as ‘a Paradise and Cabinet of rarities’.⁴⁵⁰ Yet MacGregor contends that British cabinets were much slower to develop, as the tastes of the earliest noble collectors were for fine arts rather than rarities and curiosities. Whereas members of the European elite such as Cosimo de’Medici (1389-1464) or Augustus of Saxony (1536-86) created cabinets of significant scale in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, British people did not make equivalent attempts until the seventeenth century.

Between the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century in England, institutional collections like the one belonging to the Royal Society occupied an intermediate position between private cabinets and public museums.⁴⁵¹ Within the museum sector, cabinets of curiosity reappeared in the late twentieth century, and from the 1980s the ‘wunderkammer’ became a way of exhibiting once again. Since 1990 for instance, the ‘Kunstskammer’ has been a permanent exhibition of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, inspired by the early modern cabinets which originally formed its collections.⁴⁵² Artist Mark Dion has questioned how objects are currently classified in museums, and investigated how they shape our understandings of the world.⁴⁵³ Between 1999 and 2018, he created and curated modern takes on cabinets of curiosity in institutions such as the Tate Modern, the V&A, John Hopkins University and the Whitechapel Gallery.⁴⁵⁴ Other recent installations of cabinets have included Amalia Mesa-Bains’s ‘New World Wunderkammer’ for the Fowler Museum in 2013, and the recreation of an early

⁴⁴⁹ MacGregor, ‘The Cabinet of Curiosities in Seventeenth Century Britain’, 152.

⁴⁵⁰ MacGregor, ‘The Cabinet of Curiosities in Seventeenth Century Britain’, 156.

⁴⁵¹ Michael Hunter, ‘The Cabinet Institutionalized: The Royal Society’s ‘Repository’ and its background’, in Impey and MacGregor (eds.), *The Origins of Museums*, 159.

⁴⁵² ‘History of the Collection’, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, <https://www.khm.at/en/visit/collections/kunstskammer-wien/history-of-the-collection/> (Accessed 2 August 2019).

⁴⁵³ See Coleen J. Sheehy, *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2006); ‘Mark Dion’s Cabinets of Curiosity’, *Recollecting the Archive*, <https://recollectingthearchive.wordpress.com/mark-dions-cabinets-of-curiosities/>, (accessed 2 August 2019).

⁴⁵⁴ ‘A Field Guide to Curiosity: A Mark Dion Project’, V&A Museum, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/a-field-guide-to-curiosity-a-mark-dion-project#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-296%2C-483%2C12974%2C8938>, (accessed 2 August 2019).

modern ‘wunderkammer’ in the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in 2015. Moreover, a two-year interdisciplinary project headed by the V&A entitled ‘Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities’ (2016-18) examined both historic and modern classification, and questioned the potential of the cabinet for the future of the museum’s collecting and curation, aiming to ‘give new life to this early modern concept’.⁴⁵⁵

Early modern people often identified items within cabinets as ‘wondrous’, and the concept of ‘wonder’ has been examined in detail by Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park in *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (1998), where they define wonder as a ‘cognitive passion’.⁴⁵⁶ As both marvellous and miraculous, wonder as an interest tested the line between the known and unknown. Wonders as objects marked the outermost limits of the natural, examining how people challenged epistemological and aesthetic certainties through the collection of items that pushed established boundaries.⁴⁵⁷ Much as Paula Findlen has highlighted the place of objects as jokes of nature, Dudley Wilson has noted how contemporaries saw the ‘curious object’ as interfering with the harmony and existence of the universe.⁴⁵⁸ Discussing the changing meanings of the word ‘curiosity’, Deborah Harkness has tracked the change of this term from largely pejorative in the medieval period, denoting sinful interest in knowledge, to a virtuous tool of the natural philosopher by the late 1600s.⁴⁵⁹ Daston has also researched this cultural shift, by examining the early modern ‘vogue for the preternatural’ – ‘preternatural’ meaning phenomena which were technically natural, but rare, inciting wonder and marvel – which arose in part due to new printing centres disseminating books of occult secrets, and voyages of exploration

⁴⁵⁵ ‘Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities’, V&A Museum, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/opening-the-cabinet-of-curiosities> (Accessed 26 June 2017).

⁴⁵⁶ Peter G. Platt (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in *Wonders, Marvels and Monsters*, 15.

⁴⁵⁷ Park and Daston, *Wonders and the Order Of Nature*, 13-16. Pamela H. Smith, ‘Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750 (Review)’, *Configurations* 8, no. 3 (1 September 2000): 419–23. For other notable works on wonder and curiosity, see Evans and Marr (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*; Neil Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*; Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*.

⁴⁵⁸ Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 72.

⁴⁵⁹ Deborah Harkness, ‘*Nosce teipsum*: Curiosity, the humoural body, and the culture of therapeutics in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England’, in Evans and Marr (eds.), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, 173.

which brought back exotic creatures and objects.⁴⁶⁰ Daston thus describes cabinets of curiosities like Page's as 'museums of the preternatural', as they often contained both religious and secular objects, including antique coins or medals, scientific instruments, plants, natural and humanmade objects from Asia and the Americas, carvings and portraits, relics, rare or unusual zoological specimens, and stones.⁴⁶¹

In the early twentieth century, scholars from different disciplines became interested in the study of stones. Medical physician William Thomas Fernie, for example, discussed *Precious Stones: For Curative Wear; and Other Remedial Uses* in 1907, mirroring the lapidary tradition by listing stones alphabetically, recording their material description and historical virtues, and aiming to 'vindicate on sound, and even scientific, grounds the confidence reposed by our forefathers in Precious Stones for remedial uses'.⁴⁶² A few years later, mineralogist George Frederick Kunz wrote a similar text entitled *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones* (1913), accompanied by a companion piece two years after focusing on magical gems and jewels.⁴⁶³ Although offering a more detailed examination of the 'supernatural' context of stones, Kunz also catalogued them alphabetically, dedicating chapters to certain types of stones; for instance, birthstones or engraved gems. In a variation of this trend, art historian Joan Evans published *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* in 1922, examining the situation of stones in lapidaries, and presenting her research in chronological order by lapidary.⁴⁶⁴

From the 1970s a new scholarly trend emerged, offering more thorough examinations of stones according to particular interdisciplinary influences; for

⁴⁶⁰ Lorraine Daston, 'Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe', in Platt (ed.), *Wonders, Marvels and Monsters*, 81-4.

⁴⁶¹ The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford had among its holdings St. Augustine's pastoral crook. See R.F. Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum, 1683-1894*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 37; Daston, 'Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe', 84; Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*, 2.

⁴⁶² William Thomas Fernie, *Precious Stones: For Curative Wear; And other remedial uses. Likewise the Nobler Metals*, (Bristol: J. Wright & co.), 4.

⁴⁶³ George Frederick Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1913); George Frederick Kunz, *The Magic of Jewels and Charms*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1915).

⁴⁶⁴ Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and Renaissance particularly in England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922). See also Julius Wodiska, *A Book of Precious Stones*, (London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910).

instance, A.J. Dubman Hansen's literary analysis, *Shakespeare and the Lore of Precious Stones* (1977), and a history of jewellery and art by Diana Scarisbrick entitled *Jewellery in Britain* (1994).⁴⁶⁵ Writing a history of geology and geography in 1985, Hugh Torrens examined the 'basic curiosity value' of geological objects, noting that although different civilizations across time used them as 'charms' imbued with medicinal value, to many, stones simply had a directly aesthetic appeal as "mere' curiosities'.⁴⁶⁶

The medical and magical potency of stones has been researched by historian Tom Blaen in *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems* (2012). Blaen's volume mirrors the early modern encyclopedic works he references in its scope and breadth. Each chapter is both thematically and chronologically focused, and dedicated to a different aspect of stones' 'lives', from the medieval period to the eighteenth-century. Blaen argues that stones can act as a 'lens' through which to view wider cultural and intellectual change in this period, adding vital understanding to histories of religion, medicine, magic and science, and demonstrating the 'complexities and contradictions' present in these areas at a time in which the reformation and regulation of intellectual and moral boundaries were underway. The changing attitudes to stones across the early modern period, he contends, show intricacies and nuances in contemporary intellectual culture more holistically than studies of individual areas of science, religion, medicine or magic.⁴⁶⁷ Where Blaen examines the place of stones within early modern medicine and magic, this chapter locates the medical power of bezoar to its place in the period of curiosity, wonder and collection, examining how these two facets relate.

The bezoar itself has been the subject of examination in the last decade. Marcia Stephenson has investigated the situation of the Peruvian bezoar in early modern colonial relations and transatlantic trade, arguing how both Iberian colonizers and Andean pastoral peoples alike valued the stone, meaning it became

⁴⁶⁵ Abby Jane Dubman Hansen, 'Shakespeare and the Lore of Precious Stones', *College Literature* 4:3, (Fall 1977), 210-19; Diana Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain 1066-1837 – A documentary, social literary and artistic survey*, (London: Michael Russell Publishing, 1994).

⁴⁶⁶ Hugh Torrens, 'Early collecting in the field of Geology', in Impey and MacGregor (eds.), *The Origins of Museums*, 204.

⁴⁶⁷ Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 14.

a focal point in the struggle over ‘competing worldviews’.⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, the Peruvian stone became associated with both the divine and demonic. When in the possession of the Spanish it was lauded for its extraordinary medical virtuosity, yet when Europeans discovered it hidden away by indigenous people, they deemed it idolatrous, and its possession duly punishable.⁴⁶⁹ Art historian Beate Fricke has interrogated the visual relationship between bezoars, goas, and their containers in her analysis of the power of these stones in the early modern period.⁴⁷⁰ Fricke has analysed the discovery of the bezoar stone in Peru by Spanish soldiers in 1568, considering how it became a salient transatlantic cultural and economic object toward the end of the sixteenth century, and exploring the effect of losing these stones to Europeans on the power of indigenous communities. She has also placed a particular emphasis on what we can derive from the aesthetic qualities of bezoars, Goas (similar stones, which will be discussed further in a moment) and their receptacles, and how they were perceived to be powerful. Stephenson and Fricke’s works signal important efforts to unite the bezoar’s medical virtuosity with its antiquarian curiosity, although their focus remains on more specialised areas of study relating to their respective disciplines. This chapter addresses an omission in the current scholarship on early modern stones, by examining the bezoar stone as both a potent and virtuous healing object, and also a valuable antiquarian curiosity.

In exploring the relationship between the bezoar’s medical potency and its antiquarian worth, the concepts of power and value feature significantly in this chapter. The juxtaposition of the bent pin in the previous chapter and the bezoar stone in this chapter illuminates the different values attributed to, powers assumed of, and material variation between different early modern healing objects. The bezoar stone, for instance, was much more valuable to contemporaries than the bent pin which formed the focus of the previous chapter. Although known within early modern society as a powerful object that could both heal and harm, the social and economic worth of a bent pin was negligible.

⁴⁶⁸ Marcia Stephenson, ‘From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry: The Transatlantic Role of Andean Bezoar Stones during the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries’, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 90:1 (2010), 3-39.

⁴⁶⁹ Stephenson, ‘From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry’, 22-3.

⁴⁷⁰ Beate Fricke, ‘Making Marvels–Faking Matter: Mediating *Virtus* between the Bezoar and Goa Stones and Their Containers’, in Göttler and Mochizuki (eds.), *The Nomadic Object*, 342-367.

People could easily replace a pin if it was lost or broken. It was cheap, not considered worth collecting, and as an individual entity was culturally unimportant; that is, whilst pins had an undeniably vital function within contemporary dress, to misplace one would not matter.

The bezoar, however, demonstrates a contrasting set of values. As this chapter will show, it was expensive, rare, exotic and desirable. Yet despite their situation at opposite sides of the spectrum of value, the bent pin and the bezoar stone were both medically potent, and both played a part in early modern health and illness. In fact, although the bezoar was an unstable object, scrutinized and attacked by some contemporaries, and its origins, functions and alleged power were never fully resolved, none of these points of contention detracted from the bezoar's immense contemporary medical power, antiquarian worth or monetary value. While people distrusted the obscure, multi-faceted power of the bent pin (we need only remember the popular proverb about the crooked pin in the pudding), the ambiguity surrounding the bezoar stone appeared to actively augment its desirability.

I underpin my analysis of the power and value of the bezoar stone with anthropological and archaeological theory concerning the value of objects. As discussed in the Introduction, Arjun Appadurai has used the concept of value to demonstrate that 'things' have social lives, defined as the situation in which exchangeability is an objects' socially pertinent feature.⁴⁷¹ He highlights crucial relationships between demand, trade and value, noting that 'exchange is not a by-product of the mutual valuation of objects, but its source', and that a system of interchange must exist in order to make things valuable.⁴⁷² In the same volume, Colin Renfrew discusses the assumed potency of objects in relation to different regimes of value. Also foregrounding the importance of social context to the definition of value, Renfrew states that as well as being arbitrary, 'it is never a property inherent within an object or material in the manner of such physical and measurable properties as hardness, density...we speak of value as if it were inherent within the object or commodity, and in doing so we create a metaphor,

⁴⁷¹ Appadurai (ed.), *The social life of things*, 3-4.

⁴⁷² Appadurai (ed.), *The social life of things*, 3-4.

or mask a reality.⁴⁷³ In other words, while Appadurai argues that an object is imbued with value due to exchange and trade, Renfrew contends that value is something assigned by an individual or group.⁴⁷⁴

Renfrew also discusses 'prestige goods'; objects which have a value that, within a given cultural context, is regarded as intrinsic.⁴⁷⁵ Following the lead of Appadurai, Renfrew notes that it may be useful to introduce the term 'prime value' concerning those objects that in a given culture are interpreted as having intrinsic value. As this chapter will examine, early modern European people imbued the bezoar with high value as a result of its exchange and trade, and assigned it high value as an exotic rarity. The 'prime value' of the bezoar is evident in the way contemporaries referred to it as 'magistral' and virtuous, and associated it with other inherently-valuable precious stones.⁴⁷⁶ Some people, like the errors authors in Chapter Two, thought that too many virtues were attributed to the bezoar and attacked it, but nevertheless the stone remained incredibly popular throughout the early modern period.

Many English authors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries described the bezoar as 'magistral' and 'miraculous'; 'famous' and 'salutory', and several regaled the stone's 'admirable virtue'.⁴⁷⁷ Deriving from the classical Latin 'virtus', used to denote any attractive or valuable quality, potency, efficacy or special property, the word 'virtue' was used in early modern English to denote a vast array of merits relating to both people and objects.⁴⁷⁸ The term 'virtuoso', for example, was devised in this period to denote a learned person or scholar,

⁴⁷³ Renfrew, 'Varna and the emergence of wealth in prehistoric Europe', 158-60.

⁴⁷⁴ By stating this, Renfrew contradicts Appadurai to a certain extent, who labels 'exchange' as the source of value. But we may note that an object can have value to an individual, without having any exchange value or power; a sentimental value.

⁴⁷⁵ Renfrew: 'Prime value' is thus 'the equivalent of ascribed intrinsic value.' Renfrew, 'Varna and the emergence of wealth in prehistoric Europe', 158-60.

⁴⁷⁶ Anon., *A Brief relation of the plague at Naples*, (London, 1665), 2; Jacob Aerts Colom, *The zea-atlas, or, The water-world shewing all the sea-coasts of y known parts of y earth*, (London, 1688), [6].

⁴⁷⁷ 'Magistral': Anon., *A Brief relation of the plague at Naples*, 2; 'famous': Traiano Boccalini, *I ragguagli di Parnasso, or, Advertisements from Parnassus in two centuries*, (London, 1656), 154; 'famous': Samuel Chappuzeau, *The history of jewels, and of the principal riches of the East and West taken from the relation of divers of the most famous travellers of our age*, (London, 1671) 122; 'salutory': Samuel Collins, *A systeme of anatomy, treating of the body of man, beasts, birds, fish, insects, and plants*, (London, 1685), 492; 'admirable virtue', George Castle, *The chymical Galenist a treatise, wherein the practise of the ancients is reconcild to the new discoveries in the theory of physick*, (London, 1667), 121.

⁴⁷⁸ "virtue, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2018. Web. 28 January 2019.

particularly a natural philosopher or member of the Royal Society, while, like the word ‘antiquary’, it could also signal those interested in or who collected natural curiosities and rarities.⁴⁷⁹ In 1662, John Evelyn noted ‘The Greeks and inventive Romans, who...publish'd so many thousands of medails, and coynes as are in the hands and collections of the *Virtuosi*’, whereas half a century later Lord Shaftesbury scorned the ‘inferior Virtuosi’ who, ‘in seeking so earnestly for Rarities, they fall in love with Rarity, for Rareness-sake.’⁴⁸⁰

Concerning objects, however, contemporaries commonly used the word ‘virtue’ to describe the ability of an item to exert power and affect the body in a beneficial way, whether curative or protective, and also to denote an object of great monetary worth or value.⁴⁸¹ Fricke has examined the power of the bezoar stone in the context of Renaissance art theory, where researchers have extensively examined the Latin term ‘virtus’ with regards to the artist’s power to create. Fricke argues however that the term ‘virtus’ should be perceived differently in relation to what she terms ‘talismanic’ and ‘marvellous’ objects such as the bezoar, using the word ‘virtus’ as a synonym of power, denoting the bezoar’s ‘potent qualities’.⁴⁸² This chapter adopts the terms ‘medical virtuosity’ to denote the bezoar’s curative and protective power, and ‘antiquarian curiosity’ to signify how the stone was desirable to early modern collectors, and will explore the dynamic between these two concepts.

⁴⁷⁹ “virtuoso, n. and adj.”. OED Online. December 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223848?redirectedFrom=virtuoso> (accessed December 03, 2018).

⁴⁸⁰ John Evelyn, *Sculptura, or, The history, and art of chalcography and engraving in copper with an ample enumeration of the most renowned masters and their works*, (London, 1662), 34; Lord Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinion and Times*, (1711), Vol. III, 157.

⁴⁸¹ See OED. “virtue, n.”. OED Online. July 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223835> (accessed November 16, 2018).

⁴⁸² Fricke uses treatises such as Peter of Abano’s *Tractus de Venenis*, (Mantua, 1473) to show the bezoar recorded as ‘propria et specifica virtus’. Fricke, ‘Making Marvels’, 346-7.



Figure 43 – Bezoar, from bladder of deer. British (?), 1801-1912. London: Science Museum, A134901. Source: Science Museum.

What was the bezoar stone?

In the ‘Expert Lapidary: Or A Physicall Treatise of the secret Vertues of Stone’, part of his *School of Physic* (1659), physician and astrologer Nicholas Culpeper detailed some commonly held tenets regarding the bezoar in early modern Europe:

There are two sorts, East and West Bezoar; the East is best, it hath no obnoxious quality, it is profitable against the bitings of venomous beasts, and all melancholly diseases, as Leprosie, Itch, Scabs, Quartane Agues, Ring-worms, &c. It hath been known to cure men past hope, and left off

by Physicians, and hath restored them to their former health...it is a Preservative against all manner of poison.⁴⁸³

As well as being called 'East' and 'West' bezoars, the two main types were also known to contemporaries as 'Oriental' and 'Occidental'. Europeans first learnt about the bezoar from Arabic sources in the twelfth century, and so they did not appear in earlier lapidaries or books of secrets. They were absent from the works of Pliny (23/4-79 AD), Marbode of Rennes (1035-1123), Albertus Magnus (1200-80), and from the travels of Marco Polo (1254-1324), and appeared infrequently in works by medieval medical authors who cited Arabic sources, such as Pietro d'Abano (1257-1316), appearing only in the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* (a list of medicines produced by the College of Physicians) in 1649.⁴⁸⁴ The first bezoar known to be owned by a European person was a gift from the King of Cochin (or Kochi, Kerala) to the Portuguese King Manuel I (1469-1521) after the Portuguese first arrived in subcontinental India in 1500.⁴⁸⁵

Thereafter, the most significant influx of information about the bezoar for the European market came via a sixteenth-century pharmacopeia by Spanish physician and botanist Nicolás Monardes (1493-1558).⁴⁸⁶ This work, entitled *Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales* (A medical history of things that have been discovered from our West Indies), was

⁴⁸³ From 'The Expert Lapidary: Or A Physicall Treatise of the secret Vertues of Stones' in Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's school of physick*, (London, 1659), 267-8.

⁴⁸⁴ Peter Borschberg, 'The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones (approx.. 1500 to 1700)', in Michael North (ed.), *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges Between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900*, (Ashgate: Farnham, 2010), 31-7. In the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*, the bezoar was catalogued as a 'stone'. Nicholas Culpeper, *A physicall directory, or, A translation of the London dispensatory made by the Colledge of Physicians in London*, (London, 1649), 75. Monardes notes how Pliny discussed 'wilde hartes' which eat snakes to heal themselves of disease, but that the 'Arabiens doe amplifie this cause and say, that the wild hartes by eating of these serpents, come to ingender the Bezaar stone'. Nicolás Monardes, (trans. John Frampton), *Ioyfull Nevves out of the Newe Founde Worlde Wherein Is Declared the Rare and Singuler Vertues of Diuerse and Sundrie Hearbes, Trees, Oyles, Plantes, and Stones, with Their Aplications, Aswell for Phisicke as Chirurgerie,..Englished by Ihon Monardes Marchaunt*, (London, 1577), 1580 edn., fol. 121. Maria do Sameiro Barroso, 'Animal Stones and the Dark Age of Bezoars', in Philip Wexler (ed.), *Toxicology in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, (London: Academic Press, 2017), 121.

⁴⁸⁵ Borschberg, 'The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones', 33.

⁴⁸⁶ Daniela Bleichmar, 'Books, Bodies, and Fields: Sixteenth-Century Transatlantic Encounters with New World Materia Medica', in Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan (eds.), *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 83-99; Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, (London: Yale University Press, 1993).

published in 1565.⁴⁸⁷ It spanned 30 editions in at least eight languages, and was translated into English as *Joyfull Newes out of the Newe Founde Worlde* in 1577. A 1580 edition, ‘Wherevnto are added three other bookes treating of the Bezaar stone’, indicated the enthusiasm that ‘new’ medicines like the bezoar brought to Europeans. Despite having never been to the ‘New World’ (in this case, Peru), Monardes wrote several books about the discoveries made there, with information collected from family and merchants. Monardes dedicated a chapter to Peruvian bezoars, but also discussed those from ‘East India’; that is, he examined both Occidental and Oriental bezoars.⁴⁸⁸

The word ‘bezoar’ came from the Persian *pa(d)-zahar* meaning poison antidote.⁴⁸⁹ Monardes stated in 1577 that ‘this Bezaar stone hath many names: for the Arabiens do cal it *Hagar*, the Persians *Bezaar*, the Indians *Bezar*...the Spaniardes ‘the stone against venom & sounding’.⁴⁹⁰ Monardes’ description of the bezoar and the etymology of its name also highlighted the magnitude of its curative and prophylactic healing potency: ‘(ben) in Hebrew is as much to say as Lorde, and (zaar), as if ye would say, Lord of the venomes, and by good reasons it is so named, seeing as this stone is Lady of the venomes, and doeth extinguish and destroy them as being Lady, and mistresse over them.’⁴⁹¹ Over a hundred years later, English physician Frederick Slare similarly noted that ‘some would have it be a Persian Word, and to signify an antidote against Poison.’⁴⁹²

However, understanding and classifying the bezoar stone was not an easy task. Contemporaries agreed that bezoars came from the guts of beasts, but they disagreed about which ones. Whereas some early modern authors vaguely cited ruminants and quadrupeds, others referenced several different animals including monkeys and pigs, whilst some insisted bezoars only came from goats.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁷ Author’s own translation.

