

SEXTUPLETS AND HIGHER MULTIPAROUS BIRTHS  
A critical review of history and legend from Aristoteles to the 20th century

by

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PART II: SEPTUPLETS AND HIGHER BIRTHS

II. Septuplets

The mathematical frequency of a delivery of seven children at one birth is 1:80<sup>6</sup>, or one such delivery in every 26,214.400,000 according to Hellin's rule<sup>89</sup> (N. B. The frequency of sextuplets in the first part of this paper was stated to be 1:80<sup>5</sup>, or one in every 3,276.800,000). There are very few modern authors who know of cases of septuplets. Lotze, in his critical study of twinning, was able to recall one such case only,<sup>90</sup> the Römer family in Hameln.<sup>91</sup> I was able to collect 28 separate legendary or historical instances of human septuplets, and 4 cases among animal births.

a) *Human births*

26 *First century A. D.* It is the Roman historian Trogus Pompejus whom Pliny accepts as an authority that septuplet births occur in Egypt.<sup>92</sup>

Later authors relied upon this statement, and commonly referred to the high fertility and high multiparity of Egyptian women on the authority of Trogus and Pliny.<sup>93</sup> There are a few recent authors who stated that the septuplicity of Egyptian women was an Aristotelian tradition.<sup>94</sup> I was unable, however, to find any

<sup>89</sup> HELLIN D., *Die Ursachen der Multiparität der uniparen Tiere*. Münch., 1895.

<sup>90</sup> LOTZE R., *Zwillinge* (Oehringen, 1937) (Forms v. 6, Neue Folge, of Monogr. Schr. Deut. Naturkde, 1937). – On p. 24: "Sechslinge sind nur in ganz wenigen Fällen, Siebenlinge überhaupt erst einmal (Hameln 1600) beobachtet worden". The same case of septuplets is referred to on p. 76, with addition: "... Sonst ist kein Fall von Sieblingen bekannt". – For this case see No. 40 among the following septuplet cases.

<sup>91</sup> For further description of this case see No. 40 below.

<sup>92</sup> PLINIUS, *Historiae naturalis libri xxxvii* (5v.; Lpz., Tauchnitz, 1830), v. 2, p. 9 (Lib. 7, Chap. 3): "...Et in Aegypto septenos uno utero simul gigni auctor est Trogus." I could not find this passage in the work of Trogus or in the Epitome made by Justinus.

<sup>93</sup> Thus, e. g., SCHENCK J., *Observ. med. libri 7* (Frankf., 1609), on p. 642 &c.

<sup>94</sup> SCHLIEBEN E., *Mehrlingsgeburten in Sage und Geschichte*. Zschr. ärztl. Fortbild., 1936, 33: 233; 263.

such reference in the books of the *History of Animals*. Schlieben<sup>95</sup> mentions that Trogus called Egypt 'septiferum' (: seven-bearing) because of the frequency of septuplet births, but the German author himself points to the Egyptian history which has no record of septuplet births.

**27 First century A. D.** It was Strabo (64-63 B. C. – 25 A. D.), the geographer, who in the matter of fertility in Egypt accepted also the authority of a misquoted Aristoteles.<sup>96</sup> According to this author, there was once an Egyptian woman who had seven children at once. Osiander, jun., pointed out, however, that Strabo was in error because at other places of the *History of Animals* the maximum number of children in one uterus was put at five by Aristoteles.<sup>97</sup>

**28 ca 396 A. D.** A legendary septuplet birth is related in the earliest history of the Longbards, in the time of Agelmundus, the first king of the Longbards. There are several versions of the legend, and the mother of the septuplets is sometimes said to be a prostitute, sometimes the queen-mother herself. The year of the event also vacillates between 369 A. D. and 396 A. D. The earliest references to the legend are contained in Sigebert's *Chronica* and in the work of Paulus Diaconus, also called Warnefredus, historian of the Longobards (740-801).<sup>98</sup>

Retold in simple words the legend takes the following form. During the reign of Algemond, first King of the Longobards, a prostitute gave birth to seven children at once. In order to hide her shame she threw all seven into a fishpool. When the king passed by soon afterwards, he stirred the indistinct mass of children with his lance, and when the lance was withdrawn one of the children held it fast. This child was thereafter adopted by the king, reared by him under the name of Lamisius (or Lanytius), and he became the heir of the Longobard kingdom.<sup>99</sup> By such an ending of the legend the prostitute became, of course, the queen-mother.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>96</sup> STRABO, *Geographia* (Falconer ed., pp. 989-90): "Narrat Aristoteles quandam septem geminos peperisse".

