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Concerns for women's health in Graeco-Roman Tebtunis

At least two divinatory texts from Graeco-Roman Tebtunis address concerns about women's health and reproductive health. These texts are the two Women's Astrological Manuals (PSI inv. D 35 + P. Carlsberg 684 & P. Carlsberg 100 + PSI inv. 2183v. + PSI inv. D152) and the Sand Divination manuals (Quack and Ryholt, 2019, 257-62). This talk explores the potential connections and differences between these two texts, while situating them against an array of interventions for infertility known to us via Graeco-Roman textual records, including narratives, fertility petitions, and temple inscriptions. By introducing this assortment of materials, my talk aims to highlight the discrepancies between the ancient Egyptian concept of reproduction and its interventions as preserved in the magico-medical corpus. My preliminary findings indicate that, while the ancient Egyptians believed that both male and female principles were necessary for successful conception and reproduction, the magico-medical corpus from (at least) the Graeco-Roman time is disproportionately concerned with female infertility. The lack of attested prescriptions to enhance male fertility raises the possibility of gendered bias.