⁴⁸⁸ On Peruvian bezoars, see Monardes, *Joyfull Newes* (1580), fols. 98-101; on Eastern bezoars, see 121-132.

⁴⁸⁹ Which in Arabic literature became *ba-zahar*. Stark, ‘Mounted Bezoar Stones, Seychelles Nuts, and Rhinoceros Horns’, 71. Fricke, ‘Making Marvels’, 346.

⁴⁹⁰ Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1580), fol. 120.

⁴⁹¹ Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1580), fol. 120.

⁴⁹² Frederick Slare, *Experiments and Observations upon Oriental and other Bezoar-Stone, Which Prove them to be of no Use in Physick*, (London, 1715), ij; Monardes, *Ioyfull newes* (1580), fol. 121. Stephenson, ‘From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry’, 10.

⁴⁹³ For instance, see John Hill, *A History of the Materia Medica*, (London, 1751), 851-2 for a description of ‘the monkey bezoar’ amongst other diverse animals.

Although writers cited goats with the most frequency, we may remember that Sir Thomas Page referred to one of his bezoars as coming from a hog. Figure 43 shows a deer bezoar, while Figure 44 shows an unidentified ‘animal’. The lack of agreement surrounding bezoars’ provenance is augmented by secondary literature, in which some authors refer only to what bezoar stones are known to be today (balls of materials that animals and humans cannot digest, such as hair, and fibers), rather than offering contemporary classification.⁴⁹⁴

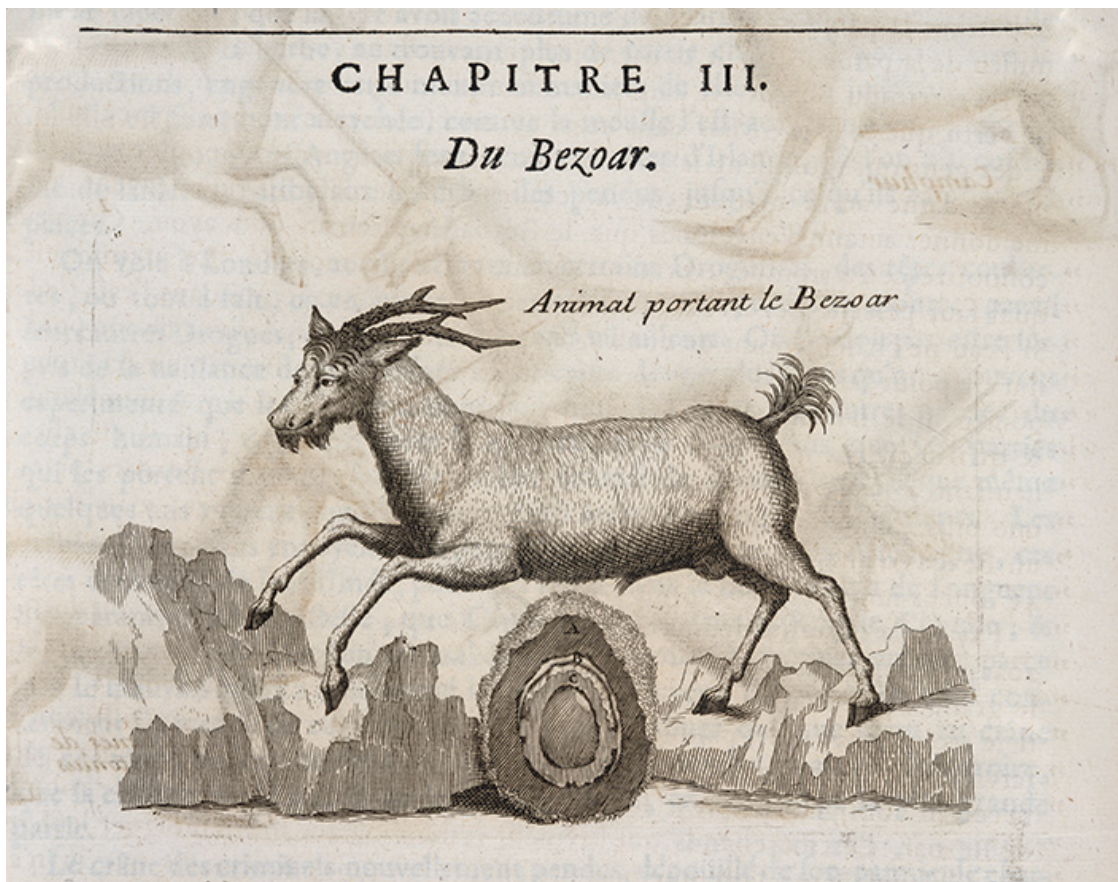


Figure 44 – Detail from Pierre Pomet, *Histoire générale des drogues*, (Paris, 1694).
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

As a result of their novelty, ambiguity and uncertain provenance in the early modern era, bezoars often straddled boundaries of categorisation not only

⁴⁹⁴ See for instance ‘Spherical bezoar stone from unknown animal, 1551-1750’, *Science Museum, London*, <http://broughttolife.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/objects/display?id=4574> (accessed 6 August 2019).

with regards to their virtues and functions, but also in terms of what they actually were. Like other objects we have seen in the previous three chapters, bezoars tested the nuanced borders between the natural and the artificial, the religiously legitimate and the diabolical. As we saw in Chapter Two, scholars argued about the true and false virtues of objects, whether or not a certain thing existed, and whether particular functions and effects were naturally appropriate or part of diabolical magic.⁴⁹⁵ This was the era of what Paula Findlen has called the ‘experimental culture of the museum’, in which people debated the classification of problematic items including fossils, zoophytes, coral, unicorn’s horns and bezoar stones.⁴⁹⁶ Contemporaries took issue with objects that did not comfortably fit into established categories like animal or vegetable. Coral, for instance, was largely considered a ‘plant-mineral’ or ‘stone-plant’ until the eighteenth century.⁴⁹⁷ Findlen has argued that early modern people often deemed difficult objects like this as ‘jokes as nature’ (*lusus naturae*) or ‘jokes of knowledge’ (*lusus scientiae*), relating to their fluid and incomprehensible categorisation.⁴⁹⁸

Similar uncertainty occurred over how to categorise stones that originated from inside animals, like the bezoar. Lorenzo Legati, cataloguer of the Cospi Museum (established after nobleman Ferdinand Cospi donated his cabinet to the senate of Bologna in 1657), noted of oxen stones that ‘nature jokes, in this manner making it seem that oxen lay eggs.’⁴⁹⁹ In this instance, where the mineral world resided within the animal, Legati highlighted the ‘playfulness of scientific discovery’ recognised by Findlen.⁵⁰⁰ Whilst contemporaries mainly classified the bezoar as a stone, ambiguity occasionally arose, especially in the absence of earlier textual evidence regarding its origins. Indeed, the inventories of cabinets of curiosity reveal that bezoars were the only objects to be labelled as both

⁴⁹⁵ See Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 260.

⁴⁹⁶ Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 202.

⁴⁹⁷ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), 92. Some argued for its classification as purely a mineral throughout this period, for instance Paolo Boccone, who in the seventeenth century argued that coral showed the external form but not the internal structure of a plant. Paolo Boccone, *Recherches et observations curieuses sur la nature du corail blanc & verge, vray de Dioscoride*, (Paris, 1671), 2. Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 237.

⁴⁹⁸ Findlen, ‘Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge’, 292–331.

⁴⁹⁹ Findlen, *Jokes of Nature*, 305.

⁵⁰⁰ Findlen, *Jokes of Nature*, 305–6.

naturalia and artefacta.⁵⁰¹ Thus whilst Slare, writing in 1715, acknowledged the bezoar's common categorisation as 'lapis' or 'stone', he made his scepticism clear, stating that 'it will indeed sink in Water, but yet is very far from having the Specific Gravity, or Solidity of a Stone'.⁵⁰²

Medical virtuosity

While its origins and classification remained unresolved throughout the period, the bezoar was renowned for aiding numerous afflictions pertaining to both the body and mind. Sick people used the bezoar to cure minor ailments including scabies, bites, itchings, 'quarterne agues', grief of the heart, faintness, sadness, and pestilent fevers, as well as to conserve youth and to expel worms.⁵⁰³ In his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), scholar Robert Burton recommended the bezoar for its 'especiall vertue against all melancholy affections' as 'it comforts the heart and corroborates the whole body'.⁵⁰⁴ Following Arabic tradition, medical practitioners in England also prescribed the bezoar as a preventative and purgative. Apothecary John Parkinson noted in 1640 that the 'bezar stone is [used]...to provoke sweate, and thereby expel evill vapours from the heart and vitall spirites'.⁵⁰⁵ Yet the bezoar was perhaps most well-known for its antidotal qualities, and was believed to remedy even fatal diseases such as the plague (sometimes understood as a poison).⁵⁰⁶ Contemporary authors wrote that bezoars were valued so highly in part precisely because of their dual alexipharmic power; that is, they could both prevent poisoning, and cure poisoning. In fact, contemporaries generally regarded this stone as a cure-all, given 'where ordinarie

⁵⁰¹ Fricke, 'Making Marvels', 344.

⁵⁰² Slare, *Experiments and Observations*, j-ij.

⁵⁰³ Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1577), fol. 99r.; fol. 100v.

⁵⁰⁴ Robert Burton, *The anatomy of melancholy vvhat it is. VVith all the kindes, causes, symptomes, prognostickes, and seuerall cures of it*, (London, 1621). Lovell and Monardes were in agreement that the bezoar worked particularly well on females, Monardes stating that 'especially I have seen these causes more remedied in women than in men'. The reasons for this, Monardes elucidates, concerned the humoral composition of women; the stone manifesting 'effectes where there is a melancholie humour'. Robert Lovell, *Sive panzoologicomineralogia. Or a compleat history of animals and minerals*, (Oxford, 1661), 28; Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1577), fol. 99.

⁵⁰⁵ John Parkinson, *Theatrum Botanicum: the theater of plants. Or, an universall and compleate herball*, (London, 1640).

⁵⁰⁶ James Primrose, 'Of the Errours about the Bezaar Stone' in *Popular errours*, 347. On plague as a poison, see for instance Daniel Sennert, *The sixth book of Practical physick Of occult or hidden diseases*, (London, 1662), 12-14.

medicines have not profited, in the which it doth manifest profite, and if it do no profite, it can do no hurte.’⁵⁰⁷

Sick people in early modern Europe employed bezoars in different ways, whether as amulets, powders, tinctures or cordials. How they used the stone varied according not only to societal, temporal or chronological trends, but also to personal preference. Thirteenth-century Islamic physician Ibn al-Baitar noted that the bezoar could either be worn ‘in the form of a necklace or signet ring’ or ‘chewed in the mouth’, and three centuries later Neopolitan scholar Giambattista della Porta continued to advise taking the stone both internally (in wine), and externally (by hanging it ‘about the neck night to the heart...against the plague’).⁵⁰⁸ The *Pharmacopoeia Londonensis* of 1679 however noted that the bezoar was only to be taken inwardly, ‘for this Stone is not used to be worn as a Jewel’, and evidence of bezoars used as amulets is often from earlier in the period, where they were mounted in filigree cases to be worn around the neck or fashioned into rings and pendants.⁵⁰⁹ For instance, during the 1500s, Queen Elizabeth I of England and King Eric XIV of Sweden both wore bezoars set in silver finger-rings.⁵¹⁰ Figure 45 provides an example of a bezoar ring in a gold band reported to the PAS and now at the British Museum, given a date of ‘14thC-15thC’.

While few extant records describe how the bezoar worked when set in jewellery, other stones used by contemporaries, like the toadstone, operated prophylactically when worn as a necklace or ring, and when held close to, or in contact with, the skin.⁵¹¹ Moreover, like other stones, some people believed bezoars to operate magically through the power of sympathy; a concept discussed in more depth in Chapter Five. For instance, the *Picatrix*, a medieval Arabic text on astral magic, translated into Spanish and Latin in the thirteenth century, stated

⁵⁰⁷ Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1577), fol. ‘011’ [101].

⁵⁰⁸ Ibn al-Beithar, quoted in Hermann Fühner, ‘Bezoarsteine’, *Janus* 6 (1901), 353; Giambattista della Porta, *Natural Magick*, (London, 1658), 545.

⁵⁰⁹ Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinesis*, 52. Borschberg, ‘The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones’, 30-1.

⁵¹⁰ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, Vol. II. (London, 1823), 420; 499. With thanks to Abigail Gomulkiewicz for this reference.

⁵¹¹ Tom Blaen, ‘Not used to be worn as a Jewel’: The wearing of precious stones in early modern England – ornaments or medicine?, *Geological Society Special Publications* 452, 261-265, (22 December 2016), esp. 264.

that to heal the bite of a scorpion, the arachnid's image should be engraved onto a bezoar stone under a specific constellation and set into a golden ring. [Example in Figure 46]. The person who was stung would then stamp the ring's image into some soft incense, make a drink from this incense, and upon ingesting it would be immediately cured.⁵¹²



Figure 45 – Bezoar finger-ring in gold band. England, 14thC-15thC. 5.6mm x1.6mm, bezel 16.2mm in diameter, stone 14.9mm, bezel and stone 8.1mm thick. London: British Museum, 2011,8015.1. Source: PAS.

⁵¹² Fricke, 'Making Marvels', 346; John Michael Greer & Christopher Warnock (trans.), *The Complete Picatrix: The Occult Classic of Astrological Magic Liber Atratus Edition*, (Adocentyn Press, 2010-11), 45.



Figure 46 – Ring. Europe, 1700-1800 (intaglio). London: V&A Museum, 1826-1869.
Source: V&A Museum.

Like other early modern materials, the medical effects of the bezoar could also be transferred to liquid. Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612) owned a ‘Bezoar Cup’ made from a single giant bezoar stone, which he drank from to prevent poisoning.⁵¹³ This bezoar cup worked in a similar way to the antimonial cup discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter Two. When someone steeped wine in the antimonial cup, the properties of the metal prompted gentle purgation, yet we may remember physician James Primrose arguing that antimony worked just as well when dipped into drink. Similarly, French pharmacist Pierre Pomet noted in 1684 how ‘Indians’ (a capacious term invented by Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to denote diverse peoples around the globe) used the bezoar by letting it stand ‘infusing some time in Wine and Water, that it may impart its Virtue’ when drunk before meals.⁵¹⁴ Pomet further noted that to counteract any poisoned liquid, the Indians often hung the bezoars ‘in little gilt chains’ attached to drinking vessels, ‘to put into any Liquor

⁵¹³ Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1580), fols. 126-31.

⁵¹⁴ On Indians, see Jonathan Gil Harris (ed.), *Indograpy: Writing the “Indian” in early modern England*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), especially Gil Harris, ‘Introduction: Forms of Indograpy’, 1-22.

for the Infusion’.⁵¹⁵ Europeans adopted these methods, and examples of European bezoar cups and vessels with bezoars attached still exist in museum collections today. [Figure 47]. Their design evidences the dual value of the bezoar; when attached to such elaborate containers, the bezoar could be displayed as part of an antiquarian collection, and could simultaneously preserve the owner from harm.

During the seventeenth century, bezoar given in the form of powders, cordials and tinctures (where substances, often powdered, were added to liquid) became increasingly popular. Whilst tinctures were not a new method, having been used by Europeans since the 1500s, Blaen has argued that the seventeenth century marked an overall shift in medicine towards an increase in the consumption of stones.⁵¹⁶ Apothecaries sold ground bezoar for use in various recipes, and works by medical practitioners are scattered with references to its use as a powder, often taken with other substances. Monardes, for instance, noted that ‘many persones sicke of the Hearte’ had been ‘delivered from death’ by mixing four grains of powdered bezoar with rose or orange water.⁵¹⁷ A seventeenth-century English medical text about ‘choice & famous medicines’ similarly noted that:

Bezoar water is a very great Cordial; it expels from the Heart and Spirits evil Vapours, and Humours, which annoy them. It drives forth Pestilential and Malignant Feavers by Sweat; resists Melancholy, and wonderfully relieves the Spirits being overwhelmed therewith. It is Excellent in Swooning Fits, a spoonful being taken at a time, mixt with Borrage water, and a little Syrup of Gilliflowers: it may be taken otherwise, alone, or in Sack, or in any Cordial water.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ Pierre Pomet, *Histoire générale des drogues, traitant des plantes, des animaux et des minéraux*, (Paris, 1684); (trans. anon.), *A Compleat History of Druggs*, 3rd edition, (London, 1737), 238.

⁵¹⁶ Blaen, *Medical Jewels*, 305.

⁵¹⁷ Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1580), fol. 99.

⁵¹⁸ B. R., *A Brief account of some choice & famous medicines*, (Oxford, 1676). For another example of a recipe for bezoar water, see Wellcome MS1322/7 f.8.



Figure 47 – Deckelschale mit Bezoar im Inneren. Spain, c.1600. 152mm x 180mm x 120mm. Vienna: Kunshistorischesmuseum, Kunstammer, 3764. Source: Kunshistorischesmuseum.

Early modern people thus used the bezoar as a healing object in various different ways. Even when early modern lapidaries began to include bezoars, following their dissemination throughout Europe, these texts still mostly omitted the method by which people should utilise the stones, merely stating which ones they should use for a certain ailment. Some believed the stone to operate sympathetically, while others relied on the bezoar, like other stones and other early modern healing objects, to work when in contact with the body. At the same time that contemporaries debated about best method of using the bezoar, they also disagreed about the source of its power.

Origins of power and debated decline

An antidote and panacea, the bezoar was one of the most medically powerful objects in early modern Europe. Yet its origins, workings and the explanation of its power were contentious issues. As discussed throughout this thesis, in particular in the examination of the popular errors texts in Chapter Two, bent pins in Chapter Three, and ‘witch-bottles’ in Chapter Five, early modern people often disagreed about objects’ sources of power. Contemporary authors mostly attributed the potency of the bezoar stone either to organic and terrestrial design, where an animal ingested certain vegetation and/or was bitten by a poisonous snake, and thereafter formed the antidotal bezoar. Another popular explanation was to attribute the bezoar’s power to celestial forces.⁵¹⁹

The most popular line of interpretation claimed that the bezoar’s remedial potency derived from the diet of its animal host. Eleventh-century Arabic scholar Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni noted in his *Book of Stones* that poisonous snakes and grasses eaten by goats remained in the intestines and petrified, thus creating the bezoar. The poison within the snake accorded the stone with the ability to offset other toxins. This theory was reiterated by early modern European scholars, albeit with certain authors citing different plants and fruits responsible in part for the stones’ creation and medical virtue. In the sixteenth century, Monardes stated that the best bezoars were those taken from beasts fed in the mountains, noting that ‘those bred in the plain groundes’ were ‘not so good’, due to their lack of ‘healthfull herbes.’⁵²⁰ More specifically, a century and a half later, Slare stated that goats bearing bezoars ate the fruit of a type of grass known as ‘Juncus Odoratus’, or ‘Babul in Indostan language.’⁵²¹

A similar subset of belief concerning the bezoars’ organic origins proposed that the stones developed from the tears of deer that had been poisoned by a snake. English cleric Edward Topsell wrote in 1607 that ‘the Hart thus poysoned doeth...sendeth forth certaine teares...The teares of this beast after she [sic] hath

⁵¹⁹ While Fricke has examined the bezoars’ power in detail, this is mainly limited to how the power was used, increased or interpreted, rather than how the bezoar was understood to be powerful. Fricke, ‘Making Marvels’, 342-367.

⁵²⁰ Monardes, *Joyfull Newes*, (1577), fols. 98-9.

⁵²¹ He also notes the stone is taken from the ‘ventricle or stomach’, ‘and is said to be made or created there by the juice of some very cordial vegetable Plant on which the animal feeds.’ Slare, *Experiments and Observations*, ij; 26.

beene hunted with a Serpent, are turned into a stone (called *Belzahard*, or *Bezahar*)...and being thus transubstantiated doe cure all manner of venom'.⁵²² Sixteenth-century Portuguese physician Amatus Lusitanus similarly noted that when a stag killed and ate a snake, its tears coagulated to form bezoars.⁵²³ [See Figure 48]. These authors reference only deer and goats, and neither author explains how or where their contemporaries found the stones.

Others, however, argued that the bezoars' power originated from celestial influence. Thirteenth-century scholastic Bartholomaeus Anglicus (c.1203-72) and sixteenth-century witchcraft author Reginald Scot (c.1538-99) were among those who argued that precious stones had virtuous powers bestowed via the 'heavens and starres' which could affect medicinal change on a person's body'.⁵²⁴ Important in promoting this notion was Italian Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino in his *Three Books on Life* (1489), who argued that the bezoar's power originally derived from Jupiter, defining the word 'bezoar' as 'liberating from death'.⁵²⁵ Ficino argued that bezoars were effective 'not only if they are taken internally but even if they touch the flesh', and that 'warmed thereby, put forth their power, they introduce celestial force into the spirits by which the spirits preserve themselves from plague and poison'.⁵²⁶

⁵²² Edward Topsell, *The historie of foure-footed beastes*, (London, 1607), 132-3.

⁵²³ Maria Do Samieiro Barroso, 'Bezoar Stones, magic, science and art', in C.J. Duffin, R. T. J. Moody, and C. Gardner Thorpe (eds.), *A History of Geology and Medicine*, Geological Society Special Publication No. 375, (London: The Geological Society, 2013), 198.

⁵²⁴ Scot, *Discovery of Witchcraft*, 168; Batman uppon Bartholome [Bartholomaeus Anglicus, ed Stephen Batman], *De Proprietatibus Rerum, Newly Corrected, Enlarged and Amended*, trans. J Trevisa (London, 1582), 172 r and v. Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 266.

⁵²⁵ Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (eds.), *Three books on Life / Marsilio Ficino; a critical edition and translation*, (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies in conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, 1989), 301.

⁵²⁶ Ficino; Kaske & Clark, eds., *Three Books on Life*, 300-1.



Figure 48 – Woodcut detail of venomous serpents and a bezoar-weeping hart from *Hortus sanitatis*, first published Mainz, Germany, 1491. Source: Huntington Library.

The origins of the bezoars' power were therefore debated, but did contemporaries continue to regard them as medically potent throughout the early modern period? Although Blaen has argued that stones were of no use in medicine by the early 1700s, contemporary evidence presents a less immediate and definitive decline in people's belief in the healing power of the bezoar. Blaen states that by the early eighteenth century, stones once believed by some to be invested by celestial influence were now 'firmly part of the natural world, disconnected from any specific heavenly blessings or planetary operations'. Moreover, Blaen argues that by this time, contemporaries had ceased to believe in the medical

power of stones. Aside from their monetary and antiquarian value, he contends, people did not believe such stones to have any inherent virtue ‘that was not contained in their chemical structure, and as such were of no value in medicine’.⁵²⁷

Scholars did debate the provenance and potency of the bezoar, and, like other stones, it was increasingly attacked towards the end of the period.⁵²⁸ Pomet, the French pharmacist, mounted one of the most notable condemnations. Voicing his disapproval at the use of the bezoar in 1684, he noted that: ‘The Use...was formerly very common, but at present we scarce know what it is, by reason of the Iniquity of the Times, and its extravagant Price, or that it grows out of Fashion; for Medicines have their Modes as well as Clothes’.⁵²⁹ Yet regardless of Pomet’s attempt to present the bezoar as an archaic nostrum, this stone held a key place in healing well into the eighteenth-century, and evidence abounds demonstrating its continued use.⁵³⁰ In the 1700s bezoars were still imported, exchanged, collected, and sold for ‘substantial sums’.⁵³¹ Moreover, increasing demand for ‘bezoardiacs’ – compound remedies in which bezoar was a fundamental ingredient – rose to their greatest ever prominence during the second half of the seventeenth-century, and physicians like John Floyer and Robert James were still recommending the curative virtues of bezoardiacs, used with ‘great success’, in 1710 and 1764.⁵³² The popular proprietary medicine ‘Gascons’ or ‘Gascoignes Powder’, a well-know bezoardiac, was lauded by those such as the Countess of Kent Elizabeth Grey in her *Choice manual of rare and select secrets*

⁵²⁷ Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 267.