<sup>97</sup> OSIANDER J. F., jun., *Handb. d. Entbindungskunst. 2. Aufl.*, Tüb., 1829, p. 299. This author believes that in the interpretation of Aristoteles the Greek "penta" was mistaken for "Hepta".

<sup>98</sup> The *Chronica* of SIGEBERT OF GEMBLoux, and the *Historia Langobardorum* of Paulus Diaconus are quoted by 16th century writers (SCHENCK; LYCOSTHENES) who were successful in making four or five instances of septuplets out of a single event.

<sup>99</sup> SCHENCK J., *loc. cit.* (cf. Footnote 93), p. 642 quotes the legend from Sigebert's work as follows: "Lamisii Longobardorum regis mater septem uno partu edens filios, eos in piscinam quandam proiecit. Quos cum Agelmundus primus Longobardorum Rex, (post Ibor et Agion) iter faciens hasta revolveret, Lamissius hastam eius firmiter tenuit. Ab eo igitur nutritus postmodum, et regni haeres factus est". Cf. also BASTIN A., in *Aesculape*, Par., 1929, 19: 282-98.

<sup>100</sup> LYCOSTHENES C., *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronica* (Basel, 1557), p. 284: describes the legend without mentioning the name or the fate of the rescued child. The mother is a common "meretrix" in his book. The author marked this event of multiparity with a woodcut on the margin illustrating a pregnant woman whose abdomen was so heavy that she had to use a sling in order to uphold the weight. The same figure occurs in the book several times, always when the text reports a case of multiparity.

The characteristic features of this early medieval legend are, *a*) the excessive pluriparity, *b*) the shame which the mother feels and wants to hide, *c*) the social status of the mother which moves between the two extremes of a low-class prosti-



Birth of the Lara septuplets (Case No. 31); copperplate by Tempesta, from 1612  
(Reproduced also in Aesculape, Par., 1929, 19: p. 291).

tute and a lady of the highest nobility, *d*) the destruction of the offspring in water, *e*) the masculine sex of the offspring, *f*) the nobleman who rescues the child or children, rears them and provides them with high honors. With some variation of the individual elements the same features occur in many of the later legends

of multiparity which served partly as a veil of myth enveloping the origin of the ruling families, partly as a primitive weapon of social equalization by means of debasing the mighty.

**29** *ca 470 A. D.* The same legend about the mother and her seven children occurs in a variant, reported by Schenck,<sup>101</sup> in which the event is supposed to have taken place under a certain Emperor Zenon. Zeno, the Isaurian, was emperor of the East from 474 to 491. Since Schenck again refers to Sigebert and Paulus Diaconus as his historical sources, there is little doubt left that the prostitute of Zeno's times is identical with the meretrix of the Longobard legend.

**30** *12th century A. D.* Abú-l-Qásim az-Zaharáwí (d. 1107, A. D.) whose opinion I quoted in the first part of this paper under No. 1 on sextuplet births also considered the possibility of a septuplet delivery (Cf. Footnote 40). His opinion was accepted and quoted by later writers.<sup>102</sup>

**31** *10th century A. D.* The most famous of the medieval legendary septuplets are the seven brothers who became the heroes of the old Spanish legend about the 'Seven lords of Lara'. The legend deals with historical persons whose names occur in documents of the 10th century. Hence, I list the infants of Lara as septuplets of the 10th century. Whether they were real or fictitious remains an open question.

Lara was a noble family that played a great role in the civil wars of Castilia until the middle of the 14th century when the family became extinct. In 1130 it was divided into two branches.<sup>103</sup> The seven infants ("siete infantes") were the sons of Gonzalo Gustios and Sancha Blásquez according to the legend, and their uncle was Gustios González, the brother of Nuño Rasura who lived in the middle of the 10th century during the reign of García Fernández, independent count of Castilia, and son of Fernán González.