⁵²⁸ For an example of a lapidary which held the bezoar in high esteem, see Anon, *Here Bygenneth a lytell boke of stones*, (1528), 24.

⁵²⁹ Pomet, *A Compleat History of Druggs*, 236.

⁵³⁰ For instance, the azure stone: ‘whatever may be the credit of this beautiful stone in medicine’. Hill, *A History of the Materia Medica*, 27-9.

⁵³¹ Mary Terrall, ‘Handling Objects in Natural History Collections’, in Adriana Craciun and Simon Schaffer (eds.), *The Material Cultures of Enlightenment Arts and Sciences*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 23.

⁵³² John Floyer, *The Physicians Pulse-watch*, (London, 1710), 182; Robert James, *Pharmacopœia Universalis: Or, a New Universal English Dispensatory*, (London, 1764), 137; Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 253-4. See also Culpeper’s advocacy of ‘Pulvis Bezoardicus Magistratis. Bezooardick Powder’; ‘Surely the College laid all their heads together to invent a Cordial that should be so dear no body should but it...Tis a great Cordial to revive the Body, but it will bring the Purse into a Consumption.’ Culpeper, *Pharmacopœia Londinensis*, 151.

in *physic* of 1653, and it was also listed in the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* of 1679.⁵³³

In fact, one of the most avid contemporary attackers of the bezoar ironically demonstrated its resilience within early modern English healing. Slare, the English physician, was amongst those who used methods of experimentation and observation to try to show that the bezoar was ineffective, and highlight the elements of fraud involved in its trade.⁵³⁴ In his 1715 text *Experiments & Observations upon Oriental and other Bezoar Stones, which prove them to be no use in physic*, Slare concluded that ‘the celebrated Bezoar, a medicine of the first rank, became the subject of my test and scrutiny very early, and I soon found that it did not deserve the great Encomiums which were given it.’⁵³⁵ However, even with work spanning over twenty years on what he termed ‘the inefficiency of this senseless stone’, Slare nevertheless admitted that contemporaries continued to commend and value it as highly as gold well into the eighteenth century: ‘Some...do venture to complain of its having been ineffectual, but the Number of these were too few to contend with the Multitude of Advocates that then supported its Credit, and have maintain’d it to this Day.’⁵³⁶ Also writing in 1715, medical practitioner John Catherwood provided a further line of defence, explaining why the bezoar may have been criticised by some, in spite of its continued use. Much like the justification given by the errors authors in Chapter Two, Catherwood noted that it was not the stone itself that was subject of error, but its incorrect medical employment: ‘I would observe, that the Fault lies not in the Medicines so much as in the unskilful Applications of them; and particularly

⁵³³ Elizabeth Grey, *A choice manual of rare and select secrets in physick and chyrurgery*, (London, 1653), 172-3. In his essay on treatment for gout in 1721, George Cheyne recommended the bezoar (and the Goa stone). See Cheyne, *An essay on the gout: with an account of the nature and qualities of the Bath waters*, (Dublin, 1721), 19. Similarly, John Theobald recommended the ‘bezoar mineral’ for jaundice as late as the 1760s. Theobald, *The young wife's guide, in the management of her children*, (London, 1764), 36; The bezoar stone is cited for use several times within this Dispensatory, and once as being ‘a notable restorer of nature, a great Cordial, no way hurtful nor dangerous’. Nicholas Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis, or, The London Dispensatory*, (London, 1679), 52; 145.

⁵³⁴ For instance, Slare praises a fellow physician from ‘Leyden’ for not blindly leading others, but examining and experimenting with medicine (including the bezoar stone) for himself. He notes that great improvements in medicine are made this way, stating ‘you have opened the eyes of the blind.’ Slare, *Experiments & Observations*, 42-4.

⁵³⁵ Slare, *Experiments & Observations*, ij.

⁵³⁶ Slare, *Experiments & Observations*, vij –viii; v.

I affirm, that I have made use of the Bezoar and Gascoin Powder with admirable Success, and have found it to be the best of Cordials'.⁵³⁷

Evidently there was incongruity between intellectual criticism and lay practice in relation to the bezoar. Why did it remain such a central part of medicine, despite condemnation? Both traditionally educated and reformed physicians used stones, and the fact that they aligned with both traditional and more novel medical practices may have ensured continued belief in their efficacy from the medieval period through the eighteenth century. Indeed, even if people began to use the bezoar in medicine less, it remained desirable as both a medical and an antiquarian object. Slare noted in 1715 not only that 'The Authors that write of [the bezoar], both Ancient and Modern, give extravagant Encomiums of its Vertue, and of its Power to cure Diseases; and the Price it bears at this time in London, being Three Pound and Ten Shillings, the finest Four Pound, equals it with Gold, and shews us what Value we have of it here', but that it was also 'kept for a rarity'.⁵³⁸

Antiquarian curiosity

Indeed, the bezoar stone was not only medically virtuous, it also interested antiquaries who saw it as a wondrous and curious object. Consequently, the bezoar often featured in cabinets of curiosity like Page's. Although uncommon in England at the beginning of the 1600s, cabinets were widespread by the end of the century, and homes or private collections were 'stuffed with queer foreign objects' and 'exotick toys'.⁵³⁹ As trade with new worlds increased, collectors gravitated towards the unfamiliar and bizarre. Some objects became desirable due to their exoticism and scarcity in Europe, while others were valued because they subverted the regular order of the natural world. Whilst some items in cabinets such as unicorn horns and griffin claws came from remarkable creatures, some were gems with marvellous properties like lodestone and ruby, and others were anomalies that were unusual or unfamiliar, like giants' bones. Drugs, spices, jewellery, metalwork, art, plants and fossils could all feature. However diverse

⁵³⁷ John Catherwood, *A new method of curing the apoplexy*, (London, 1715), 69.

⁵³⁸ Slare, *Experiments and Observations*, iij.

⁵³⁹ Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious*, 13.

these items were, their equivalent identity as rare, unusual and highly precious items meant that contemporaries viewed them as valuable commodities to be traded, bought, sold, collected and displayed.⁵⁴⁰ As suggested by Italian physician Fortunio Liceti in 1616, this intervention of wonder in early modern society provoked the circulation of knowledge between different people. Not only did man delight in the sight of objects of curiosity, but he was eager to own and share them.⁵⁴¹

Each item selected for a collection of curiosities was wonderful in itself, and at the same time acted as a microcosm of the arcane knowledge and powerful secrets of the wider world. Steven Lubar has noted the title of a 1665 work by Flemish physician Samuel Quiccheberg, which ‘effusively provides the rationale for the wunderkammer’:⁵⁴²

*Inscriptiones or Titles of the most ample Theater That Houses Exemplary Objects and Exceptional Images of the Entire World, So that One Could Also Rightly Call It a: Repository of artificial and marvelous things, and of every rare treasure, precious object, construction, and picture. It is recommended that these things be brought together here in the theater so that by their frequent viewing and handling one might quickly, easily, and confidently be able to acquire a unique knowledge and admirable understanding of things.*⁵⁴³

Like Page, notable members of seventeenth-century English society participated in this cabinet culture. Member of Parliament Sir Walter Cope (c.1553-1614) gathered curiosities from around the world to put in his cabinet, which his contemporaries frequently visited.⁵⁴⁴ Founding member of the Royal Society John Evelyn (1620-1706), continually refers to his own collections, and those of others which he ‘indefatigably’ visited.⁵⁴⁵ Samuel Pepys’ servant James Paris du Plessis (1666-1735) similarly collected various ‘treasures’ and curiosities in a ‘cabinet’.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁰ Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 67.

⁵⁴¹ Wilson, *Signs and Portents*, 72.

⁵⁴² Lubar, ‘Cabinets of Curiosity’.

⁵⁴³ Samuel Quiccheberg, *Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi*, (1565).

⁵⁴⁴ Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 60.

⁵⁴⁵ Wilson, *Signs and Portents*, 85.

⁵⁴⁶ Wilson, *Signs and Portents*, 90.

Prominent early modern cabinets can still be examined via surviving images. Notable examples include the frontispiece to Danish physician and antiquarian Ole Worm's *Musei Wormiani* (1655); a catalogue based on the comprehensive inventory for his cabinet. [Figure 49]. The depictions of cabinets by Flemish painters Frans Francken the Younger (*Kunst und Raritätenkammer*, 1636) and Domenico Remps (*Cabinet of Curiosities*, c.1689) also provide significant examples. [Figures 50 and 51]. On whatever scale people amassed collections, whether in distinct cabinets, rooms or whole houses, this period marked a change in the culture of collecting, directly affected by overseas trade and new knowledge. As Sean Silver writes, 'the effect was general – a sea-change in how people experienced the world.'⁵⁴⁷

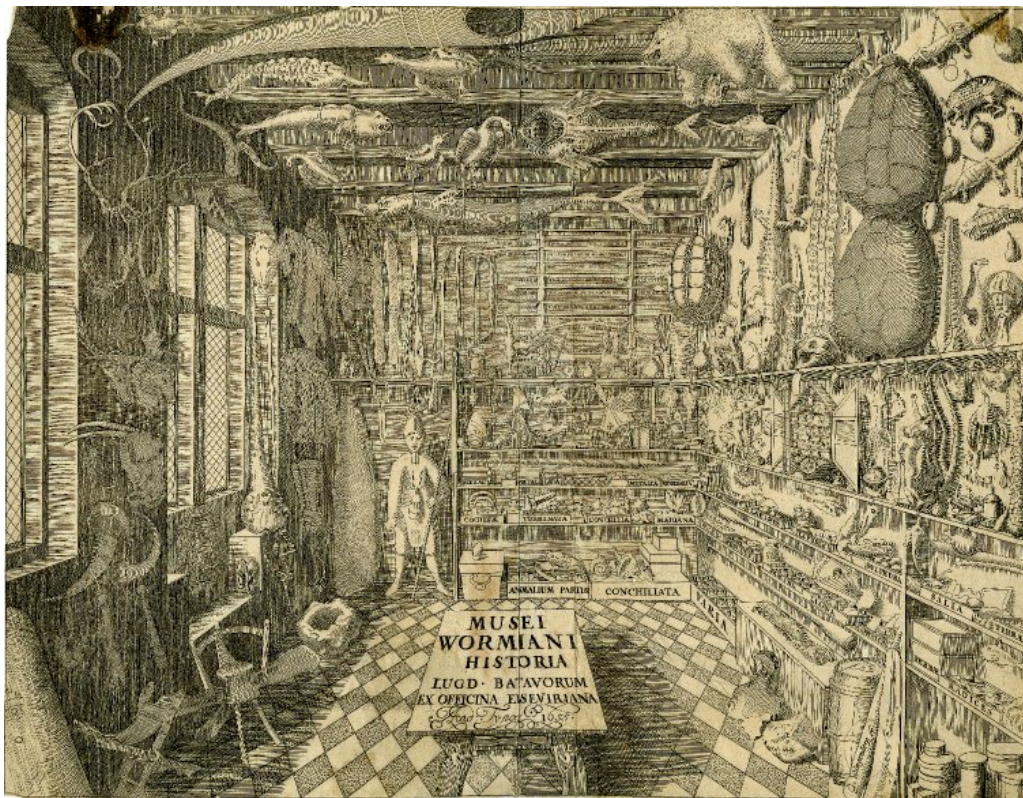


Figure 49 – Frontispiece of Ole Worm, *Musei Wormiani*, 1655. London: British Museum, 1872,0511.1004. Source: British Museum.

⁵⁴⁷ Silver, *The Mind is a Collection*, 5-6.



Figure 50 – Frans Francken the Younger, 'Kunst und Raritätenkammer', 1636. Oil on panel. 86.5 x 120 cm. Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, GG_1048. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 51 – Domenico Remps, 'Cabinet of Curiosities', c.1689. Florence: Opificio delle Pietre Dure. Oil on canvas. 99 cm x 137 cm. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Further testament to the social value of the bezoar was its location within the ranks of stones. Following the medieval lapidary tradition, early modern people categorised stones as more or less ‘precious’, a term used since at least the fourteenth century to denote ‘a stone of a kind prized for its beauty, hardness, or rarity’.⁵⁴⁸ Contemporaries did not always agree which stones were considered most valuable, but diamonds, rubies and sapphires were often ranked among the most precious. Many authors, including English naturalist Robert Lovell (d. 1690), included the bezoar in the category of ‘stones or jewels more pretious’.⁵⁴⁹ Catalogues of royal treasuries grouped bezoars with pearls, diamonds, emeralds and other precious gems.⁵⁵⁰ Indeed, whilst not all lapidaries considered the cost of stones in their classifications, the bezoar was amongst the few precious stones, along with pearl and coral, that could be traded and priced solely by weight or carat.⁵⁵¹

The only references to the bezoar stone in the *Musaeum Regalis Societatis*, the catalogue of the rarities owned by the Royal Society from the late seventeenth century, were indirect. The 1681 catalogue included ‘A Stag’s Tears. A thicken’d Excretion from the inward Angle of his Eye. In colour and consistence almost like to Mirrh; or Ear-wax that has been long harden’d in the Ear.’⁵⁵² As we have seen, some contemporaries understood the bezoar to originate from the tears of a stag, although why the Royal Society did not refer to this as a bezoar is not known. The 1686 edition mentioned only the bezoar’s appearance, in which ‘the colour of Occidental Bezoar’ or ‘Oriental Bezoar’ was used as a frame of reference

⁵⁴⁸ "precious stone, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/266791. Accessed 17 December 2019.

⁵⁴⁹ For a counter example, see William Turner, *A compleat history of the most remarkable providences both of judgment and mercy*, (London, 1697), who added the bezoar into his list of ‘stones less precious’ in his collation of the ‘wonders of nature’. Indeed, bezoars were not uncommon within early modern lapidaries; Anselm Boetius included bezoars in his *Gemmarum et Lapudum Historia*, (History of Gems and Stones), 1609. Lovell also used the categories ‘stones less pretious’ and ‘stones lesse used in Physick’, indicating that such categories of stones were used in contemporaneous medicine. Lovell orders the stones by place, matter and name. The ‘bezoarstone’ is classed as coming from Persia, India & Peru – ‘out of the capricerve’. Robert Lovell, *Panzooryktologia, sive, Panzoologicomineralogia, or, An universal history of minerals*, (Oxford, 1661), 28; 63-103.

⁵⁵⁰ Stephenson, ‘From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry’, 4.

⁵⁵¹ For a thorough list of the lapidaries that do contain such information, see Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 9n.

⁵⁵² Nehemiah Grew, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis. Or a Catalogue & Description of the Natural and Artificial Rarities Belonging to the Royal Society and Preserved and Gresham College*, (London, 1681), 21.

to describe other ‘BALLS found in the Stomachs of divers Beasts’.⁵⁵³ Whilst direct reference to bezoar stone may have been omitted from this prominent collection of rarities, these very references are testament to the knowledge of the objects’ contemporary popularity, suggesting that the stones were renowned enough to omit any more detailed specification of colour. Moreover, they provide evidence of philosophical enquiry into everyday, albeit precious rarities.

A competitive market

The bezoar’s medical virtuosity and antiquarian curiosity is reflected by its enduring monetary worth across the early modern period. As noted by Pomet, the larger the stone, the higher the price; ‘The Rarity of the Bezoar is in the Size; for the small Sorts have not so much Virtue in them as the large’.⁵⁵⁴ Indeed, French gem merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-89) paid 2,000 livres – an amount with which one could purchase 18 kilograms of coin silver – for a bezoar weighing just a few grams.⁵⁵⁵ Tavernier also noted that loose pieces of bezoar (perhaps 5-6 pieces) weighing one ounce would be worth 15-18 francs (where a franc was equal to one livre), but one single piece weighing one ounce would fetch 100 francs.⁵⁵⁶ For Page’s single bezoar alone to weigh two and a half ounces shows its exceptional size, and thus explains its ‘extraordinary magnitude’.⁵⁵⁷ Slare asserted that in England, even as late as the first quarter of the eighteenth-century, bezoars sold for ‘£3 10 shillings’ with ‘the finest £4, equal[ling] it with gold’. His ‘druggist’ friend, Slare noted, sold at least 500 ounces of bezoar a year, with one ounce equivalent to about twelve stones, facts that are testament to the bezoars’ longstanding economic worth.⁵⁵⁸ Borschberg has argued that the most expensive bezoar in this period was the porcupine, a stone which we may remember Page left three pieces of in his will, known to trade for forty times its own weight in gold.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵³ Grew, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis*, (1686 edn.).

⁵⁵⁴ Pomet, *A Compleat History of Druggs*, 235-6.

⁵⁵⁵ North (ed.), *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges*, 36.

⁵⁵⁶ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les Six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier*, (Paris, 1676), 224, 349.

⁵⁵⁷ Slare, *Experiments and Observations*, 33-4.

⁵⁵⁸ Slare, *Experiments & Observations*, ij.

⁵⁵⁹ Borschberg, ‘The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones’, 34.

As bezoars were objects of great monetary value, they were sought and owned by people of societal prominence and often royalty throughout the early modern period. Bezoars were often gifted to people of significance, for instance the ‘Besorte stone’ given as a New Year’s Gift by merchant ‘Dunston Amys’ to Elizabeth I in 1589.⁵⁶⁰ Indeed, Monardes dedicated the aforementioned *Joyfull Newes*, to the Duchess of Béjar, the woman who first introduced him to the stone and its medicinal significance. The Duchess was looking for a cure for her son’s fainting spells, and was told bezoar stones were used at the royal court to treat such illnesses. Monardes, her doctor, located two gold-encased bezoars which successfully eliminated the boy’s fainting. In offering this testimonial at the beginning of his book, Monardes emphasised the medical virtues of the stone, at the same time locating it as an item of high-status custom and expense.⁵⁶¹ Other elite users of the bezoar included King Eric XIV of Sweden (1533-77), Rudolf II (Holy Roman Emperor 1552-1612) who owned as many as 22 bezoar stones, and Ferdinando Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua (1587-1626) who had an entire cabinet filled with them.⁵⁶² For those who could not afford to buy and keep their own stone, but wanted to display one at an important event, it was even possible to rent a bezoar; German physician and collector Michael Bernhard Valentini (1657-1729) discussed how druggists in his country mounted hog stones in gold ‘cages’, leasing them out for one ducat per day.⁵⁶³

As a direct result of its continued desirability as a virtuous and curious object, and its high price, there was a competitive market for bezoars in the early modern period. Rivalry arose between those who traded and exchanged these sought-after stones, and it was not long before the market began to adapt to high demand. As we have seen, bezoars were attributed to several different animals, and two main types of stone prevailed; the East and West, or Oriental and Occidental. Many contemporary disputes centred upon which stone was better according to origin, colour, shape, size and perceived virtues. Oriental bezoars,

⁵⁶⁰ Dunstan Anes, formerly Gonsalvo Anes, *alias* Gonsalvo Jorge; Jewish merchant and purveyor of the Queen’s household. John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*, Volume III: 1579 to 1595, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 498. With thanks to Abigail Gomulkiewicz for this reference.

⁵⁶¹ Stephenson, ‘From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry’, 14.

⁵⁶² Fricke, ‘Making Marvels’, 351.

⁵⁶³ Michael Bernhard Valentini, *Museum museorum*, (Frankfurt, 1704), 34.

like those belonging to Page, were thought to originate from animals residing mostly in Persia and the East Indies. They were the more popular and ubiquitous stone, in part because Europeans discovered them before their Western counterparts. Whilst knowledge of the Oriental bezoar had disseminated throughout Europe from the twelfth century, the discovery of a new Occidental bezoar, found in Peru and Mexico, came in 1580 with the extended version of Monardes' *Joyfull Newes*.⁵⁶⁴ Whilst 'Oriental' bezoars were 'variable and uncertain in size, shape and colour', with the 'most esteemed' colour being olive green or green-brown, the Occidental stones were bigger, more regular in shape, and pale brown or faint grey.⁵⁶⁵ The animal host of the Oriental and Occidental bezoars also appeared to differ, although ambiguity surrounded both.⁵⁶⁶

The contrast between the two types of stone was not merely geographic and aesthetic but also concerned potency, and whether or not Occidental bezoar mirrored the more established medicinal virtues of the Oriental was continually debated for both philosophical and economic reasons. Whereas Culpeper noted that 'the East is best', Dutch-born physician Gideon Harvey (1636/7-1702) contended that 'in my opinion, certain Occidental Bezoar may justly be preferred before the uncertain Oriental.'⁵⁶⁷ Slare dismissed the Occidental stone entirely, stating that 'there are two Sorts, the *Oriental* and *Occidental* BEZOAR; this last is of little Concern, and therefore we shall confine ourselves to the *Oriental* only.'⁵⁶⁸ Whilst contentions continued throughout the period, the Occidental bezoar was generally seen to have less medical virtuosity than the Oriental, and was often given in a higher dose to compensate. Twelfth-century Arabic scholar Ibn Zuhr (known in Europe by his Latin name Avenzoar) stated that medical practitioners prescribed the Oriental bezoar in doses of four to sixteen grains,

⁵⁶⁴ Translated literally as 'Medical history of the products imported from our West Indies'. [Authors own translation]. Hill, *Material Medica*, 850. Stephenson, 'From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry', 15.

⁵⁶⁵ Hill, *Material Medica*, 840-50.

⁵⁶⁶ The origins of the newer, Occidental bezoar reportedly originated from a 'bisulcous' (i.e. bisulcate, with cleft or cloven hoof) quadruped similar to a deer, although another contemporary author noted the beast to be a 'Peruvian sheep', and we may remember that Page's bezoar came from a hog. Hill, *Materia Medica*, 851; Sir John Narbrough, *An account of several late voyages & discoveries*, (London, 1694), 32.

⁵⁶⁷ Culpeper, *Culpeper's school of physick*, 267 Gideon Harvey, *The family-physician, and the house-apothecary*, (London, 1678), 52.

⁵⁶⁸ Slare, *Experiments and Observations*, ij.

whereas they gave the weaker Occidental bezoar in doses of sixteen to thirty grains.⁵⁶⁹ Six hundred years later, English physician John Hill noted the same pattern, contending that the Occidental bezoar was ‘said to possess all the virtues of the Oriental, but in a more remiss degree, and therefore that it requires to be given in a larger dose’.⁵⁷⁰ Bias concerning colonial trade could have also played a factor in which stone was preferred. It was no coincidence, for instance, that Spanish physician Monardes sought to assert the superiority of the newer, Occidental bezoars arriving from Spain’s colonies in Peru, stressing their monetary value, quality and legitimacy.⁵⁷¹

Most contemporaries did not justify this variation in potency and virtuosity, although Hill noted that apothecaries valued the Occidental bezoar less because of its colour. The Oriental stone, Hill stated, possessed a preferable ‘fine yellowish Green colour to Gascoigns powder’, meaning that some people used the Occidental stone only in remedies in which ‘colour is of no consequence’.⁵⁷² Indeed, some determined the value and power of a bezoar not according to geographical provenance, but by appearance alone. Round stones with a high lustre were mostly preferred, and sellers in Asia and Europe polished low-quality or polished stones in an attempt to achieve the desired look.⁵⁷³ Whilst agreement over which type of stone was more virtuous was therefore not unanimous, it is clear that organic, aesthetic and geographical considerations played a part in determining the virtue of the bezoar, and many physicians such as Slare conducted empirical experiments and trials to discover which version was more potent.⁵⁷⁴

The desire of early modern Europeans to capitalize on the immense popularity of the bezoar is further evidenced by the high volume of counterfeits they created. The forgery of stones was not new to this period, as from at least the seventh-century figures like scholar and archbishop Isidore of Seville (560-

⁵⁶⁹ Fricke, ‘Making Marvels’, 348.

⁵⁷⁰ Hill, *Material Medica*, 851.

⁵⁷¹ Stephenson, ‘From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry’, 16. For information about why the VOC traded only infrequently in bezoar stones, see Borschberg, ‘The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones’, 33.

⁵⁷² Hill, *Materia Medica*, 851.

⁵⁷³ Borschberg, ‘The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones’, 36.

⁵⁷⁴ Slare, *Experiments and Observations*.

636AD) had warned of the quality of fakes and those who created them.⁵⁷⁵ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many texts noted not only how to recognise imitations, but also how to manufacture them. Whilst Thomas Nicols' *Faithful Lapidary* (1652) provided 'infallible rules to escape the deceit of all [stones] such as are adulterate and counterfeit', William Heth's lapidary (1603) and Giambattista della Porta's *Natural Magic* (1558) both explained how to counterfeit 'precious stones'.⁵⁷⁶ Books of secrets also contained a multitude of recipes explaining how to manufacture stones. The sixteenth-century *Secretes of Maister Alexis of Piemont*, for instance, detailed how to create 'Emeraudes, or other stones or Ievvels', 'to make a paste or dough for pretious stones', 'to counterfeit a Diamond', 'to make Corall' and 'to counterfeit pearls that shall seeme natural; and true' amongst many other recipes.⁵⁷⁷ Fabrication, however, was particularly prominent with the bezoar. The people native to the 'land of the bezoar' were accused of increasing the size of the stones by adding paste. Primrose noted that 'the Indians doe counterfait them', whilst Monardes even claimed that only one in ten Indian stones was genuine.⁵⁷⁸ Regardless of condemnation, people still produced and bought fake bezoars enough to prompt such diatribes.

Whilst the criticism of fabricated bezoars seems unsurprising, humanmade bezoars were generally not considered to be 'fake' in the modern sense; that is, they were not viewed solely as deceptive items of fraud made by those capitalising on a lucrative market. Artificial bezoars were, in fact, often produced as comparably virtuous alternatives to the originals. Although some people expressed concern at the potential toxicity of fake stones, and even though their power was (like their natural counterparts) not agreed upon, many learned

⁵⁷⁵ I have not been able to find Blaen's reference for Isidore of Seville. Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 231.

⁵⁷⁶ BL, Stowe MS 1071, fos. 96-9; Giambattista Della Porta, *Natural Magic in XX Bookes*, (1589), (London, 1658) 178-89; Nichols, *Faithful Lapidary*, (2nd edn 1653), title page. Also see W.T., *Marrow of Chemical Physick*, 149; Jean Haudicquer de Blancourt, *The Art of Glass Shewing How to Make all Sorts of Glass, Crystal and Enamel*, (London, 1699), esp. 147-202; Anon., *Wits Cabinet or, A Companion for Young Men and Ladies*, (London, 8th edn 1698), 37-40. All from Blaen, *Medical Jewels, Magical Gems*, 231.

⁵⁷⁷ William Ward (trans.), *The Secretes of the reuerend Maister Alexis of Piemont*, (London, 1595), 112-114; 133; 147. Also see Antonius Musa Brasavola, *Exumen Omnium Sumplicium Mediranetorum Quorum in Officinis Asusest* (Lyons, 1537), quoted in Lyn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: Vol V: The Sixteenth Century*, (London, 1941), 455.

⁵⁷⁸ Primrose, *Popular Errours*, 355.

scholars argued that their medical effects were equivalent to real bezoars, and belief in their virtuosity prevailed.⁵⁷⁹



Figure 52 – Goa Stone and Gold Case. India, Goa, late 17th–early 18th century. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.244a–d. Source: Met Museum.

⁵⁷⁹ For an example of one expressing a belief in the real danger posed by fake bezoars, if they were made of toxic substances like quicksilver or cinnabar, see Capsar Bauhin, *De lapidis Bezaari* (Basel, 1625), 142. Francis Bacon for instance argued that since the virtues of a stone were not from the stones themselves but from the ‘comfort’ that the light passing through them gave, fake stones could be held in similar acclaim. Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, Or, A Natural History in Ten Centuries*, (London 1626), 257-8.

The most prominent example was the Goa stone, which was created in response to the increasing difficulty of obtaining authentic bezoars for the European market. This stone was manufactured by Portuguese Jesuits residing in Goa, India, in the seventeenth century, and was made in direct duplication of the bezoar. [Figure 52]. Created from a paste of clay, shell, amber, musk and resin, some contemporaries claimed that the Jesuits added as many ingredients as possible to increase the chances of equaling the bezoars' virtuosity. In England, early modern people believed this stone to be not only medically powerful, but also socially valuable, worth trading, exchanging, collecting and displaying in antiquarian collections, just like the bezoar.⁵⁸⁰ In fact, the Goa shared the bezoar's medical potency, was often cited in cures and recipes, and was even believed to be alexipharmic.⁵⁸¹ In a section entitled 'Forms of Medicines Frequently used by the London Physicians' in 1695, physician John Pechey listed the Goa as a component of a cordial, and when recording ingredients crucial for use against children's fevers noted not only 'both the bezoars' but also 'Goa-stone'.⁵⁸² Harvey, the Dutch-born physician who preferred Occidental over Oriental stones, criticised the widespread use of the Goa in English medicine, and questioned its equivalence with the highly revered bezoar: 'That a Spider, Toad, or Mercury tyed about a mans Neck is a certain defence against the Plague; or that a Bezoar Pepple, the Goa Stone, Pearl, and the like, are infallible curatives of that...are part of the foolish credenda of Physicians'.⁵⁸³ Contemporaries believed the Goa to have equal potency with the bezoar, so while in theory the counterfeit Goa was supposed to be less expensive, its demand rivalled that of the bezoar, thereby increasing its price often to a corresponding level.⁵⁸⁴

Like the bezoar, contemporaries were confused about how they should categorise the Goa. Harvey, also the author of a play entitled *The Conclave of Physicians* (1686) which ridiculed the learning and avaricious practices of the

⁵⁸⁰ For an overview of the Goa stone, see Do Samieiro Barroso, 'Bezoar Stones, magic, science and art', 205-6.

⁵⁸¹ Wexler (ed.), *Toxicology in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 131-2.

⁵⁸² John Pechey, *The store-house of physical practice being a general treatise of the causes and signs of all diseases afflicting human bodies*, (London, 1695), 494; 531.

⁵⁸³ Gideon Harvey, *The art of curing diseases by expectation with remarks on a supposed great case of apoplectick fits*, (London, 1689), 53.

⁵⁸⁴ Duffin, Moody and Gardner (eds.), *A History of Geology and Medicine*, 205-6; 219.

College of Physicians, noted of the Goa: 'The Iesuit is deceitful, he Saves one, and Damns a hundred...if the West-Indies cannot afford us a Remedy, we will for the East, and fetch the Goa-Stone, and though we know not what it is, or what it will do, we have heard wonders of it.'⁵⁸⁵ While early modern lapidaries omitted the Goa, inventories often made no distinction between 'real' and 'fake' bezoars. It was not simply the case that the animal stones (those cut from the stomachs of beasts) were deemed as natural, and humanmade stones (such as the Goa) were considered artificial. The same was not true for all objects that straddled the threshold between natural and artificial; the efficacy of 'potable gold', for example, depended on whether it was discovered in nature or produced alchemically.⁵⁸⁶ Yet bezoars and Goas shared an equal medical power and an equivalent categorisation, whether made by human or animal. As stated by Irish author Nahum Tate in 1700, the Goa, like the bezoar, was 'Nature and Arts choice Gift.'⁵⁸⁷

Contemporary competition over the trade, market and possession of the bezoar emphasised its virtues. The stone's curious provenance and power, coupled with its almost unshakable position as a rare wonder drug, meant that it was enduringly desirable in European markets. As a result, fakes abound and contemporaries created imitations to meet demand and capitalise on the original success of the bezoar. Humanmade stones not only matched the medical potency of the original, but for some, both stones even possessed holy virtues. Letters between traders in Portugal and Goa reveal how they grouped bezoars and Goas within a similar category to sacred objects such as rosaries, reliquaries and agnus dei.⁵⁸⁸ Within this context, we see how early moderns considered both stones to be quasi-relics, situated alongside holy and devotional objects. Evidently, the Jesuits had tried (and succeeded) to mimic the wondrous, even miraculous healing quality of the bezoar, as both stones took their place next to other items that demonstrated the power of God.

⁵⁸⁵ Gideon Harvey, *The conclave of physicians in two parts, detecting their intrigues, frauds, and plots, against their patients, and their destroying the faculty of physick*, (London, 1686), 107.

⁵⁸⁶ Fricke, 'Making Marvels', 354.

⁵⁸⁷ Nahum Tate, *Panacea, a poem upon tea in two canto's* [sic], (London, 1700), 2.

⁵⁸⁸ Fricke, 'Making Marvels-Faking Matter', Stephenson, 'From Marvelous Antidote to the Poison of Idolatry', 23; Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 76.

Conclusion

Sir Thomas Page left two bezoar stones in his will. One was inside a cabinet of curiosities, and the other he bequeathed to a trusted physician. Page's will thus epitomises the ways in which he and his contemporaries understood and valued bezoar stones; for both their antiquarian curiosity, and their medical virtuosity. Revered as powerful medical objects, bezoars were comprehensive antidotes and could protect against and heal a plethora of diseases, explaining the 'extraordinary magnitude' Page noted of his hog bezoar. Furthermore, the bezoar was rare, exotic, and highly coveted by antiquaries. Originating from far-off lands that Europeans had only recently discovered, and from foreign beasts, this stone was considered a wonder that was avidly collected. Throughout the period, the market for bezoars was increasingly competitive, and as it was traded more and more, its value increased. This was exemplified by its rising price, and the fabrication of humanmade fakes such as Goa stones, which ultimately matched the medical potency and monetary value of the original. Some early modern people even believed that both stones possessed holy virtues.

This chapter argues that, in early modern England, the power and value of the bezoar stone depended on the mutually reciprocal relationship between medical virtuosity and antiquarian curiosity, and that in order to understand the bezoar stone, the two concepts cannot be separated. The juxtaposition of the bent pin in the previous chapter and the bezoar stone in this chapter illuminate the different values attributed to, powers assumed of, and material variation between different early modern healing objects. Although both the bent pin and bezoar were medically potent, contemporaries ascribed far more social and monetary value to the rare, arcane and exotic stone. In short, the 'social life' of the bezoar depended on the relationship between its medical virtuosity and antiquarian curiosity.

An examination of the bezoar also illustrates the nuances of contemporary debates around mechanisms of power and disputed provenance. Despite its enduring popularity, it was a complex object, in part because various types existed. A stone could be categorised according to its geographical provenance, which animal it originated from, its size, shape and colour. It straddled the boundaries of categorisation, and contemporaries disagreed about the origins of

its power and the correct method of its use. Moreover, the bezoar faced criticism from those who disagreed with its virtues. Yet, like the objects we have examined so far in this thesis, there was incongruity between intellectual criticism and lay practice, and the bezoar remained a part of healing until the end of the period.

Through an analysis of bezoar stones in early modern England, we better locate these objects not just within contemporary narratives, but also within our own museum collections. Like many other early modern healing objects, researchers and museum cataloguers do not categorise the bezoar consistently. For contemporaries, displaying objects within cabinets revealed secrets, and demonstrated the owner's social power, wealth and worldly knowledge. Just as the objects selected in this period reflected a particular philosophical understanding of the world, the exhibition of objects in museums today reflects a different interpretation. In both situations, the objects displayed act as metonyms; as representations of a world beyond everyday, conventional, geographical, temporal or social reach. During both the seventeenth-century and today, collectors and museums remove objects from their original contexts in order to construct a particular narrative.⁵⁸⁹ The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, for instance, seeks to present the bezoar as part of its 'Cabinet of Curiosities', a permanent collection which explores the 'encyclopedic' identity of the 'Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque periods'. Whilst the display mentions the bezoar's alexipharmic power, and its role as a panacea, this stone is primarily situated as an example of one of the rare, curious and unusual objects that people coveted during the early modern vogue for collection.⁵⁹⁰ The Science Museum, however, categorises the bezoar as an amulet, and as part of the history of medicine.⁵⁹¹ Several historians similarly classify the bezoar as an amulet, worn by

⁵⁸⁹ See Sarah Byrne, Anne Clarke, Rodney Harrison (eds.), *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, (London: Springer, 2011), esp. 61; Haidy Geismar, *Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age*, (London: UCL Press, 2018).

⁵⁹⁰ See catalogue entry for 'bezoar', object number 'Kunstammer, 981': www.khm.at/en/object/8b88f7e11c/ (accessed 31 January 2019).

⁵⁹¹ See for instance object numbers A635027 <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co106409/bezoar-stone-from-a-camel-1601-1800-bezoar-stone>; A635026 <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co106408/spherical-bezoar-stone-from-unknown-animal-1551-1750-bezoar-stone>; A652502 <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co106471/bezoar-stone-from-a-goat-c-1801-1920-bezoar-amulet>.

early modern people on the body for curative or protective benefit.⁵⁹² Other times, researchers and populist literature classify the bezoar as a ‘lucky’ amulet or charm; in 2018, *History Today* for instance referenced the bezoar as a ‘mystical good luck charm’.⁵⁹³ Due to its ambiguous provenance, varied potency and multi-faceted value as both an object of medical virtuosity and antiquarian curiosity, the bezoar is difficult to categorise within modern collections. In contextualising the bezoar stone, museums and researchers mix fake with real.

Like the bezoar stone, and like the amulets presented in the first chapter, the object central to the final chapter of this thesis is complex and cannot be easily classified. The following chapter examines a cure for bewitchment that was used in England and New England towards the end of the early modern period. It analyses both early modern and modern classifications, as well as interrogating the textual evidence alongside the material, in order to situate this object within contemporary contexts of healing.

⁵⁹² See for instance Borschberg, ‘The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones’, 30-1; Stark, ‘Mounted Bezoar Stones, Seychelles Nuts, and Rhinoceros Horns’, 74. See also a Bonhams sale of a bezoar stone holder in 2010, where the stone was described as an ‘amulet’: *Bonhams*, <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/17854/lot/372/?category=list> [accessed 10 December 2018).

⁵⁹³ Evan Andrews, ‘Eight Unusual Good Luck Charms: Symbols, amulets and other talismans from around the globe’, *History Today*, <https://www.history.com/news/eight-unusual-good-luck-charms>. For another reference to the bezoar as lucky, see for instance ‘Bezoar Goat’, *Armenian Geographic*, https://www.armgeo.am/en/bezoar_goat/ [both accessed 2 February 2020].

CHAPTER FIVE

‘Witch-bottles’

Introduction

An early modern stoneware bottle, originally made in Germany, is currently in storage at the Museum of London. [Figure 53]. On its exterior, a bearded mask is printed above a rosette medallion, and inside lie eleven rusty nails and a cloth heart pierced with pins. Many more like it still exist, as these bottles were part of a seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century cure for bewitchment which often involved people concealing them within buildings. This cure followed a variable but mostly standard format, in which urine, from either the afflicted person or an animal, was put in an (often stoneware) vessel, usually with other ingredients that included pins, nails and human hair. This bottled mixture was then boiled and/or buried into the ground, walls or floors. The process would cause significant pain or torment to the witch who had caused the affliction, either forcing them to break the vexatious spell or resulting in their death, thereby curing the bewitched victim. Around 100 bottles similar to this one have been collected by the Museum of London, and by other museums and archives nationwide.⁵⁹⁴

These objects are among the few early modern magico-medical items for which we have both written and physical evidence, making them valuable to the study of contemporary healing. However, researchers have so far attended less to the textual evidence than to the material evidence. This is reflected in the way that they have made the objects the focus of their investigations, rather than the practice in which these objects were involved. Known today as ‘witch-bottles’, the items used in this cure are a well-known but understudied part of early modern English healing.⁵⁹⁵ The reliance on material evidence and the omission of

⁵⁹⁴ Information about bottles pers. comm. Nigel Jeffries, AHRC award no. AH/S002693/1, who noted that: ‘Of the 120 stoneware and glass bottles of the 17th century we have so far recorded, 99 are noted as having contents.’

⁵⁹⁵ See “witch, n.2”, subsection C2, under ‘special combs’: ‘witch bottle *n.* a stone or glass bottle, filled with urine, nails, hair, etc., which was either burned or heated for the purpose of repelling or breaking a witch's power over her victim’. OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229575?redirectedFrom=witch+bottle> [accessed January 15, 2018].

a thorough textual analysis has meant that researchers have often analysed these bottles and the cure in which they were involved in a misleading and inaccurate way.

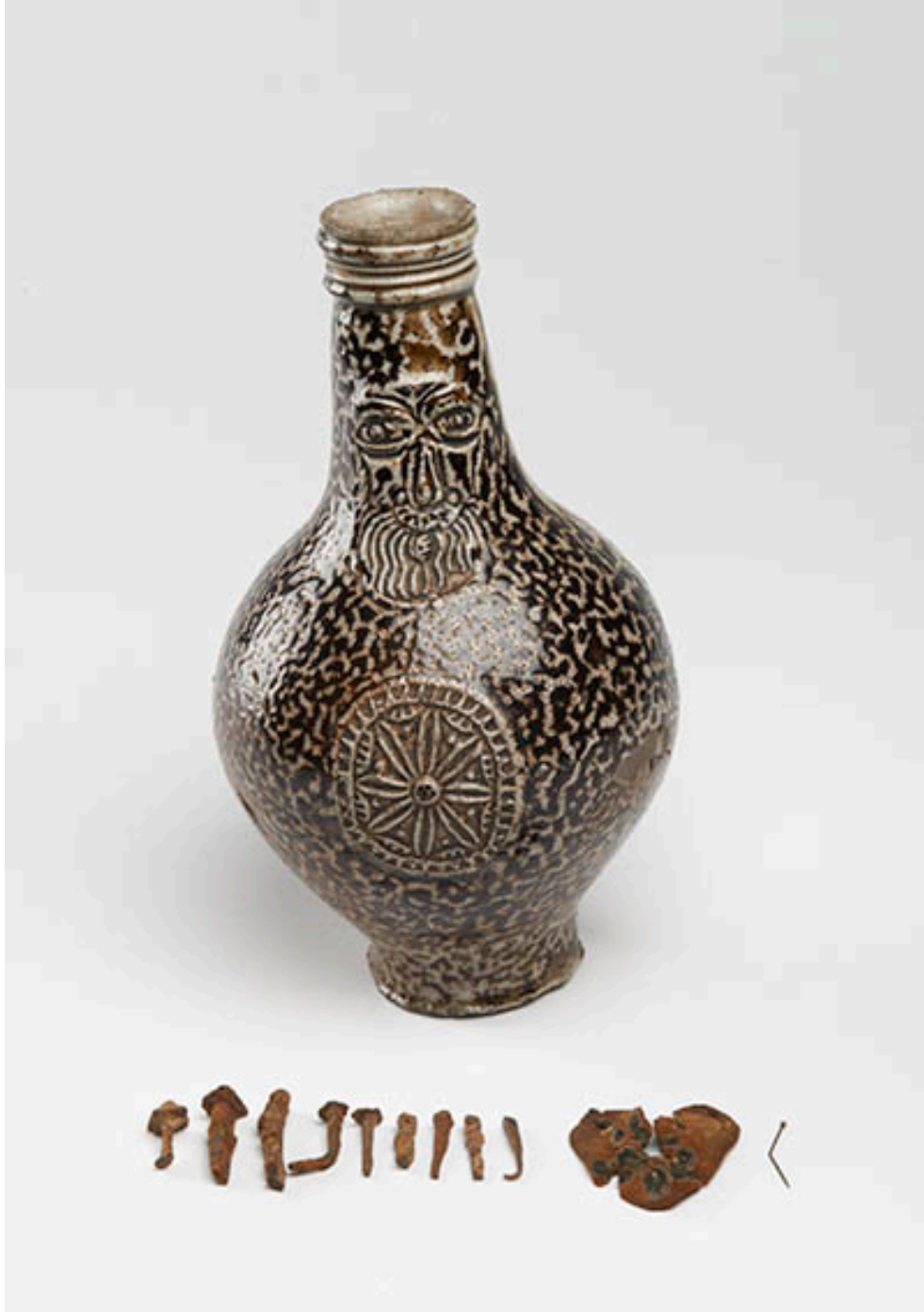


Figure 53 – Bartmann jug. Frechen, Germany, 17th Century c. 1670. London: Museum of London, ID: 18013a. Source: Museum of London.

This chapter asks: what are ‘witch-bottles’, how did the function of these objects change over time, and what is their role in early modern health and illness? In this study, I argue that archaeologists, folklorists and historians have conflated several uses of ‘witch-bottles’, but that when paired with textual evidence from c.1660-1705, these objects have a specific curative purpose. Rather than offering a replacement narrative of ‘witch-bottles’, this chapter addresses issues regarding interpretation and function. I consider vessels that were filled with ingredients, heated and sometimes also buried or built into walls and floors, to cure bewitchment in England and New England. Within these geographical and temporal limitations, the function of these objects is clear. This was not a prophylactic or defensive act, but a remedy for a specific case of witchcraft, in which the spell was reversed and the patient cured.

To begin, this chapter assesses the research on ‘witch-bottles’, examining how previous scholarship has contributed to our current knowledge of these objects, and how this has led to their omission from histories of healing. We will then examine how contemporary authors explained the workings of this cure in medical and scientific contexts. Analysis of primary texts will next show how this remedy was situated within medical and religious politics, and what kind of practitioners or laypeople may have administered it. This chapter is the first to bring together all known surviving textual evidence for this remedy, and in doing so, relocates the ‘witch-bottle’ within the history of early modern healing.

Literature review

Archaeologists, historians, folklorists and independent researchers have all written about ‘witch-bottles’, mostly producing journal and magazine articles concerning a particular find, or discussing these objects as part of histories of witchcraft, ritual and magic.⁵⁹⁶ However, the most well-known research on

⁵⁹⁶ See, for instance, Jason Semmens, ‘The Usage of Witch-Bottles and Apotropaic Charms in Cornwall’, *Old Cornwall* 12:6, 25-30; 25; Bill Angus, ‘The Apotropaic "Witch posts" of Early Modern Yorkshire: A Contextualization’, *Material Religion* 14:1 (2018), 55-82; 12; Eamon P. Kelly, ‘Trapping Witches in Wicklow’, *Archaeology Ireland* 26:3 (Autumn, 2012), 16-18; Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Owen Davies, *Popular Magic*, (London: Hambledon, 2000); Owen Davies and Timothy Easton, ‘Cunning-Folk and the Production of Magical Artefacts’, in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, 209-31.