On the maternal side there was also an uncle of the septuplets, Roy (or Rodríguez) Blásquez (or Velásquez), lord of Vilviestre who married Doña Lambra, the sister of the Count of Castilia. Doña Sancha was also invited to the wedding of her brother and she arrived with her seven sons who at that time were called the infants of Salas de Lara. On the day of the marriage all seven were made knights by the Count of Castilia. Among the guests was a certain Alvarez Sánchez, a relative of the bride, who felt himself offended by a remark of Gonzalo, one of the septuplets. A quarrel ensued in which the newly wed bride called the mother of the septuplets a swine because she was as fertile as a sow with her pigs. Then, the seven brothers threatened the new bride with cutting off her wedding dress way above her knee. Doña Lambra demanded vengeance for the insult, and her husband, the uncle of the seven, betrayed them into the hand of the Moors who

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<sup>101</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 643.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. SCHENCK J., *loc. cit.*, p. 642: "Quandoque formantur in matrice multi foetus, etiam 4, et 5, et 6, et 7, and plures decem. Compertum habeo quandam mulierem abortiendo emisisse septem, et aliam 15 omnes formatos". Cf. Footnote 40 for French translation.

<sup>103</sup> *Enciclopedia universal*, 1907, v. 26: p. 802, etc.

massacred all seven sons in a skirmish and captured their father, Gonzalo Gustios. According to the legend, the father fell in love with the daughter of the Moorish king while he was in prison. He made Zaida the mother of a son called Mudarra who then avenged his family.<sup>104</sup>

As mentioned above, the House of Lara was an authentic Spanish family. Gonzalo Gustios, Roy Velázquez, and Doña Lambra were historical personalities according to the old documents, though only Gustios could be identified as Lord of Salas ("señor de Salas"). The geography of the legend is also very exact. Mudarra is perhaps the creation of the legend.

The legend originates perhaps from the 12th century when it was included in a primitive epic. The older narrative poem became the basis of a version of the legend and was incorporated into the *Crónica general* which was composed about 1344, A. D. A 17th century engraver called Tempesta misread the date of the composition of this chronicle and believed that the seven brothers were alive in 1304 A. D.<sup>105</sup>

**32** *13th - 14th century.* A slightly modified form of the medieval pluriparity legends is that pattern in which a poor mother of many children curses the heartless rich lady who then would give birth to many children at once. A variant of this pattern of legend will be told later under the 9-fold multiple births. It concerns the rich lady of the fortress of Montigny-le-Ganelon. I refer to the legend here because the poor mother of the narrative had seven children *seemingly* of the same age.<sup>106</sup>

**33** *15th century.* The same Barbara Stratzmann (née Schmottzerin) whose sextuplet birth and fertility I described under Case No. 3 in the first part of this paper is also recorded by the same sources<sup>107</sup> as the mother of septuplets in her last pregnancy. According to Schmelin's *Chronik*<sup>108</sup> the septuplets were born at the following intervals: three were delivered on the 20th week of pregnancy, one was born 3 weeks later, two were born four and a half weeks later, and the seventh came to light three days later.

According to the narrative of Giambattista Bianchi, the septuplet delivery

<sup>104</sup> For a complete history of the legend and its bibliography see MENENDEZ PIDAL R., *La leyenda de los infantes de Lara* (1896). See also JUAN DE LA CUEVA, *Tragedia de los siete infantes de Lara* (Sevilla 1579). Also *Los famosos hechos de Mudarra* (1583). Also VEGA CARPIO, L. F. DE (1562-1635): *El bastardo Mudarra* (1612). Also HURTADO DE VELARDE, *Gran tragedia de los siete infantes de Lara* (1615). Also OTO VENIO, *Historia septem infantium de Lara* (1612). Also TRUEBA Y COSIO, *The infants of Lara* (in his *Romance of History of Spain*, 1830).

<sup>105</sup> Tempesta's engraving represents the seven brothers of Lara as their perfection is being admired by Pallas and a many-nippled allegoric figure of Nature. It was reprinted in the article of BASTIN, *Accouchements multiples*, etc. *Aesculape*, Par., 1929, 19: p. 290.

<sup>106</sup> See Case No. 67 of this paper.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Footnoter 43 to 46.