‘witch-bottles’ is rooted in archaeology and materiality. Ralph Merrifield and Brian Hoggard have offered analyses of these objects as part of the study of archaeology, ritual and magic, presenting valuable surveys of material and geographical evidence.⁵⁹⁷ Yet it is important to note that not all objects classed as ‘witch-bottles’ are the same. The known textual evidence for the cure examined in this chapter situates it between c.1660 and 1705, but variations of this process differing in method, form or function existed both within and outside of this period. Researchers have often agreed that ‘witch-bottles’ existed for several decades and even centuries after the time period analysed in this study, and some attribute an earlier date to ‘witch-bottles’ and their associated practices than known textual evidence demonstrates.⁵⁹⁸ Yet in the absence of comprehensive textual analysis, the dating of ‘witch-bottles’ has often been confused and imprecise, leading to generalisations about their function. Towards the end of this period, for instance, texts refer to the process of bottling then burning urine as solely a revelatory or vexatious practice, whereby the motive was to reveal or kill the witch.⁵⁹⁹ While curing the bewitched victim may have

⁵⁹⁷ Ralph Merrifield, ‘The Use of Bellarmine as Witch Bottles’, *Guildhall Miscellany* No. 3, (February 1954); Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*; 3-15; Ralph Merrifield, ‘Witch Bottles and Magical Jugs’, *Folklore*, 66:1 (March 1955), 195-207; Hoggard, ‘Witch-Bottles: Their contents, contexts and uses’, 91-105; Hoggard, ‘The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic’, 167-186. See also Houlbrook, ‘The Concealed Revealed: the ‘Afterlives’ of Hidden Objects in the Home’, 195-216; Angus, ‘The Apotropaic “Witch posts” of Early Modern Yorkshire’, 12; Kelly, ‘Trapping Witches in Wicklow’, 16-18.

⁵⁹⁸ Hoggard, ‘The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic’, 170.

⁵⁹⁹ One later example, from Bristol in 1762, hereby referred to as the ‘Lamb Inn’ case, is similar to (although, I argue, not identical to), the urinary experiment. Henry Durbin, a contemporary author detailing the Lamb Inn case, referenced the efforts of ‘relieving’ two bewitched children by ‘casting their urine in the fire’, after which one child ‘was well as if nothing had happened’. Another contemporary, William Dyer, noted that this same practice was advised by a cunning woman from ‘Bedminsr’ who had given the girls’ family ‘instructions how to...counteract ye charm’. While similar to the urinary experiment in that this practice involved using the urine of the bewitched person/people in order to cure them and afflict the witch, neither authors mention any vessel (crucial in a discussion of what ‘witch-bottles’ are) or any other ingredients, nor the cure working via sympathy or chymistry, instead stating that the urine was cast into the fire or simply boiled. In the one instance in which Dyer mentions a ‘pipkin’ being used, the practice still differs from the urinary experiment, in that the ‘Bedminsr’ cunning woman advised the family of the bewitched girls to put their urine in a ‘pipkin on a fire, and if, when it boiled, all the colours of the rainbow came out of it visibly, she could cure it, and she would do the rest at home.’ For this reason, I am not including the Lamb Inn case as evidence for early modern use of the urinary experiment as a cure, although it is almost certainly a later variation. For more on the Lamb Inn case, see the testimony of George Eaton c.1762, Staffordshire Record Office, DW/1778/1/ii/812; cited in Jonathan Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England 1640-1789*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 187; Henry Durbin, *A Narrative of Some Extraordinary Things that Happened to Mr. Richard Giles’s Children*, (Bristol, 1800), 54-5 cited in Jonathan Barry (ed.), ‘The Diary of William Dyer: Bristol in 1762’, *Bristol Record Society* Vol.

been an intentional or unintentional facet of practices mentioned in later textual records, its role as a cure was often not explicitly noted, whereas its function as a remedy was central to earlier understandings of the practice.⁶⁰⁰

Inaccuracies concerning the function of ‘witch-bottles’ run alongside other erroneous claims concerning the material record. An article in the *National Trust Magazine* (2007), for instance, categorised a bottle from Dorset amongst ‘the practice of concealing spiritual middens’, stating that this object was ‘possibly one of only four found in Britain with its contents...still inside’, when around

64 (2012), 164 (n.661); Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 19; and, for a recipe to ‘perplex or kill a witch’ also related to the Lamb Inn case, see Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal, 25 November 1752; cited in Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 187. The rest of this note lists other possible variations to the ‘urinary experiment’: For a 1650s cure for bewitchment using many of the same ingredients and processes, see TNA, ASSI 16/21/3, cited in Malcolm Gaskill, ‘The Fear and Loathing of Witches’, in *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, 2018), 131. For the case of Jane Wenham in 1712 (mentioned in Chapter Three) in which urine was bottled and boiled as ‘an infallible Secret of proving’ her a witch, see Physician in Hertfordshire, *A Full Confutation of Witchcraft*, 36; Anon., *The Case of the Hertfordshire Witchcraft Consider’d. Being an Examination of a Book, Entitl’d, A Full and Impartial Account of the Discovery of Sorcery and Witchcraft, Practis’d by JANE WENHAM of Walkern*, (London, 1712), 34; Bragge, *A Full and Impartial Account*, 20. For a discussion of Wenham and this practice in secondary literature, see Phyllis J. Guskin, ‘The Context of Witchcraft: The Case of Jane Wenham (1712)’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15:1 (Autumn, 1981), 48-71. For possible variations in New England, see Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (eds.), *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692. In Three Volumes*, (Da Capo Press: New York, 1977), Vol. I, 308 and Vol. III, 771-3 in which a method was taught to kill a witch by bottling and heating urine in 1692; cited in Norman Gevitz, ‘“The Devil Hath Laughed at the Physicians”: Witchcraft and Medical Practice in Seventeenth-Century New England’, *Jl History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, IV (2000). For examples of hair being burnt, urine thrown on the embers of a fire, and bottled urine locked in a cupboard in New England as ‘counter magic’ between 1680 and 1692, see Richard Godbeer, ‘Magical Experiments – Diving, Healing and Destroying in seventeenth-century New England’, in Richard Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion – Magic and Religion in Early New England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43-46. See C. L.’Estrange Ewen, *Witchhunting and Witch Trials* (London: Kegan Paul, 1929), App. VII, 314-16 for a 1717 experiment for a control test of non-bewitched urine. Barry also speaks generally of these variations in *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 273-4. For a nineteenth-century iron ‘witch-bottle’ used for revelatory purposes, see Davies, *Witchcraft Magic and Culture*, 281. Finally, for an account of a Cornish cunning-man giving a recipe for a bottle filled with urine, salt and nails to be heated for a more generally prophylactic or apotropaic function, see Cornwall Record Office no X268/83, cited in Semmens, ‘The Usage of Witch-Bottles and Apotropaic Charms in Cornwall’, 25-30, which also contains and for other nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cornish examples.

⁶⁰⁰ Jonathan Barry has noted that ‘it is not surprising if [witchcraft pamphlets] emphasise the harming/identifying aspect, as that is the most relevant to the case, and also avoided the possible downside of using a dubious means of cure.’ With thanks to external reader Jonathan Barry for my forthcoming article in *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, who noted that ‘it is not surprising if [witchcraft pamphlets] emphasise the harming/identifying aspect, as that is the most relevant to the case, and also avoided the possible downside of using a dubious means of cure.’

100 extant bottles have been recovered with contents inside.⁶⁰¹ Moreover, while the architectural find-locations of some filled bottles indicate a likely date, it is not possible to precisely line up the material and textual evidence. Bottles that were aesthetically similar or even identical to the bottles used in this cure (known today as ‘Bartmann’ or ‘Bellarmine’ bottles) were used for altogether different functions, and it is vital to acknowledge that the material record does not always reveal which practice extant bottles would have been used for, and thus researchers cannot be certain for which function extant bottles were used.⁶⁰² This is a significant point that has not been acknowledged in most secondary analyses. Secondary studies have often not made explicit reference to the distinct functions of ‘witch-bottles’, the scope for the changing function of these objects’ over time, and/or have not presented the temporal parameters of their research clearly. As a result, many researchers inadvertently present ‘witch-bottles’ as a homogenous group of objects, and make generalisations concerning their use.

Despite an abundant amount of related literature, ‘witch-bottles’ do not generally feature in histories of early modern magic. They are afforded only a few sentences in Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), where they are said to function as part of a revelatory practice and as a ‘counter-charm designed to force [the witch] to reveal herself and call off the spell’, while Stuart Clark does not make reference to these objects in his work.⁶⁰³ Moreover, recent studies often uncritically reiterate the descriptions given by nineteenth-century collectors and folklorists, who said that ‘witch-bottles’ were historically used to ‘prevent the entrance of witches’.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰¹ Sue Herdman, ‘Finders seekers’, *The National Trust Magazine*, (Autumn, 2007), 72. For the extant material records, see the ‘Concealed Revealed’ project on *HistoryPin*, discussed further in a moment. <https://www.historypin.org/en/the-concealed-revealed-witch-bottles/geo/51.451768,-0.113656,3/bounds/3.158868,-40.525491,75.274499,40.298179/paging/1> [Accessed 26 June 2019]; pers. comms. Nigel Jeffries, AHRC award no. AH/S002693/1.

⁶⁰² See, for instance, the case of accused witch Jane Wenham in 1712, in which urine was bottled and boiled as ‘an infallible Secret of proving’ her a witch, see Physician in Hertfordshire, *A Full Confutation of Witchcraft*, 36.

⁶⁰³ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 648-9. Clark, *Thinking With Demons*.

⁶⁰⁴ *Notes & Queries* 4th S. VI. (August 6, 1870), 114. For a discussion of nineteenth century folklorists and their impact, see Annie Thwaite, ‘A history of amulets in ten objects’, *Science Museum Group Journal* 11 (Spring, 2019), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/191103> (accessed 18 July 2019).

However, the most common and problematic inferences are that ‘witch-bottles’ during this time were ‘prophylactic’ or ‘apotropaic’.⁶⁰⁵ As a result of their particular architectural and geographical situation, Merrifield for instance argued that ‘witch-bottles’ were ‘sometimes prophylactic, intended as a safeguard against future attacks, rather than a cure for witchcraft from which the victim was already suffering’.⁶⁰⁶ Hoggard has described the practice as part of a ‘line of defence’ and ‘apotropaic armoury’ of the home, while Jason Semmens refers to the bottles as a ‘protective charm for houses’.⁶⁰⁷ The Museum of London classifies them as objects used to ‘protect against’ witches, and Freya Massey notes their ‘unequivocal association with protection from witchcraft due to several accounts in primary literature’. Finally, Owen Davies and Timothy Easton most recently described these objects and their practice as an ‘apotropaic ritual’.⁶⁰⁸ Certainly, objects were made and used to protect the home in the early modern period. John Aubrey's *Miscellanies* (1696) for instance noted the custom of nailing horse-shoes on the thresholds of doors, ‘which is to hinder the power of Witches that enter into the House.’⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, ‘witch-bottles’ are situated within a broader context of objects concealed within domestic properties, many of which likely functioned defensively.⁶¹⁰ However, during the stated temporal boundaries, no known primary texts describe ‘witch-bottles’ as protective objects; instead, they wholly substantiate that this was a curative practice for a specific affliction of bewitchment.

⁶⁰⁵ Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 183.

⁶⁰⁶ Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 183.

⁶⁰⁷ Hoggard, ‘Witch-Bottles: Their contents, contexts and uses’, 105, 103 and 104 respectively; Semmens, ‘The Usage of Witch-Bottles and Apotropaic Charms in Cornwall’, 25.

⁶⁰⁸ Freya R. Massey, ‘Ritualisation and Reappropriation: Special Deposits and Ritual Activity in Domestic Structures in Early Modern England’, PhD Thesis, Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield (September 2014), 21-6, esp. 21. See also ‘witch bottle’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford University Press, 2019), www.oed.com/view/Entry/229575 (Accessed 15 July 2019); Charles E. Orser Jr, ‘Rethinking ‘Bellarmine’ contexts in 17th-century England’, *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 53:1 (2019), 88-101; 95; Davies and Easton, ‘Cunning-Folk and the Production of Magical Artefacts’, 209-13.

⁶⁰⁹ Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 112. The same practice is discussed in New England in 1666 by Richard Godbeer, ‘The Serpent that Lies in the Grass Unseen - Clerical and Lay Opposition to Magic’, in Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion*, 82.

⁶¹⁰ On concealed animals, see Brian Hoggard, ‘Concealed Animals’, in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, 106-117. For concealed clothes, see the ‘Deliberately Concealed Garments Project’, <https://www.concealedgarments.org/>, [accessed 20 August 2018]. For a comprehensive study of concealed objects, see ‘The Concealed Revealed’ project, <https://theconcealedrevealed.wordpress.com/>, [all accessed 20 August 2018].

The terminology often used to describe ‘witch-bottles’ is also problematic. While Merrifield sometimes refers to the practice as an ‘antidote to witchcraft’, he also references it as a ‘rustic superstition’ or a ‘traditional folk custom’.⁶¹¹ Discussing such complex terminology, Merrifield acknowledges that the term ‘ritual’ is riddled with misinterpretation, derogatory associations, and sensationalism. He defines ‘religion’ and ‘magic’, and notes the pejorative nature of the word ‘superstition’ as a ‘term usually applied to religious or magical practices or beliefs that are no longer approved, and implies disbelief on the user’s part.’⁶¹² Yet having explicated the difficulties of these terms, Merrifield concludes by noting that he will use them throughout his work ‘in the senses indicated here, with the understanding that any prejudice implied is that of the author, who is inevitably a creature of his own time.’⁶¹³

Other secondary authors employ this language uncritically, without even such acknowledgement.⁶¹⁴ In 2017 for instance, the *Fortean Times* published an article entitled ‘Witch Bottles: Uncorking a History of Dark Superstition’.⁶¹⁵ As indicated by Merrifield, superstition and magic (often overlapping, though not identical categories) are often set in direct contrast to science and rationalism in the West today, where superstitious belief signifies belief held without proper scientific grounding, producing no real effects.⁶¹⁶ Yet as we have seen, especially in the Introduction and Chapter Two of this thesis, in the early modern period superstitious actions were not necessarily irrational or inefficacious, but were often believed to harness demonic instead of Godly power.⁶¹⁷ Condemning the ‘witch-bottle’ cure as ‘superstitious’ today therefore has altogether different

⁶¹¹ ‘Antidote to witchcraft’ from Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 163; ‘rustic superstition’ and ‘traditional folk custom’ from Merrifield, ‘Witch Bottles and Magical Jugs’, 195, 200.

⁶¹² Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 6.

⁶¹³ Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 7.

⁶¹⁴ For examples, see Brian Hoggard, Alan Massey and Graham Morgan, ‘A Witch Bottle From Greenwich’, (unpublished, sent to author by Greenwich Foundation 13/11/13), unpaginated, [19]; Lyn Blackmore, ‘The Holywell Witch bottle’, (unpublished, given by Nigel Jeffries from Museum of London research output), unpaginated, [1]; Brian Hoggard, Alan Massey, Patrick Stone and Andrew Wilson, ‘The Felmersham Witch Bottle’, *Bedfordshire County Life* (Summer, 2004), 7-8; Ernest. W. Tilley, ‘A Witch Bottle from Gravesend’, *Archaeologia Cantiana* 80 (1965), 252.

⁶¹⁵ ‘Witch Bottles – Uncorking a History of Dark Superstition’, *Fortean Times*, Issue FT359 (November 2017).

⁶¹⁶ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 3-4.

⁶¹⁷ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 184-5.

connotations than in early modern period. As a result of the uncritical use of language, these objects and their practice have thus been inaccurately understood and so have become sensationalised.

Similarly, researchers often identify ‘witch-bottles’ as a facet of folk culture, without acknowledgement of the complexity of this interpretation.⁶¹⁸ As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, scholars such as Peter Burke have highlighted the implied antithesis between folklore and learned customs in modern Western culture, and Elliott Oring has noted how within academia, the term folklore is even connoted with error.⁶¹⁹ Consequently, when secondary texts describe the ‘witch-bottle’ practice as a facet of ritual, magic or counter-magic ‘endemic in folk customs’, or as a part of ‘folk belief’, we are unlikely to see this practice as also part of academic debate or learned healing, even though extant textual evidence demonstrates the knowledge and use of this remedy across all social strata.⁶²⁰ In the absence of the critical examination of these basic terms and analysis of primary texts, ‘witch-bottles’ are inaccurately represented and sensationalised. For instance, *Bedfordshire County Life* (2004) described the procedure as ‘A reminder of an apparently quaint olde English custom’; whereas *Period House* magazine published a 2003 article entitled ‘Spooky or What?’, stating that:

In the pitch black nights of long ago, it was easy to imagine that the spirits and witches probably lurking in the shadowy corners of one's ill-lit house were responsible for the spells causing illness and bad luck in the family...trying to understand the thinking behind the bizarre anti-witchcraft devices used by people in those days is extremely difficult and this caused one author to comment that using words to explain magic was like trying to cut roast beef with a screwdriver. Quite!⁶²¹

⁶¹⁸ For examples, see Linda Geddes, ‘London’s magical history uncorked from ‘witch bottle’’, *New Scientist* (4 June 2009), <https://institutions.newscientist.com/article/dn17245-londons-magical-history-uncorked-from-witch-bottle/> (accessed 2 July 2019); Gaskill, ‘The Fear and Loathing of Witches’, 131.

⁶¹⁹ Burke, ‘History and Folklore: a historiographical survey’, 133-9; Oring, ‘Anti Anti-Folklore’, 328-338.

⁶²⁰ Gaskill, ‘The Fear and Loathing of Witches’, 131. For ‘folk belief’, see Gevitz, “‘The Devil Hath Laughed at the Physicians’”, 15.

⁶²¹ Hoggard, Massey, Stone and Wilson, ‘The Felmersham Witch Bottle’, 7-8; Alan Massey, ‘Spooky or what?’, *Period House*, (November, 2003), 92-93.

As these articles comprise much of what is written about ‘witch-bottles’, their narratives constitute a large part of our collective knowledge. Moreover, whilst country dwellers, like city dwellers, could have been both rich and poor, educated and uneducated, the existing tendency to characterise the urinary experiment as used by ‘simple uneducated country folk’ implies its absence from urban, educated and medical spheres, both in dissemination and use.⁶²² However, the spread of bottles across both rural and urban environments demonstrates that the users of this cure belonged to diverse social and spatial geographies, and due to the discovery of several bottles from London, it is clear that this cure was used by many early modern urban inhabitants.⁶²³

Not only have scholars identified ‘witch-bottles’ as part of a protective ritual that began in the sixteenth-century (a temporal claim for which known evidence does not exist), but also the term ‘witch-bottle’ is not contemporary, only arising in the nineteenth century.⁶²⁴ The language used to describe these bottles and their associated practice in both academic and non-academic literature perpetuates these misleading interpretations, and has prevented these objects from being fully recognised as the curative items contemporaries believed them to be. In order to understand as fully as possible the situation of this cure in early modern contexts of healing, it is therefore important to begin with terminology. The earliest known reference to the name ‘witch-bottle’ was in 1845, in a catalogue from the Saffron Waldon Museum. This term was not

⁶²² Alan G. Massey & T.H. McK Clough, ‘A Witch Bottle from Exton, Rutland’, *Rutland Record* 35, 209-212.

⁶²³ For instance, see a bottle found in rural Morley, South Norfolk, deposited under the entrance hall of a seventeenth-century timber framed house. Norfolk Heritage Explorer Records (HER), NHER no. 14539, accessed from <http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/> [accessed 03/02/14]. A bottle found at Rouen Road (previously named Ber Street) in the city of Norwich, containing sixty-three iron nails, thirty-eight bronze pins, and human hair appears to have been buried under one of the houses on this street. A map from 1696 illustrates that this bottle was found underneath one of a cluster of dwellings. This urban example from Norfolk is by no means exceptional, with other bottles from cities such as Oxford and Reigate, Surrey, serving to demonstrate the socially and geographically diverse users of this curative practice. Alan Massey, ‘The Reigate Witch Bottle’, *Current Archaeology* 169, 34; Tilley, ‘A Witch Bottle from Gravesend’, 252. Bottles have been found in various locations across the capital from Chiswick, to Westminster, to Lambeth, Fleet Street, Holborn Guildhall, Aldgate and Shoreditch. (bearing in mind the boundaries of the capital have changed since the early modern period). See <https://www.historypin.org/en/the-concealed-revealed-witch-bottles>

⁶²⁴ For reference to this practice as sixteenth-century, see Hoggard, ‘The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic’, 167-186; Semmens, ‘The Usage of Witch-Bottles and Apotropaic Charms in Cornwall’, 25.

defined or explained, perhaps suggesting that it was already in common parlance.⁶²⁵ Whatever the precise provenance, the term ‘witch-bottle’ does not appear in early modern literature.

While describing this practice in 1691, New England minister Cotton Mather referred to the cure as ‘the urinary experiment’.⁶²⁶ Although criticising this form of healing, Mather's choice of vocabulary situates the practice within medical, learned milieu; ‘experiments’ or ‘experimenta’ referring to forms of treatment that had proved effective in practice, but whose rationale could not be deduced from first principles and was therefore not fully understood.⁶²⁷ This study will therefore adopt the contemporary term ‘urinary experiment’ to describe the cure in which these bottles played a crucial part between the middle of the seventeenth- and the start of the eighteenth-centuries. In doing so, this chapter situates these objects and their associated cure within the realm of contemporary healing.

How did the urinary experiment work?

In order to explain how these bottles were used as a part of a cure, we begin with the earliest known written record. Sometime around 1670, a ballad entitled *A miraculous cure for witchcraft, or, Strange news from the Blew-Boar in Holburn* was anonymously printed. [Figure 54]. It told the story of a girl bewitched not far from London, who was ‘vext in Body, and perplex in mind’.⁶²⁸ After trying countless remedies, the girl and her friends finally found a ‘chymist’, well-known for his art and skill. He told them to take the bewitched girl’s urine, put it in a bottle with some other ‘ingredients’, and then bury it in a dung-hill not to be touched or meddled with at all; this would cut the witch’s charms.

⁶²⁵ Anon., *An Abridged catalogue of the Saffron Walden Museum*, (Saffron Walden: Youngman, 1845), 99.

⁶²⁶ On the same page, Mather also makes reference to ‘the Traditional Experiment of Botteling Urine’. Cotton Mather, *Memorable providences relating to witchcrafts and possessions a faithful account of many wonderful and surprising things that have befallen several bewitched and possessed person in New-England*, (Boston in N. England, 1689), 59.

⁶²⁷ Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 57-8; Peter Murray Jones, ‘Amulets: prescriptions and surviving objects from late medieval England’ in Sarah Blick (ed.), *Beyond Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Essays in honour of Brian Spencer*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 92-107; 93.

⁶²⁸ While the exact date of this ballad is uncertain, a date of 1670 has been suggested. Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft, or, Strange news from the Blew-Boar in Holburn*, (1670?), [1/1].

A MIRACULOUS CURE FOR WITCHCRAFT OR

Strange News from the *Blew-Boar* in *Holburn*

To the Tune of, *Aim not too High.*

O F things most strange we every day do hear,
 Yet things more strange than usual do appear,
 As by my storie which I shall relate,
 Ple let you know without the least deceit.

Wizzards and Witches have too well been known
 By hellish arts to trouble many a one:
 Some by sad torments sorely were oppress'd,
 And some to death bewitch'd, this is no Jest.

Not far from *London* as the storie tells,
 A Girl that was bewitch'd, in health now dwells:
 Who while the witch surviv'd, no ease could find
 But vex in Body, and perplex in mind.

Her friends were troubled for to see her so;
 But how to help it they no means did know:
 Nature oblig'd them for this Girl to grieve,
 And try all ways how they might her relieve.

They try'd and try'd, but noway could they find,
 Her torments they increas'd, her strength declin'd,
 Her pains too great, they thought for to endure,
 Yet they poor souls for her could find no cure.

From one unto a nother they were sent,
 Untill at last they to a Chymist went,
 Who was well known to have great art and skill;
 And strove the minds of patients to fulfill.

When they to him their business had made known
 Quoth he, I pray you let me now alone:
 My greatest skill and art I now will show,
 To ease this Girl of this tormenting woe.

This Girls own Urine then he bid them take,
 And with some other things a mix ure make:
 Which being put into a bottle then,
 He order'd them the manner, place, and when.

They should this Bottle in in a Dung-hill put,
 Which he believ'd the witches Charms would cut:
 Thisthing they then were all resolv'd to try,
 Hoping to find some help immediately.

The 27th of *March* they did begin
 To try this fancy at the *Blew-boar-Inn*:
 A place in *Holburn* known exceeding well;
 Near this we may conclude these people dwell.

So coming to this place they straight way went
 To try this thing was wholly their intent:
 And in the Dung-hill there a hole was made,
 The Bottle with the Ingredients in it laid.

This being done, they all'd it up again,
 And by this Dung-hill they did all remain:
 As if no other thing they had to do,
 But to divert the time to work they go.

And their intent was carefully to see
 After this Bottle, that it there might be;
 And not be touch'd or medled with at all;
 This thing admir'd was by great and small.

All night they sat and carefully did watch,
 And in the morning came this wicked witch;
 Who did this Girl bewitch, and presently
 Askt for the Bottle, which they did deny.

Much swell'd then she did appear to be;
 And hellish looks she had undoubtedly:
 This Bottle she was forc'd to go without;
 Her hellish curses then she thunder'd out.

But of her curses they were not afraid;
 Nor nothing seem'd at her to be dismay'd:
 But in short space it was certain laid, (dead)
 And tydings brought them that this Witch was

As soon as this witches life did end,
 The Girl immediatly began to mend:
 And they that question what's interred here,
 To *Holburn* go, the truth you'll find appear.

O GOD preserve us from such wicked Fiends;
 Protect our persons and our nearest friends,
 From Curied witches, and such fiends of Hell;
 Who joy when they in wickedness excell.

F I N I S

Figure 54 – Ballad: Anon, *A miraculous cure for vvitchcraft, or, Strange news from the Blew-Boar in Holburn*, (1670). Source: EEBO

Sure enough, after following these instructions and waiting eagerly by the hill all night, the witch appeared looking ‘swell’d’, and demanding the bottle. The girl and her friends refused this request, the witch left and died, and the bewitched girl immediately began to recover.⁶²⁹ In this ballad, a chymical physician instructed the girl how to make the urinary experiment. While various contemporary authors including elite, educated men wrote about this curative procedure, its existence in ballad form shows how it was also known about by a broad spectrum of society.⁶³⁰

Extant texts help us understand this cure more fully. Thirteen known primary accounts discuss this remedy.⁶³¹ Together, they demonstrate that a variety of people understood the urinary experiment as a treatment for bewitchment, and used it from around the mid-seventeenth-century to at least 1705. Nine are from England and four from New England.⁶³² In addition to the ballad, one text is written by an astrologer-physician, detailing cures for diseases

⁶²⁹ Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft*, [1/1].

⁶³⁰ For more on ballads, see ‘Broadside Ballads Online’, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about>; Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (eds.), *Broadsides and Ballads in Britain, 1500-1800*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

⁶³¹ Both EEBO and ECCO were searched in the process of finding these texts.

⁶³² Material evidence corroborates this; extant bottles in England are prevalent within southern and eastern counties, in particular Norfolk and Suffolk, and London. Scholars have debated the possible explanations for this trend, although there is no definitive explanation for this relative northerly absence or south-easterly bias. As a result, researchers of the urinary experiment have often overlooked the widespread dissemination of this cure. Whilst not all are precisely dated, around a hundred ‘seventeenth-century’ bottles have been found spanning at least twenty-two modern counties. ‘The Concealed Revealed Witch-Bottles’, *HistoryPin*, <https://www.historypin.org/en/the-concealed-revealed-witch-bottles/> (accessed 15 July 2019). Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750*, (London: Penguin, 1996), 119-120. Bottle data pers. comm. Nigel Jeffries, AHRC award no. AH/S002693/1. Whilst the south-eastern trend of the urinary experiment is so far inexplicable, this pattern does suggest the possibility of the practice (or a variant of it) originating in the Rhineland. For more on this, see Dennis Haselgrove, ‘Imported Pottery in the “Book of Rates”: English customs categories in the 16th and 17th centuries’, in David Gaimster and Mark Redknap (eds.), *Everyday and Exotic Pottery from Europe, c. 650-1900*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1992), 326. For the possibility of the practice spreading due to of immigrants fleeing persecution in the Low Countries, see Blackmore, *The Holywell Witch bottle*, [1]. Merrifield, ‘The Use of Bellarmine as Witch Bottles’, 12. Researchers in New England have also identified a material record of glass ‘witch-bottles’ across five different states, although these bottles have been given approximate dates of use between 1740 and 1820. These could be early modern examples, which would indicate a disparity in the type of vessel used for the urinary experiment in England and New England. Or, perhaps the objects found by Becker evidence a later variation to the urinary experiment, indicating a similar change in function over time as in England, where researchers have noted glass or iron bottles were used in later practices. If the latter is true, this material evidence also demonstrates how a form of this practice was disseminated geographically from Massachusetts and New Hampshire to five other different states. Godbeer, ‘Magical Experiments’, 44; Marshall Joseph Becker, ‘An Update on Witch Bottles in Pennsylvania’, *Pennsylvania Archaeologist* 75:2, (2005), 12-23; Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, 218.

including bewitchment. Five are lay or civil accounts of witchcraft, diabolical activity or trials, three of which are anonymous.⁶³³ Another four texts are written by religious men, presenting theological arguments against the use of this cure.⁶³⁴ The final two books, uniform in the detail they provide, are collections of miscellanies; one offering money-saving tips, the other a compendium of information about supernatural phenomena and healing.⁶³⁵ These accounts encompass a variety of authors and topics, evidencing the wide range of contemporary people who knew about this witchcraft cure.

While only one author was a medical practitioner, all known texts discuss the urinary experiment as a form of healing. Recognised as both a sin and a crime, witchcraft also caused physical and mental harm to those afflicted. Medical theories concerning suitable methods of healing varied. The notion that the universe was a network of correspondences was a recognized idea in the contemporary world, promoted avidly by Paracelsus who considered all beings bound together by sympathetic links. Consequently, any action brought about in the virtue or spirit of one would affect the others, a concept initially advanced by Greek philosopher Plato (b.429 BCE), who referred to this as the 'anima mundi'.⁶³⁶ Followers of Paracelsus and other chymical physicians developed a medical theory which emphasised a connection between the microcosm (the

⁶³³ The trial of Jane Kent, June 1682, (t16820601a-11) listed on the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org) is from a text entitled Anon., *A Full and True Account Of The Proceedings at the Sessions of Oyer and Terminer... Which began at the Sessions-House In the Old-Bayly, On Thursday, June 1st. and Ended on Fryday, June 2d. 1682*, (London, 1682) which will hereby be referenced when referring to this version of the case. A different record of Jane Kent's case which will also be used in this study is: Anon., *The True narrative of the proceedings at the session-house in the Old-Bayly, which began on Thursday the 1st of this instant June and ended on Fryday the 2d. following*, (London, 1682). The three other unrelated accounts are: Anon., *An Account of the tryal and examination of Joan Buts, for being a common witch and inchantress*, (London, 1682); Ralph Davis, *An account of the tryals, examination and condemnation, of Elinor Shaw, and Mary Phillip's (two notorious Witches)*, (London, 1705); Chamberlain, *Lithobolia*.

⁶³⁴ Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus, or, a full and plain evidence concerning witches and apparitions*, (London, 1681); Increase Mather, *An essay for the recording of illustrious providences*, (London, 1684); C. Mather, *Memorable Providences*.

⁶³⁵ Thomas Tryon, *The way to save wealth shewing how a man may live plentifully for two-pence a day*, (London, 1695); Aubrey, *Miscellanies*.

⁶³⁶ Plato's dates are debated, but were around 429–347 B.C.E. Richard Kraut, "Plato", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/plato/>. Elizabeth Potter, *Gender and Boyle's Law of Gases*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 93.

human body) and macrocosm (the universe).⁶³⁷ Sympathetic medicines used this connection between body and cosmos and were also referred to as magnetical medicines, because like a magnet, they operated at a distance. These remedies attracted the forces of the cosmos into the human body through chymical ingredients (including mercury or antimony) or human ingredients (for instance mummy or 'mumma', either actual human flesh or the bitumen discharged from preserved bodies).⁶³⁸ So, whereas Galenic physicians understood witchcraft as the Devil as arousing the humours, chymists saw the Devil as infiltrating into and interfering with 'the constitution of the animal spirits'.⁶³⁹

Chymical medicine is key to understanding the urinary experiment. Three different texts explicitly explain how this cure worked, and all three reference it as a form of chymical, magnetical or sympathetical physic. Almost a century after Paracelsus, during its early years, the Royal Society showed considerable interest in magnetical cures, which were advocated by notable physicians and natural philosophers such as John Dee (1537-1608), Robert Fludd (1574-1637) and antiquary, politician and astrologer Elias Ashmole (1617-92).⁶⁴⁰ A contemporary example which fostered great debate was the weapon salve; a remedy which healed a wound by anointing a blood-stained weapon with a sympathetic unguent, commonly made up of ingredients such as mummy and rose oil.⁶⁴¹ The blood that coated the weapon was the 'animating principle'; Fludd noted that when God breathed his spirit into man it was transferred into the blood, and was also present in other parts of the body including flesh and bodily excretions. The ointment applied to the bloodied weapon had a magnetic power, caused by the stars, 'which by the mediation of the ayre, is carried and adjoined to the Wound,

⁶³⁷ Lauren Kassell, 'Magic, Alchemy and the Medical Economy in Early Modern England: The Case of Robert Fludd's Magnetical Medicine', in Jenner and Wallis (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies*, 88-107; 89.

⁶³⁸ Kassell, 'Magic, Alchemy and the Medical Economy in Early Modern England', 95.

⁶³⁹ Thomas Willis, *The remaining medical works of that famous and renowned physician Dr. Thomas Willis*, (London, 1681), 48.

⁶⁴⁰ The terms 'magnetical' and 'sympathetic' were often used interchangeably during this period. Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, (London, 1652), 464; Robert Fludd, *Mosaical Philosophy grounded upon the essentiall truth*, (London, 1659), 289; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 266; Patricia Fara, *Sympathetic Attractions: Magnetic Practices, Beliefs and Symbolism in Eighteenth century England*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 149.

⁶⁴¹ See Sir Kenelm Digby, *A late discourse made in solemne assembly of nobles and learned men...touching the cure of wounds by the powder of sympathy*, trans. R. White, 2nd. edn, (London, 1658), 3; 14.

that so the Spiritual operation thereof may be effected'.⁶⁴² In short, the blood conveyed the virtues of the salve to the patient, no matter how far the distance between the weapon and the wounded body.⁶⁴³ Fludd argued that the weapon-salve was not superstitious or magic, but natural, quoting examples of its efficacy.⁶⁴⁴

In the urinary experiment, it was not the blood, but the urine of the patient that provided the sympathetic link. Within the thirteen known contemporary accounts of this cure, urine is the only consistently required ingredient, and Thomas Tryon's and John Aubrey's texts detail the successful use of the urinary experiment using only urine and a bottle.⁶⁴⁵ In fact, two early modern vessels have survived containing the urine with which they were originally filled; a bottle from Greenwich currently at the Old Royal Naval College, London and a bottle from Reigate, Surrey, purportedly buried 'after 1720'.⁶⁴⁶

Urine had been used magnetically in a similar way to blood from at least the mid-seventeenth century. Describing a cure for jaundice, Fludd described how a patient could make a paste from their urine and other natural ingredients, bury it in a secret place and leave it undisturbed, and this cure would work 'be he further or nearer off from the place of the medicine'.⁶⁴⁷ Towards the end of the century, 'Chymical Physitian in Ordinary to the King' John Archer (fl. 1660-88) described a practice in which women could cure themselves of agues by feeding cakes made with their urine to a dog, naturally transferring the agues from one being to the other 'by the magnetick quality of the diseased urine'.⁶⁴⁸ Sympathetic

⁶⁴² Kassell, 'Magic, Alchemy and the Medical Economy in Early Modern England', 94.

⁶⁴³ Flemish physician Jan Baptist Van Helmont (1580-1644) also concluded that a certain 'magnetic' sympathy existed not between the weapon and the wound, but between the blood of the afflicted body, and the blood left upon the weapon causing the injury. Bruce T. Moran, 'A survey of chemical medicine in the seventeenth century', *Pharmacy in History*, 38:3 (1996), 121-33.

⁶⁴⁴ Fludd, *Mosaicall philosophy*, 244.

⁶⁴⁵ Tryon's manual also contains a section on curing wounds 'by sympathy'. Tryon, *The way to save wealth*, title page; 50; Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 112.

⁶⁴⁶ Chemist Alan Massey undertook chemical analyses to confirm that the liquid inside the Greenwich bottle was 'unequivocally human urine'. Massey and Pitts, 'Urine to navel fluff', 7. For the Greenwich bottle, see Hoggard, Massey and Morgan, 'A Witch Bottle from Greenwich'; Alan Massey and Mike Pitts, 'Urine to navel fluff: the first complete witch bottle', *British Archaeology* 107, (July/August 2007), 7; Hoggard, 'Witch Bottles: Their Contents, Contexts and Use', 94. For the Reigate bottle, see Massey, 'The Reigate Witch-Bottle', 34-6.

⁶⁴⁷ Fludd, *Mosaicall philosophy*, 287.

⁶⁴⁸ John Archer, *Secrets disclosed of consumptions shewing how to distinguish between scurvy and venereal disease*, (London, 1684); title page; 60-1.

medicine had even been used to cure bewitchment before the first known reference to the urinary experiment. In 1665, physician and apothecary William Drage (1636-68) described how to cure bewitchment by punishing the witch, whereby 'Bottles of that Drink that hath been bewitched' were stopped up to make 'the Witch able neither to urine or deject, until they were opened'.⁶⁴⁹

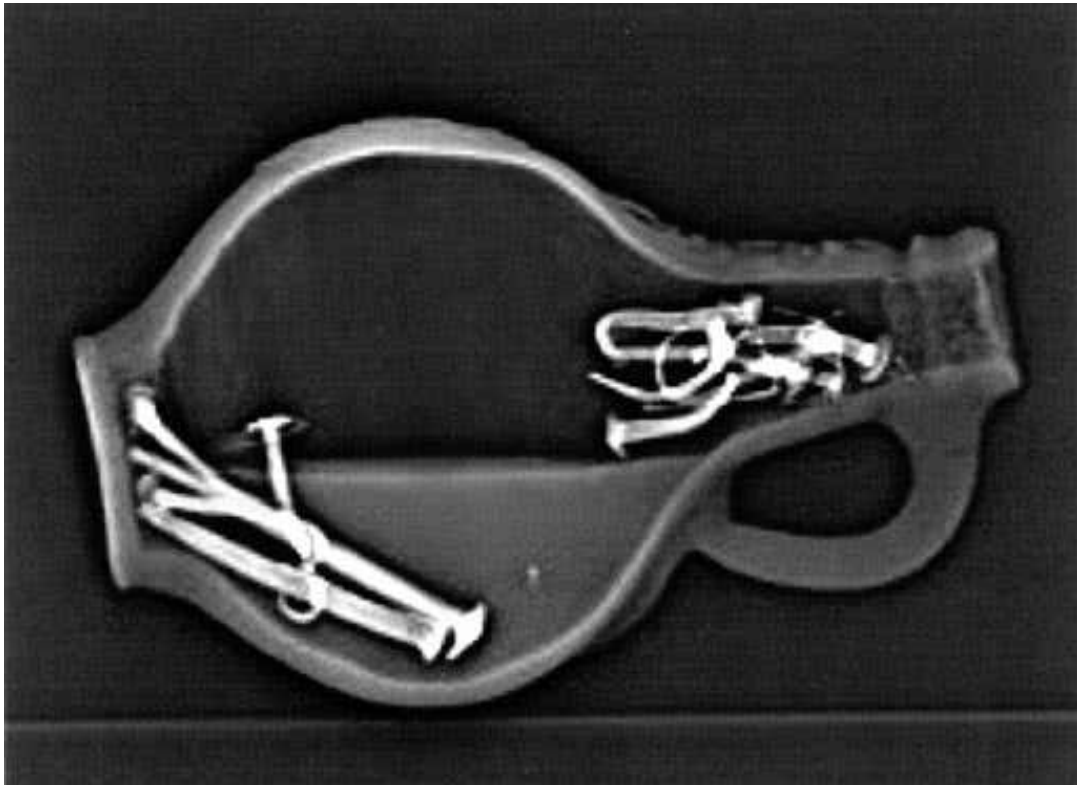


Figure 55 – 'Witch-bottle' filled with urine. Source: Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich; Alan Massey.

Moreover, in 1647 astrologer William Lilly (1602-81) described a cure for witchcraft which, like the urinary experiment, exploited the sympathetic connection between witch and victim via the patient's urine. Two new horse-shoes were to be heated 'red hot', one nailed to the threshold of the door, and the other quenched in the urine of the 'party so Bewitched', then set over the fire

⁶⁴⁹ Drage, *Daimonomageia*, 19-21.

with a little salt and three ‘Horse-nails until its almost consumed’.⁶⁵⁰ What all of this demonstrates is that the urinary experiment had its roots in a form of learned healing that was well-established by the time authors began to write about it as a cure for bewitchment.

Among the first of these authors was Joseph Blagrave. He explained the workings of the urinary experiment in *Astrological Practice of Physick* (1671), a text which offered ‘the true way to cure all kinds of diseases and infirmities’. One of five works attributed to Blagrave, whose knowledge of astronomy and astrology was essential to his practice as a physician, *Astrological Practice* boasted secret cures for ‘all kinds of evils, whether Natural, or such which come from Sorcery or Witchcraft’, including ‘experimental Rules, whereby to afflict the Witch, causing the evil to return back upon them’.⁶⁵¹ The urinary experiment was among these remedies. Blagrave explained how it operated by chymical and astrological means, instructing readers to:

stop the urine of the Patient, close up in a bottle, and put into it three nails, pins, or needles, with a little white Salt, keeping the urine always warm: If you let it remain long in the bottle, it will endanger the witches life: for I have found by experience, that they will be grievously tormented making their water with great difficulty, if any at all, and the more if the Moon be in Scorpio in Square or Opposition to his Significator, when its done.⁶⁵²

Concerning the efficacy of this method, Blagrave noted:

The reason why the Witch is tormented, when the blood or urine of the patient is burned, is because there is part of the vital spirit of the Witch in it, for such is the subtlety of the Devil, that he will not suffer the Witch to infuse any poysonous matter into the body of man or beast, without some of the Witches blood mingled with it.⁶⁵³

A decade later, clergyman, philosopher and fellow of the Royal Society Joseph Glanvill (1636-80) instead referenced the cure as one of the many ‘true’ examples to substantiate his intellectual argument for a belief in witchcraft in *Saducismus*

⁶⁵⁰ William Lilly, *Christian astrology modestly treated of in three books*, (London, 1647), 465-6.

⁶⁵¹ Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, title page; 154-5.

⁶⁵² Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 154.

⁶⁵³ Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 154.

Triumphatus, or, Full and plain evidence concerning witches and apparitions (1681).⁶⁵⁴ Originally written in response to an attack by physician and witchcraft sceptic John Webster (1580-1634), it was philosopher Henry More (1614-87) who edited, appended, and posthumously published *Saducismus*.⁶⁵⁵ While the character of Blagrave and Glanvill's works differ, their content concerning the urinary experiment is congruent. The ingredients and processes required correspond precisely, including urine, the addition of metals, and the application of heat, and Glanvill too situated the workings of the cure by 'marvellous Magical Sympathy' alongside the 'operation of the Weapon-Salve, and other Magnetick Cures'.⁶⁵⁶

Within *Saducismus* is an account of Mr Brearly, a former fellow of Christ's College in Cambridge, who had boarded at a house in Suffolk where his Landlady suffered from bewitchment. Merrifield argued that this event happened 'before 1660', and 'probably during the second quarter' of the seventeenth century, perhaps indicating the earliest recorded use of the urinary experiment, and is why 'c.1660' has been used as the approximate start date for the use of this practice as a cure in this chapter.⁶⁵⁷

Brearly told how an 'Old Man that Travelled up and down the Country' had called at the house and gave the landlady a cure for what he advised was a troublesome 'dead Spright'.⁶⁵⁸ The landlady's husband was told to take 'a Bottle, and put his Wives Urine into it, together with Pins and Needles and Nails, and Cork them up, and set the Bottle to the fire, but be sure the Cork be fast in it, that it fly not out.'⁶⁵⁹ They followed the 'prescription', but despite their best efforts the cork and contents of the bottle exploded, and the landlady remained unwell. The old man returned, and upon learning that the landlady was still 'as

⁶⁵⁴ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 244-5; William E. Burns, 'Glanvill [Glanville], Joseph (1636-1680)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10790>, [accessed 12 June 2019]; Michael Hunter, 'The Royal Society and the Decline of Magic', *Notes & Records of the Royal Society* 65 (2011), 102-119; 106.

⁶⁵⁵ Burns, 'Glanvill', *ODNB* (2008), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10790>, [accessed 12 June 2019].

⁶⁵⁶ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 205-8.

⁶⁵⁷ Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 171.

⁶⁵⁸ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 206.

⁶⁵⁹ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 206.

ill as ever, if not worse', he advised a modification to the remedy: to bottle the urine and other ingredients as before, but to 'bury it in the Earth' instead of heating it.⁶⁶⁰ Soon after doing so, the landlady made a full recovery. The amended recipe had worked. Following her return to health:

there came a Woman from a Town some miles off to their house, with a lamentable Out-cry, that they had killed her Husband. They askt her what she meant and thought her distracted, telling her they knew neither her nor her husband. Yes, saith she, you have killed my husband, he told me so on his Death-bed. But at last they understood by her, that her Husband was a Wizzard, and had bewitched this Mans Wife, and that this Counter-practice prescribed by the Old Man, which saved the Mans Wife from languishment, was the death of that Wizzard that had bewicht her.⁶⁶¹

As with the weapon salve and other sympathetic remedies understood to work at a distance, the urinary experiment provided an effective method whereby a bewitched person could be cured even if they did not know the identity or location of the witch. The patient's urine, containing the vital spirit of the witch, provided the crucial sympathetic link between witch and victim, and a connection was established not only between the filled bottle and the bewitched patient, but also between the bewitched patient and the alleged witch, and could be manipulated at a distance. It is not surprising, then, that the ballad we examined earlier described how the bewitched girl only found a remedy once she had finally consulted a 'chymist'.⁶⁶²

Some contemporaries attacked sympathetic remedies on account of their unnatural function. Critics of the weapon salve, for instance, protested that its powers could not be explained by neither nature nor medicine, but (whether knowingly or not) incited a pact with the Devil. Likewise, those attempting to cure bewitchment occasionally came under attack for being involved in diabolical activity. Essex clergyman George Gifford (1548-1620) for instance saw a witch as 'one that worketh by the Devil, or by some curious art either hurting or

⁶⁶⁰ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 207.

⁶⁶¹ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 207.

⁶⁶² Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft* [1/1].

healing', seeing no difference between the two.⁶⁶³ The urinary experiment was therefore also subject to theological denunciation. To the New England Puritans who adopted a hard-line version of Reformed theology, the correspondence between magic and Catholic ritual was particularly abhorrent.⁶⁶⁴ Father and son Increase Mather (1639–1723) and Cotton Mather (1663–1728), Puritan clergymen in the Massachusetts Bay colonies, both played significant roles in the Salem witch trials. Their descriptions of the urinary experiment were located in tracts in which they vehemently opposed any natural explanations for witchcraft, warning against the use of magic for fear of diabolical involvement. Consequently, Increase condemned the unlawful method of stopping the 'Urin of the sick' in a bottle 'in order to the recovery of health', while Cotton lamented: 'How persons that shall unbewitch others by putting Urin in a bottle...can wholly clear themselves of being white Witches, I am not able to understand...To use a Charm against a Charm or to use a Devils shield against a Devils Sword, Who can with good conscience try?'.⁶⁶⁵

Deodat Lawson (d. 1698), minister of Salem village from 1684–8, held similar beliefs. Following the witch trials in 1692, Lawson began recording courtroom observations and noting his beliefs about witchcraft in various pamphlets and sermons. Like the Mathers, he criticised those who stopped up and boiled urine in order to 'remove the affliction' of bewitchment, arguing that such means were not 'found to have any Natural or Physical virtue'.⁶⁶⁶ The issue that the Mathers and Lawson had with the urinary experiment stemmed from its superstitious nature, and they considered it as using witchcraft to cure witchcraft.⁶⁶⁷ However, while they doubted the theological situation of this practice, they did not doubt its situation as a cure; their descriptions explicitly

⁶⁶³ For a discussion of this, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*. These types of healer often came under attack from 'Anglicans' and other non-conformists such as John Webster, Oliver Heywood and Thomas Ady. Harley, 'Mental Illness, Magical Medicine and the Devil in Northern England', 125–6.

⁶⁶⁴ Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion*, 2. Godbeer has discussed the reasons for the persistence of magic even in mostly Puritan New England in more detail. See Godbeer, 'Magical Experiments', 46–7; 54

⁶⁶⁵ I. Mather, *Illustrious Providences*, 248; 264; 266–7; 269; 279; C. Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 59–60.

⁶⁶⁶ Deodat Lawson, *Christ's fidelity the only shield against Satans malignity*, (London, 1693), 62–4.

⁶⁶⁷ Godbeer, 'The Serpent that Lies in the Grass Unseen', 77.

describing how the urinary experiment attempted to ‘heal diseases’ and ensured the ‘recovery of health’ for persons bewitched.⁶⁶⁸

Who administered the urinary experiment?

It was not just religious men who criticised witchcraft cures like the urinary experiment: medical practitioners also criticized those whom they did not consider able to cure bewitchment legitimately. They offered what seemed like theological justification for their criticisms, but, as we saw in Chapter Two, these justifications ran alongside medical competition. Moreover, a progressively print-dominated world facilitated greater transmission of knowledge, enabling ordinary laymen to more easily seek advice from neighbours, family members or friends.⁶⁶⁹ Although irregular healers and counter-magic were rarely a matter of concern for either church or civil courts, prompting no large-scale punishment, some people condemned cures for bewitchment as dangerous magic.⁶⁷⁰ In fact, any medical practitioner attempting to cure bewitchment could be accused of demonic pursuits or witchcraft.⁶⁷¹ Often this kind of dispute played out between a licensed physician and an irregular practitioner, but Blagrove's text shows how this competition was ubiquitous throughout the medical sphere.

Despite his attempts at arguing for the lawfulness and efficacy of astrological physic, and his aims to align himself within learned circles by appealing to members of the Royal Society like Ashmole, Blagrove would have been considered ‘irregular’ by some traditional, licensed physicians.⁶⁷² Moreover, the 1689 reprint of *Astrological Practice* demonstrates how this text was sold alongside ready-made cures, and thus intimately associated with the culture of secrets, advertising and proprietary medicines.⁶⁷³ Advertised on the final page of Blagrove's text is a ‘secret’ remedy, a ‘most excellent water for the Preservation

⁶⁶⁸ I. Mather, *Illustrious Providences*, 176; 190; 197, 248; 264; 266-7; 269; 279

⁶⁶⁹ On domestic medicine, see Beier, *Sufferers and Healers*; Leong, ‘Making Medicines in the Early Modern Household’, 145-168.

⁶⁷⁰ Harley, ‘Mental Illness, Magical Medicine and the Devil in Northern England’, 125; Godbeer, ‘Magical Experiments’, 28-9.

⁶⁷¹ Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime*. See also Jenner and Wallis (eds.), *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies*; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*.

⁶⁷² Blagrove, *Astrological Practice*, (1672 repr.), unpaginated, [4; 6-8; 13-19].

⁶⁷³ Blagrove, *Astrological Practice*, (1689 repr.), unpaginated, [final 2 pages]. See Leong and Rankin (eds.), *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science*.

of the eyes' sold by his printer. The second chapter of this thesis argued how, throughout the early modern period, enmity grew between licensed physicians who favoured the traditional medical consultation, and empirics who advertised medical services and commodities, providing cheap, quick cures.⁶⁷⁴ Traditional physicians were threatened by movement away from the medical arcana held by elite, licensed doctors, towards increased knowledge, agency and even self-diagnosis for the patient, and attacked the 'empiricks' propagating this form of healing.⁶⁷⁵ Yet despite the condemnation he received, Blagrove also took exception with practitioners such as 'cunning women', whom he considered as healing witchcraft erroneously: 'the curing of such who are bewitched, is not done only by such, who are called white Witches, (as many foolish do imagine) for the white Witch and the black Witch are all one'.⁶⁷⁶ Blagrove's text therefore demonstrates the complexities of early modern healing, and the variety of people who were competing to cure bewitchment.

What else can extant literature tell us about who might have administered this cure? The court proceedings of Jane Kent and Joan Butts, who both stood trial in 1682, reference 'doctors', and while not providing details, further situate this practice firmly within the contemporary medical sphere. Kent was accused of witchcraft by 'Mr Chamblet', after reportedly bewitching his pigs, his daughter Elizabeth, and his wife. Elizabeth 'fell sick and died in a strange manner', and soon after Mr Chamblet's wife became ill in the same way. Two separate narratives of Kent's trial note how Mr Chamblet sought help from a doctor, who provided his wife with a remedy.⁶⁷⁷ One text noted:

Dr. Hains in Spittle-Fields [...] advised [Mr Chamblet] to take a quart of his Wives water, the pairing of her Nails, some of her Hair, and such like, and boyl them, which he did, in a Pipkin, at which time he Swore he heard the Prisoners voice at his door, and that she Screimed out as if she were

⁶⁷⁴ Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*, esp. 119.

⁶⁷⁵ Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England*, 136-154.

⁶⁷⁶ Blagrove, *Astrological Practice*, 153-4.

⁶⁷⁷ For the two identical texts that mention the urinary experiment, see 'Trial of Jane Kent', *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, [accessed 20 August 2018]; Anon, *A Full and True Account of the Proceedings*, 3-4. The third text that describes a 'Doctor in Spittle-Field' and his 'Medecine' is Anon, *The True narrative of the Proceedings*, 3.

Murdered, and that the next day she appeared to be much swelled and bloated⁶⁷⁸

The other account confirms how ‘a Doctor in Spittle-Field [...] advised [Richard Clambleton] to a Medecine that as he said took of the spell and put the Prisoner into such pain that she came howling to his house’.⁶⁷⁹ A few months earlier, Joan Buts had also been put on trial, accused of bewitching Mary Farmer. Farmer’s parents claimed ‘That their Child being taken ill in an extraordinary and violent manner’, and had been advised by their neighbours that Mary was bewitched. The neighbours then:

perswaded them to go to Dr. Bourn, which they did, and Bourn told them, That their Child was under an ill Tongue, and advised them to save the Childs water, and put it into a Bottle, stopping it close, and bury it in the Earth...assuring them, that then the Witch which had done her the hurt, would come in⁶⁸⁰

The trials of Kent and Buts confirm that the urinary experiment was considered a medicine, given by doctors and noteworthy enough to be included in accounts of the accused witches’ court cases. It is possible that some of the ‘doctors’ referenced in this primary literature were licensed physicians, although this has not yet been verified.⁶⁸¹

Other texts suggest alternative possibilities. Glanvill's account describes a type of irregular healer, perhaps also explaining how knowledge of the urinary

⁶⁷⁸ ‘Trial of Jane Kent’, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, [accessed 20 August 2018]; Anon, *A Full and True Account of the Proceedings*, 4.

⁶⁷⁹ Anon, *The True narrative of the proceedings*, 3. [Richard] Clambleton is apparently a varied spelling or interpretation of Chamblet.

⁶⁸⁰ Anon, *An Account of the tryal and examination of Joan Buts*, [2/2].

⁶⁸¹ Regarding these doctors and finding more information about them, Jonathan Barry from the ‘Early Modern Practitioners’ project, noted that ‘The information in the early modern practitioners project does not enable a more precise identification of either Dr Hainks of Spittlefields and Dr Bourne of Ewall in Surrey. A Henry Hanks was created MD Oxford 27 February 1643/4 [...] but nothing more is known of him. There are many more possible Dr Bournes, including Dr John Bourne of London, who was repeatedly prosecuted by the Royal College of Physicians in London in the 1670s and early 1680s for practising without a license and publicising his cures, and was probably a chemical physician, so he would be an ideal candidate in theory. But the Buts case does not indicate that the family in Ewell in Surrey had consulted someone in London and the trial record of the case refers to a Thomas Bourne giving evidence [...] so this seems to rule out John Bourne. There was a Quaker chemical practitioner called Thomas Bourne practising in Bristol at this period (d.1690), but it is unclear how/why he would be consulted by a Surrey family, unless he just happened to be in the area.’ With many thanks to Jonathan Barry for this information. See also: L’Estrange Ewen (ed.), *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*, 262; <http://practitioners.exeter.ac.uk/about/> [accessed 9 July 2019].

experiment could have been disseminated across the country. The landlady seeking treatment in *Saducismus Triumphatus* took advice from an old man who ‘Travelled up and down the Country’.⁶⁸² Certainly, not all irregular healers travelled, and records show many patients travelling far themselves to seek remedies.⁶⁸³ Practitioners who did operate itinerantly were under-represented in official records due to the peripatetic nature of their work, but would have been a type of unlicensed practitioner known variously by contemporary critics as mountebanks, charlatans, empirics or cunning-folk.⁶⁸⁴

In the ballad from the Blew-Boar, the urinary experiment is provided by another type of medical practitioner; a ‘chymist’. While nothing is known of this practitioner, magnetic or sympathetic medicines were not only used by elite, licensed physicians, and many chemical practitioners operated in a popular milieu, evidence of which is shown by a rich vernacular literature.⁶⁸⁵ Bruce Moran has argued that members of the aristocracy and court supported chymical cures given by empirics, and that some advocated chemical cures ‘simply as a means of social or financial advancement’.⁶⁸⁶ Chymical physicians became reputed as more accessible and affordable than their Galenic counterparts, believing that diseases could be cured with such cheap, simple remedies; perhaps explaining the success of the chymist's cure in this ballad.⁶⁸⁷

It is important to remember, however, that it was not only medical practitioners who could have administered this cure. In the case of Buts, it was Farmer's neighbours who told her parents that she was bewitched, and ‘perswaded’ them to visit Dr Bourn who prescribed the urinary experiment.⁶⁸⁸ Two other texts make no mention of the involvement of a practitioner; perhaps reflective of contemporary culture where domestic medicine played a huge part

⁶⁸² Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 109.

⁶⁸³ For more in itinerant practitioners in early modern England, see Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 88n., 100-1, 130, 139, 200-1, 230-1, 247, 334.

⁶⁸⁴ David Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 10.

⁶⁸⁵ For examples, see Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England*, esp. 10-13; Peter Elmer and Ole Peter Grell (eds.), *Health, Disease and Society in Europe, 1500-1800: A Sourcebook*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 111-139.

⁶⁸⁶ Moran, ‘A survey of chemical medicine in the seventeenth century’, 128. Godbeer argues for the parallel between Neoplatonic doctrines and assumptions underlying popular magic. Godbeer, ‘Magical Experiments’, 35.

⁶⁸⁷ Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, 103.

⁶⁸⁸ Anon, *An account of the trial and examination of Joan Buts*, [1/2].

in healing. Detailing the trial of Elinor Shaw and Mary Phillips, contemporary Ralph Davis noted that ‘Mrs Ireland the [bewitched] Boy's Mother, was advised to Cork up some of his water in a stone Bottle, fill'd up of Pins and Needles, and to Bury it under the Fire Hearth’.⁶⁸⁹ Seven years earlier, in 1698, secretary of the colony of New Hampshire Richard Chamberlain chronologically detailed an account of witchcraft upon a man named Mr Walton with whom he was lodging. On August 1, a little while into the ongoing attack, Chamberlain noted:

The same Day in the Morning they tried this Experiment; they did set on the Fire a Pot with Urin, and crooked Pins in it, with design to have it boil, and by that means to give Punishment to the Witch, or Wizard, (that might be the wicked Procurer or Contriver of this Stone Affliction) and take off their own; as they had been advised.

Who ‘they’ might be is not clear, yet Chamberlain references servants, neighbours, employees and friends all involved with the affliction and the attempts at a cure. Healing often took place in the home, and the urinary experiment may have been self-prescribed or recommended by family or friends who were often intimately involved with everyday health and illness.⁶⁹⁰

Indeed, although not recipe books, many of the texts present this remedy in recipe format, indicating that the urinary experiment may have been an important facet of domestic medicine as well as learned healing. As noted in Chapter Two, in this period a recipe comprised a list of ingredients and an accompanying set of instructions, combined for a specific effect, often with defined quantities and lengths of time, and used for various purposes whether domestic, culinary, agricultural, veterinary or medical.⁶⁹¹ Recipe books were made to compile, disseminate and transmit practical household knowledge, including remedies, and were created, disseminated and used by all strata of society.⁶⁹² Despite a large number of recipes increasingly accessible online today,

⁶⁸⁹ Davis, *An account of the tryals*, 5.

⁶⁹⁰ For a discussion of domestic medicine in England, see Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge*.

⁶⁹¹ Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 131; Leong and Pennell, ‘Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge’, 138.

⁶⁹² For more on the role of recipe books in early modern medicine, and examples of recipes' creation and use, see Leong and Pennell, ‘Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge’, 133-152; Leong, ‘Receipt Books c1571-1800’; Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in*

I have not yet found evidence of the urinary experiment within manuscript recipe collections. Blagrave, however, describes this cure amongst other recipes for ‘agues’ and ‘dyet-drinks’, prescribing ingredients in precise amounts (a bottle, three pins), adding specific timings concerning astrological forecasts.⁶⁹³ In Jane Kent’s trial, Dr Hainks advised Mr Chamblet of the correct quantity of ingredients (‘a quart of his wives water’) and the processes necessary for the cure to succeed. Similarly specific instructions were given by Dr Bourn in Joan Buts’ trial, by the chymist in the ballad, and by an unidentified person in the case of Elinor Shaw and Mary Phillips.⁶⁹⁴ Primary literature also demonstrates how this recipe could be modified. The travelling practitioner referenced in *Saducismus* provided Mr Brearley’s landlady with an amended recipe once the original had failed to work; instead of burning the bottled ingredients, they were to be buried, and sure enough, the cure was successful.⁶⁹⁵

A material analysis confirms that some ingredients and processes were essential, and others were variable. As well as urine, a vessel was crucial for the urinary experiment. Whilst none of the known primary texts prescribe the use of a specific container (instead using non-specific language such as ‘bottle’ or ‘pipkin’) there is manifest consensus in the type and design of extant bottles in the early modern version of this cure, unexplained by contemporary literature.

English Medicine, 113-4; Raymond (ed.), *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture*, Volume I, 421.

⁶⁹³ Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 132; Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 86-7; 153.

⁶⁹⁴ Anon., *A Full and True Account of the Proceedings*, 4; Anon, *An Account of the tryal and examination of Joan Buts*, [1/2]; Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft*, [1/1]; Davis, *An account of the tryals*, 5.

⁶⁹⁵ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 206.



Figure 56 – Witch-bottles 1893.81.4 (left) and 1911.29.94 (right). Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum. Source: authors own image.

Predominantly, a Frechen/Rhenish stoneware jug was used in the urinary experiment, an example of which was described in the introduction. Identified interchangeably today as ‘Bartmann’ or ‘Bellarmine’, these bottles are recognised by the bearded face on their exterior. [Figure 56]. By the time they were used in the urinary experiment, they had been imported into England from Germany and the Rhineland for around a hundred years, and English imitations were manufactured from around the mid-seventeenth century at workshops in Woolwich and Fulham.⁶⁹⁶

Both the originals and their replicas were employed for a range purposes, but their primary function was as a common vessel for containing drink, and they could have been owned and used for many years before being appropriated for

⁶⁹⁶ For an overview of Bartmann and Frechen stoneware in this period, see Gaimster, *German Stoneware 1200-1900*. See also Dion Clayton Calthrop, ‘An Old Stoneware Jug known as the Bellarmine, the Long Beard, or the Grey Beard’, in *Connoisseur*, Vol. VII, (Sept-Dec 1903), 207. D.R. Hook, ‘Appendix I – Provenancing Rhenish Stoneware using Neutron Activation Analysis’, in Gaimster, *German Stoneware*, 344-353; 344.

the urinary experiment.⁶⁹⁷ The bottles' material properties meant that they were robust and impermeable, thus ideal for holding urine and other ingredients, and for being heated and buried; two of the actions that could be undertaken with the filled bottle. Moreover, stoneware was a relatively inexpensive option; vessels of pewter and glass offered far less durable possible alternatives for this cure, and may also have mostly been disregarded due to their higher price.

Variable ingredients added to the bottled urine included pins, needles, human hair and nail parings. These objects could accentuate or manipulate the established sympathetic link. Five known primary texts mention the addition of metals, Joseph Blagrove specifically stating that 'three nails, pins or needles' should be added to the mixture, and Cotton Mather indicating their importance as instruments that 'carry a Shew of Torture'.⁶⁹⁸ The material record corroborates the importance of these type of ingredients, as at least 48 surviving bottles contain pins, nails or needles.⁶⁹⁹

One extant bottle demonstrates that pins, nails or needles were sometimes intentionally bent before being added. This bottle, found on the site of the sixteenth-century Plaisterer's Hall in London and now at the Museum of London, was found with several bent brass pins inside.⁷⁰⁰ [Figure 57]. Chamberlain confirms the bending of pins as a specific stage of the urinary experiment. He noted that after his landlord had suffered physical harm several times from a lengthy stone-throwing affliction, the urinary experiment was used and that 'crooked pins' were added to the bottle.⁷⁰¹ Hoggard has argued that pins were bent ritually to 'kill' them, 'activating a ghost pin which would be effective against spiritual enemies coming into contact with the bottle'. He states that this idea 'hinges on the perception of an invisible supernatural or spirit world

⁶⁹⁷ Gaimster, *German Stoneware*, 126. See J. Hagen, 'Rheinische Münzcheatzgefäße aus Mittelalter und Neuzeit', *Bonner Kahrbücher* 142 (1937), 177-82 for more on the Rhineland finds.

⁶⁹⁸ C. Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 59.

⁶⁹⁹ Blagrove, *Astrological Practice*, 153; Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 206; C. Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 59; Chamberlain, *Lithobolia*, 14; and Davis, *An account of the tryals*, [5/8]. Bottle data pers. comm. Nigel Jeffries, AH/S002693/1. See also Hoggard, *Magical House Protection*, 174 onwards.

⁷⁰⁰ Object ID 25437, Museum of London. Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 165-6.

⁷⁰¹ Chamberlain, *Lithobolia*, 14. For more on Chamberlain, see Godbeer, 'Magical Experiments', 44 n.92.

including the dead, magical forces and perhaps divine forces'.⁷⁰² While Hoggard does not reference primary literature, early modern authors unrelated to the urinary experiment did discuss how pins could acquire a curative or vexatious power when being bent.⁷⁰³ When people like Chamberlain's landlord added bent pins their bottles, they may therefore have been drawing upon a powerful contemporary custom.

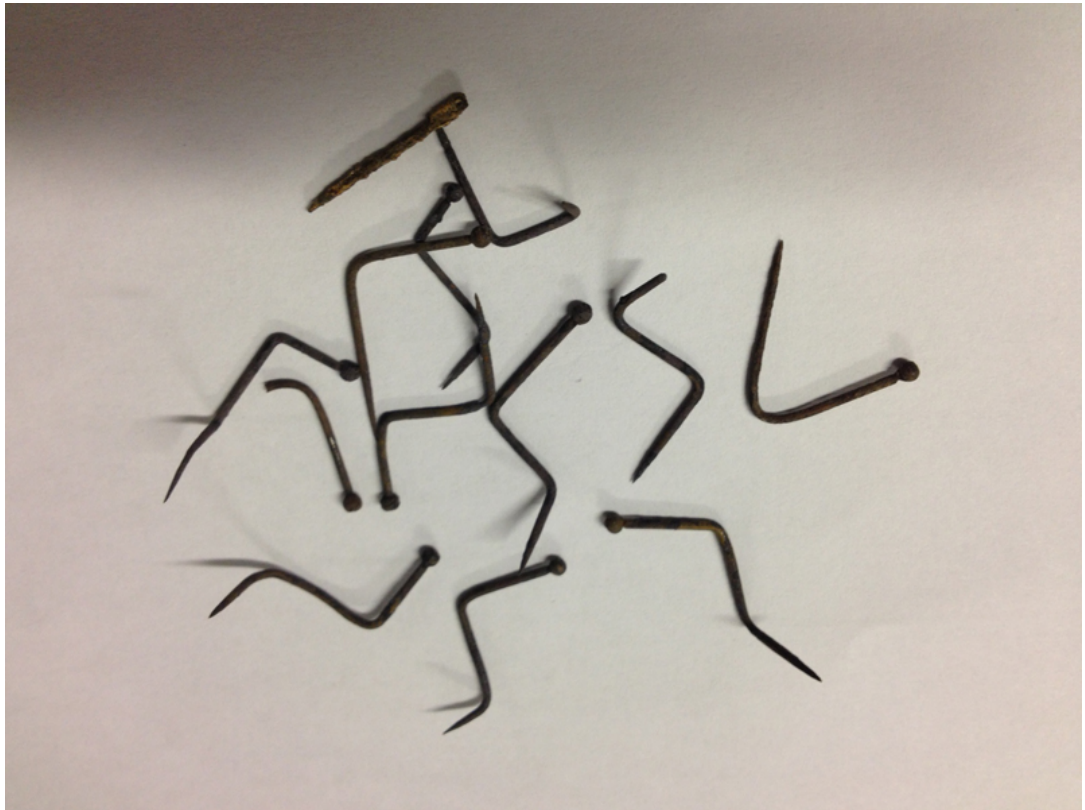


Figure 57 – Bent pins from Museum of London object ID 25437.
Source: Author's own image.

In six extant bottles, pins had been pierced through a heart-shaped piece of cloth. [Figure 58]. Scholars have speculated that this material was probably made from the clothes of the bewitched person, who cut the 'heart' from the

⁷⁰² No references are given for this argument. Hoggard, 'Witch-Bottles: Their contents, contexts and uses', 100.

⁷⁰³ For an example of bent pins as vexatious, see Bragge, *A full and impartial account*, 19. For an example of bent pins as healing objects, see Camden, *Britain*, 143.

fabric of his or her garment as a means of strengthening the sympathetic power.⁷⁰⁴ While this practice is not corroborated within primary literature, three extant texts record human bodily contents other than urine being added to the bottle. In the Old Bailey trial of Jane Kent, the victim's husband, Mr Chamblet, was advised to add his wife's hair, nail pairings 'and such like' to the cure.



Figure 58 – Heart pierced with pins from Pitt Rivers Museum, 1910.18.1 .2.
Source: Author's own image.

⁷⁰⁴ Merrifield discusses this theory in 'The Use of Bellarmine as Witch-Bottles', 6. An example of a bottle containing a cloth heart, pierced with pins, is Object ID 18013a, *Museum of London*. Bottle data pers. comm. Nigel Jeffries, AH/S002693/1.



Figure 59 – Clump of hair and nail clippings from Pitt Rivers Museum 1910.18.1 .3.
Source: Author's own image.

Material evidence of hair and nails added to the urinary experiment still exists today; 22 extant bottles contain hair, and 4 contain both hair and nail clippings, an example of which can be seen in Figure 59 (contents from a bottle currently at the Pitt Rivers Museum).⁷⁰⁵ While contemporary accounts do not explain the addition of these type of ingredients, we know that the urine of the patient, like other parts of the body, contained a ‘vital spirit’ of the witch, so adding more bodily contents might therefore have strengthened the link between witch and victim, and increased the likelihood of the cure working.

Once the bottle had been filled with urine and any other desired ingredients, it could be corked, heated, buried, hidden, and even inverted. The stoppering of the bottle, mentioned by nine of the thirteen known contemporary authors, not only acted as a physical seal but may have also represented a

⁷⁰⁵ ‘Trial of Jane Kent’, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, [accessed 20 August 2018]; Anon, *A Full and True Account of the Proceedings*, 4; Lawson, *Christ’s fidelity*, 64; Pers. Comm. Nigel Jeffries, AH/S002693/1.

symbolic stage in the recipe, sympathetically sealing up the witch.⁷⁰⁶ Four primary texts explain how, following the urinary experiment, the witch was often incapacitated by means of distention or inability to pass water. In the Old Bailey case, Mr Chamblet stated that he found Kent the next day ‘to be much swelled and bloated’ after performing the cure.⁷⁰⁷ Similarly, Tryon and Aubrey revealed that after stopping the horse’s urine ‘with a cork and bound it fast in’, ‘the party suspected to be the witch fell ill, that he could not make water, of which he died’, just as the witch in the ballad from the Blew-Boar appeared ‘much swell’d’.⁷⁰⁸

The heating or burial of the filled bottle was also a key part of the urinary experiment. While this cannot be verified within the material evidence, as the heating of stoneware bottles would normally leave no recognisable archaeological evidence, six primary texts mention filled bottles being set over a fire.⁷⁰⁹ One of the two methods offered by Joseph Glanvill required the bottle to be ‘set to the fire’, and in the case of Kent, the doctor advised Mr Chamblet to ‘boyl’ the bottle and its contents.⁷¹⁰ Blagrave explained that this action harmed the witch; when the ‘urine is burning’, he noted, the witches ‘are tormented.’⁷¹¹ Following this, or instead of burning, bottles were often buried underneath the ground or built into masonry such as hearths or walls.⁷¹² Six primary texts note the burial of the filled bottles as an important part of the urinary experiment; the anecdote in Glanvill’s text for instance demonstrates how the bottle was to be buried ‘in the Earth; and that will do the feat’.⁷¹³ The most common find-location

⁷⁰⁶ Bottling is explicitly mentioned by Blagrave, Glanvill, Aubrey and in the pamphlets concerning the trials of Joan Butts and Elinor Shaw.

⁷⁰⁷ ‘Trial of Jane Kent’, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, [accessed 20 August 2018]; Anon, *A Full and True Account of the Proceedings*, 4.

⁷⁰⁸ Tryon, *The way to save wealth*, 50; Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 112; Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft*, [1/1].

⁷⁰⁹ Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 172.

⁷¹⁰ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 206; ‘Trial of Jane Kent’, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, [accessed 20 August 2018]; Anon, *A Full and True Account of the Proceedings*, 4. Also see Lawson, *Christ’s fidelity the only shield against Satans malignity*, 64; Chamberlain, *Lithobolia*, 14.

⁷¹¹ Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 155. Blagrave further explains this process through another anecdote, involving the vital spirit of the witch was infused into some whey; Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 152.

⁷¹² Hoggard, ‘Witch-Bottles’, 101-2; Nigel Jeffries pers. comm. AHRC award no. AH/S002693/1.

⁷¹³ Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 206. The other texts that reference burial as an important stage of this cure are Anon, *An Account of the tryal and examination of Joan Butts*, [1/2]; Davis, *An account of the tryals*, [5/8]; Tryon, *The way to save wealth*, 50; Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 112; Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft*, [1/1].

for extant bottles is under a hearth, where at least 34 bottles have been unearthed.⁷¹⁴ While it is not clear whether this indicates a pattern of survival or a pattern of placement, the significance of this situation is reflected within contemporary literature. In the trial of Elinor Shaw and Mary Phillips, for instance, the filled bottled was to be buried ‘under the Fire Hearth’, and Blagrave’s recipe instructed its reader to keep ‘the urine always warm’ during the experiment, perhaps providing an explanation for the popularity of this particular location.⁷¹⁵

Evidence of bottles being buried under floors and built into walls exists in both material and textual form, but why might this have been an important stage of the cure? Scholars have examined the patterns of architectural find-locations and speculated about the possible reasons. Brian Hoggard and Timothy Easton have suggested that the popularity of the hearth as a burial site for the urinary experiment is due to its significance as a liminal area, ‘vulnerable opening’, or entry point for ‘bad energies’ into the home.⁷¹⁶ Indeed, similar research has been done on other early modern objects that were hidden within the home, including items like clothes, shoes, animals (especially cats and parts of horses), as well as written marks and charms.⁷¹⁷ Footwear historian June Swann recorded the practice of concealing shoes ‘from at least the sixteenth century to 1966’ under floors and around hearths, and the ‘Deliberately Concealed Garments Project’, led by Dinah Eastop, built upon this work to provide a study of concealed items of clothing and shoes across an unspecified period of time. While encompassing a broader time period than under examination in this chapter, this research is useful in situating the urinary experiment within contexts of ritual deposition,

⁷¹⁴ Pers. comms. Nigel Jeffries, AH/S002693/1.

⁷¹⁵ Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 154; Davis, *An account of the tryals*, 5.

⁷¹⁶ See for example Hoggard, ‘Witch-Bottles’, 103. Timothy Easton, ‘Apotropaic’, In Paul Oliver (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 533-534. Also see Robert Blair StGeorge, *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture*, (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), esp. 135; 174. On ‘malevolent forces’ in relation to ‘witch-bottles’ and liminal areas, see Dinah Eastop, ‘Garments Concealed Within Buildings’, in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, 131-46; 141.

⁷¹⁷ On concealed animals, see Brian Hoggard, ‘Concealed Animals’, in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, 106-117. For concealed clothes, see the ‘Deliberately Concealed Garments Project’, <https://www.concealedgarments.org/>, [accessed 20 August 2018]. For a comprehensive general study of concealed objects, see ‘The Concealed Revealed’ project, <https://theconcealedrevealed.wordpress.com/> a strand of the Inner Lives project <https://innerlives.org> [all accessed 20 August 2018].

and may demonstrate why researchers have ascribed significance to certain architectural burial points in the absence of primary textual explanation.⁷¹⁸ Moreover, scholars have argued that many of the objects buried in similar locations around the time of the urinary experiment were placed as part of a defensive ritual protecting the home and its inhabitants, which may help explain why this cure has also often been labelled as prophylactic or apotropaic.

What some contemporary authors do explicate is that the efficacy of the urinary experiment was enhanced by keeping the ingredients sealed or undisturbed in the bottle for as long as possible.⁷¹⁹ Blagrave's recipe stated that the ingredients should be let to 'remain long in the bottle' and that only then would the remedy 'endanger the witches life'.⁷²⁰ The ballad of the Blew-Boar similarly stated that the bottle should 'not be touch'd or medled with at all'.⁷²¹ Whilst many other contemporary remedies could be applied directly to wounds, or worn on the body, the urinary experiment worked sympathetically. As neither patient nor practitioner would have guaranteed identification of, or access to the offending witch, the decision to secrete the bottle in a concealed space may represent a measure taken to ensure the sympathetic link (providing the operation of this cure) was not manipulated or broken. It is also important to remember that bottles built into walls, fireplaces and floors may indicate an atypical trend. To re-build an object into one's home would require considerable effort and overhaul, entailing a process of great magnitude. Did the placement of bottles in such locations signify the climax of an ongoing problem, in which the patient was desperate enough to undertake such a monumental task? Or was this action undertaken in the course of building a house or property?

At least according to Glanvill, Aubrey, Tryon, and the trials of Shaw, Phillips, and Joan Butts, filled bottles should be buried 'in the Earth', 'under Ground' or 'under the fire hearth' at the time the urinary experiment was carried out

⁷¹⁸ Swann, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', 56.

⁷¹⁹ The texts that require the bottle to be sealed or undisturbed are Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 154; Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 206; Tryon, *The way to save wealth*, 50; Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 112; Anon, *An Account of the tryal and examination of Joan Butts*, [2/2]; Davis, *An account of the tryals, examination and condemnation, of Elinor Shaw, and Mary Phillips*, 5; Blackmore, 'The Holywell Witch bottle', [4].

⁷²⁰ Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 154.

⁷²¹ Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft*, [1/1].

providing proof that for at least five authors, great effort was involved in carrying out this cure for bewitchment.⁷²² Moreover, bottles have occasionally been unearthed in inverted positions. Due to the evidence of bottles also being inverted in New England, it is likely that this act held a symbolic significance rather than being merely coincidental.⁷²³ As we have seen, this cure functioned by harming or killing the witch, as demonstrated by Glanvill referring to this remedy as a ‘counter-practice’, and Blagrave noting that it was an ‘experimental rule whereby to afflict the Witch, causing the evil to return back upon them.’⁷²⁴ The physical inversion of the bottle could therefore have represented or affected the intangible inversion of the cure. Once inverted, the stoneware bottle would also resemble a bladder, with the outlet at the bottom blocked with a cork; symbolism which may be associated with the five texts that mention witches being distended or bloated after the urinary experiment had been carried out.⁷²⁵

By analysing the separate ingredients and processes of this practice, and identifying those that were essential and those that were variable, we better understand the urinary experiment as a curative recipe. While the bottle and the urine were required components, ingredients such as pins and human hair, and processes such as heating and burying were only occasionally used. When examined alongside contemporary accounts, we gain a more accurate understanding of the significance of each stage of this recipe than has previously been afforded by studies which have focused predominantly upon physical evidence, and we are therefore able to situate this practice within contexts of early modern healing.

Conclusion

Thirteen authors wrote about the urinary experiment being used in England and New England between c.1660 and 1705. These texts ranged from clerical and

⁷²² Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 207; Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 112; Tryon, *The way to save wealth*, 50; Davis, *An account of the tryals*, 5.

⁷²³ Merrifield, ‘The Use of Bellarmine as Witch Bottles’, 12; M.J. Becker, ‘An American Witch Bottle’, *Archaeology*, 33:2, (March-April 1980), 19-23.

⁷²⁴ Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 154; Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 109.

⁷²⁵ Anon, *A Full and True Account of the Proceedings*, 4; Anon, *A miraculous cure for witchcraft* [1/1]; Blagrave, *Astrological Practice*, 154; Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 112; Tryon, *The way to save wealth*, 50.

theological tracts, to records of trials and ballads, to household manuals, both domestic and physic. While many of the authors were intimately involved with witchcraft debates, only one, Chamberlain, recorded a first-hand account of bewitchment and use of the urinary experiment. Like us, most of these men did not have direct access to the cure, to explain how and why it was being employed. Aside from astrologer-physician Blagrove, who promulgated his own version of the urinary experiment, the majority of writers based their descriptions and criticisms of the cure on second-hand accounts of its use. An examination of these texts has therefore shown how people explained the urinary experiment as a cure for bewitchment within this time period.

This chapter has been the first to bring together all the known primary accounts of this practice, and has demonstrated several issues of importance. First, the urinary experiment fits within many broader contexts of witchcraft beliefs, ritual, counter-magic and concealed objects. Variations of this cure, similar in material and method, were used around the same time as well as several decades and centuries later. Crucially, however, the curative function is omitted from the descriptions of these alternative practices. Some practices contemporary to the urinary experiment, for instance, manipulated the same sympathetic connection to instead find or kill a witch. Analysis of textual evidence is therefore pivotal in showing how this practice varied, and how it changed over time. Second, urine had been used within magnetic and sympathetic healing, even to cure bewitchment, before the first known record of the urinary experiment. This can help explain the origins of this cure and establish its situation within contemporary medicine.

Third, while only one of the authors was a medical practitioner, this examination has shown what non-medical sources can reveal about contemporary healing practices; how they were explained and criticised, as well as providing anecdotes of their use. Regardless of their roles outside of healing, the framework within which contemporaries described this practice was a medical one. Several of the authors referenced the urinary experiment working via sympathy, and those texts which did not explain the intricacies of the cure's function (and even those that criticised it altogether) nevertheless described it using medical language. Fourth, a diverse range of people could be involved with

curing bewitchment, including licensed physicians and irregular practitioners of various kinds. That this cure was often recorded either as a recipe or in recipe format indicates its function within both medical and domestic spheres. Finally, and most significantly, despite scholarly claims that the urinary experiment had a prophylactic or apotropaic function, close literary analysis reveals that this cure was only used for specific cases of bewitchment.

There remains a space in the scholarship for an extensive analysis of texts alongside a comprehensive, published register of finds, without which, attempts to generalise about this group of objects are impeded. Some scholars have begun the necessary work to create a database of all known material evidence. Firstly, Hoggard published a gazetteer of finds that included ‘witch-bottles’, alongside a chapter dedicated to their analysis, in his 2019 study of *Magical House Protection*.⁷²⁶ He noted that many researchers have compiled their own lists, and acknowledged that he has not attempted to record every find from extant lists or from published papers. Hoggard’s database thus comprises a select list of objects, compiled from anecdotal reports or records submitted to his website. Secondly, although unpublished, Freya Massey compiled empirical data and an analysis on extant ‘witch-bottles’, their architectural find-locations, and their contents in her doctoral thesis on deposits and ritual activity in early modern English domestic structures.⁷²⁷

Finally, Malcolm Gaskill, Sophie Page and Owen Davies, co-ordinators of the ‘Concealed Revealed’ project, a strand of *Inner Lives: Emotions, Identity and the Supernatural, 1300-1900*, created a database on the online public archive *HistoryPin*, providing an empirical map of known ‘witch-bottles’.⁷²⁸ A recently-established branch of this project entitled “‘Witch bottles’ concealed and revealed’ the product of a partnership between Nigel Jeffries (MOLA), Owen Davies and Ceri Houlbrook (University of Hertfordshire), aims to ‘recalibrate understandings’ of mid-late 17th-century ‘witch bottles’, offering a comprehensive

⁷²⁶ Brian Hoggard, *Magical House Protection: The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

⁷²⁷ Massey, ‘Ritualisation and Reappropriation’.

⁷²⁸ *The Concealed Revealed*, <https://theconcealedrevealed.wordpress.com/>; *Inner Lives*, <https://innerlives.org/>; ‘Bottles’, *HistoryPin* <https://www.historypin.org/en/the-concealed-revealed-witch-bottles/geo/51.451768,-0.113656,3/bounds/3.158868,-40.525491,75.274499,40.298179/paging/1> [All accessed 26 June 2019].

synthesis of evidence by bringing together all known bottles from Southern and Eastern England. It aims at providing a database of objects alongside a contextual analysis, and the conveners are currently compiling all known bottles for their project, with 120 ‘seventeenth-century’ stoneware and glass bottles recorded at the time of publication.⁷²⁹

That people did not attempt to explain this practice in the same way before or after this period is interesting, and a project with more comprehensive research capacities could track the evolution of this practice over time and space. Moreover, the discovery of new primary texts, especially manuscript sources, would help reveal more about this cure and associated practice, and facilitate research about how this practice evolved. What this chapter has demonstrated, however, is that within the given temporal and geographical limitations, we should not only recognise the urinary experiment as a facet of ritual, magic and witchcraft, but also as a facet of healing.

⁷²⁹ Nigel Jeffries pers. comms. AHRC award no. AH/S002693/1; ‘Witch bottles’ concealed and revealed’, MOLA, <https://www.mola.org.uk/witch-bottles-concealed-and-revealed> [accessed 26 June 2019]; ‘The Concealed Revealed Witch-Bottles’, *HistoryPin*, <https://www.historypin.org/en/the-concealed-revealed-witch-bottles/> (accessed 15 July 2019). Several ‘witch-bottles’ were exhibited by the *Inner Lives* team in an exhibition called ‘Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft’ at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford from 31 August 2018 – 6 January 2019. Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft’, <https://www.ashmolean.org/spellbound>; ‘Outputs’, <https://innerlives.org/outputs/>, [Both accessed 3 October 2019].

CONCLUSION

This thesis has put objects at the centre of an analysis of magic and the material culture of healing in early modern England. It has argued that an analysis of objects used to cure and protect can contribute fresh information to existing scholarship; not only histories of healing, but also histories of collecting, household medicine, recipes and secrets, ritual and superstition, demonology and witchcraft, curiosity and wonder, and medical politics. Rather than analysing one type of object or one group of objects within a particular context, this study has brought together a wide range of objects which were discussed, prescribed, condemned, and used by people across all social strata. From bent pins to bezoar stones and hare's feet to hag stones, the things analysed in this thesis ranged from natural to humanmade, whether animal, mineral or human; they could be inscribed or stamped, denoting symbols, images, numbers and words; they could be worn suspended from bodies or buildings, or ingested via powders and tinctures. Altogether, they have illuminated the diversity and complexities of early modern English healing objects.

Throughout the five chapters of this thesis, the objects under examination have revealed more about many strands of contemporary healing. They have shown that there is an underused source base of early modern healing objects available for study, in part neglected due to modern categorisation. This was the topic of discussion in Chapter One, which analysed nine amulets. It demonstrated how, through close material and textual examination, early modern objects that we classify today as 'amulets' should be recognised firmly as a part of early modern healing practices. This dual analysis was adopted throughout the thesis, and the final chapter evidenced how this methodology redefined 'witch-bottles' as the 'urinary experiment', and explained the healing virtues of these objects.

An examination of which objects have been collected and which have not, both in the early modern period and today, has been a primary thread of research in this PhD. While the first chapter examined how modern museum classification affects the way we use extant evidence, Chapters Three and Four asked: why were some objects collected by early modern antiquaries, and others were not, in spite of their shared medical power? The bent pin and the bezoar stone presented

contrasting examples, where the bezoar had antiquarian curiosity as well as medical virtuosity. The central role of objects in the relationships between patients and practitioners, and also in inter-practitioner politics, was also a main theme of this thesis. Chapter Two demonstrated the crucial role of objects in the tensions between traditional physicians and empirical practitioners. Objects and proprietary medicines bought and sold could be used in the home, and negated the need for a traditional consultation with a licensed physician. The errors authors also condemned ‘superstitious’ objects and practices. Throughout this thesis, the complexity of objects has been explored, in particular how following the Reformation, too much power could be attributed to and assumed of an object. This situation was theologically dangerous, potentially denoting an implicit or explicit pact with the Devil.

This thesis has revealed the variety of materials, forms, functions and applications of early modern healing objects, as well as the diversity of people who used them across different social and spatial geographies. It has shown how healing objects cured and protected against many different ailments, and has highlighted the importance of acknowledging an objects’ function changing over time; like with the hare’s foot in Chapter One, or the ‘witch-bottle’ in Chapter Five. It has also uncovered the complexity of early modern healing objects; even the seemingly mundane and quotidian, like the bent pins in Chapter Three. In doing so, it has shown that the aim of historians and museums should not be to resolve this complexity, but to draw out of that complexity new avenues of research and discussion, and to revisit established approaches to the history of early modern healing with new methods and approaches of enquiry.

Objects played a central role in early modern healing, as this thesis has shown through five different chapters which each tackled a distinct thread of research. Given the importance of things in everyday healing, their use in historical research can therefore only serve to strengthen research, and offers far more than a solely logocentric study. Sandra Cavallo, Evelyn Welch, Tessa Storey and Sasha Handley were among the first to address the omission in scholarship and shift the focus of the material culture of medicine away from objects that can more immediately be defined as ‘medical’, to instead highlighting the medical

significance of seemingly mundane household objects and practices.⁷³⁰ This thesis has built upon this work to show the many archives of underused things, perhaps categorised in a way that precludes their immediate recognition as healing objects; for instance as amulets, charms, talismans or ‘lucky’ objects. Moreover, where previous scholarship has emphasised certain objects’ roles as facets of magic, ritual and witchcraft, with only brief allusion to their role within cure and protection, this thesis has instead aimed to situate them primarily as healing objects. The research in this PhD is therefore useful for both historians and museums, or for any researchers who wish to know more about either what these objects can tell us about contemporary healing, or what contemporary healing can tell us about these objects.

A great number of objects used for healing which survive in museum collections and archaeological stores could not be included in this thesis. They are a rich, if difficult-to-access source that helps illuminate our understanding of early modern healing, and the work done on just a few objects within the limitations of this thesis could be extended further. While certain silences and omissions in the textual record have often made it difficult to contextualise the healing objects examined throughout these five chapters, documentation only seldom or not used in this thesis, including inventories or manuscript archives, could help more in revealing who owned these objects, and how and why they were employed. Opening up the research to a wider geographical area could also allow for a more thorough examination and comparison of object-based healing practices across the early modern period.

This thesis has offered a wide-ranging analysis of magic and the material culture of healing in early modern England. It has used objects from a range of archives, from over ten different museums and libraries and four online or archaeological archives, across Europe and North America. It consulted an array of textual sources, incorporating printed medical texts, catalogues of popular error, recipe books, wills, ballads and theological tracts. In this dissertation, I argued that healing objects were used in daily life by those from the lowest to the highest strata of society, given by a plethora of medical practitioners, and also

⁷³⁰ Cavallo, ‘Health, Air and Material Culture’, 695; Cavallo and Storey, *Healthy Living in Renaissance Italy*; Handley, *Sleep in early Modern England*.

bought and used in the home. An examination of their creation, exchange, trade, condemnation and use can reveal fresh information about many different facets of early modern medicine. While the denunciation of objects that could cure and protect was motivated by theological concerns and the threat of an expanding medical market, the role of objects remained central in healing throughout the period. This PhD has shown that we cannot fully understand early modern medicine without reference to the objects central to it.



Figure 60 – Eagle-stones, coral and antimonial cup from the Introduction.
Sources: Wellcome Collection, Science Museum and Norfolk Museums Collection.

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