<sup>108</sup> SCHMELIN, *Württembergische kleine Chronik* (1660), quoted by SCHLIEBEN, *Zschr. ärztl. Fortbild.*, 1936, 33: p. 236.

of this Württemberg mother was slightly different: three were born on the 20th week of pregnancy, and all the rest were delivered three and a half weeks later.<sup>109</sup> 34 ca 1470. Edith Bonham, wife of Thomas Bonham, inhabitant of Wiltshire in England, first had twins, and then septuplets in her second pregnancy. Her husband apparently was superstitious about twin births and was troubled in his mind by his wife's imagined infidelity. Therefore, he began to travel a lot. He stayed away once for seven years. After his return she became pregnant with seven children. All seven must have been alive at birth because according to a parish tradition at Wishford Magna all seven were baptized at the font of that church. The same tradition states that the children were brought to the church in a kind of charger (i. e., large dish) which was afterwards dedicated to the church and hung on two nails "to be seen there yet, near the bellfree on the south side".<sup>110</sup>

Since Thomas Bonham died on May 29, 1473, according to the inscription on the great marble stone in the nave of the Wishford Magna church, the birth of the septuplets must have occurred before this date. The same marble stone gives also the wife's date of death (26 April, 1479), and shows their portraits, and the small figures of nine young children in brass. John Aubrey saw the tombstone and took the narrative in 1659 from the register book where it was entered.<sup>111</sup>

English works on geneology and heraldry testify the antiquity of the Bonham family. One of the Bonhams settled down in Wiltshire.<sup>112</sup> Our Thomas Bonham is evidently not identical with Sir Thomas Bonham, of Stanway Hall, who was sheriff of Essex in 1520.<sup>113</sup>

This 15th century case of septuplets is little known. I have found one additional reference to it in the 20 November, 1889, issue of the Japanese journal *Hakubun zassi*. It was then quoted by Y. Hasiba in his article on multiple births where the date of the event was incorrectly given as 1480.<sup>114</sup>

35 ca 1521. In his commentaries to Mondino's Anatomy, Berengario Da Carpi (1470-1530) mentioned a certain Giulio Scatinario of his times who was one of a

<sup>109</sup> BIANCHI G., *De naturali in humano corpore, vitiosa morbosaque generatione historia*. Tor., 1741, p. 247.

<sup>110</sup> The details of this event were kept for posterity by John Aubrey (1626-1697), English antiquarian, who wrote a work on "The natural history of Wiltshire" between the years 1656 and 1686. It was edited by John Britton almost 200 years later (London, 1847). Chapter 14 of this work deals with "Men and women". The data on the Bonham septuplets are on p. 71, etc.).

<sup>111</sup> The inscription of the tombstone reads: "Hic jacet Thomas Bonham, armiger, quondam patronus istius ecclesiae, qui quidem Thomas obiit vicesimo nono die Maii, Anno Domini MCCCCLXXIII; et Editha, uxor ejus, quae quidem Editha obiit vicesimo sexto die Aprilis, Anno D'ni MCCCCLXXIX...". AUBREY J., *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>112</sup> BURKE T., *Encyclopedia of heraldry*, 3. ed. Lond., 1840.

<sup>113</sup> BURKE T., *Geneol. & herald. dictionary*, 18. ed. Lond., 1856.

<sup>114</sup> HASIBA Y., *Issan tasi ni tuki*. Tokyó zinruigakkai zassi, 1890, 8: No. 84, 233-6.

septuplet birth and still alive in Bologna.<sup>115</sup> In 1874 Alfonso Corradi also referred to this case without comment<sup>116</sup> while Guzzoni listed it also.<sup>117</sup>

According to Da Carpi's statement<sup>118</sup> this Giulio was the seventh of the delivery. To give further credibility to the case, the 16th century anatomist professor pointed out that Mrs Scatinario, the mother of Giulio, was the sister of a certain Florian de Dulphis, a man related to the professor himself.

**36 16th cent.** Another case of septuplets is mentioned by Jean Bodin (1525-1596), author of the *Theatrum universae naturae* (Lyon, 1596). Later it was quoted by Schenck.<sup>119</sup> I was unable to verify further details of this birth, apparently an abortion.

**37 ca 1570.** A septuplet birth was reported from Siena in the surgical work of Jacques Dalechamps (1515-1588) and frequently quoted by contemporary and later authors as authentic.<sup>120</sup> The father was Bonaventura Savelli, a nobleman, and the mother was his domestic maid who at one time brought forth seven children. Four of them were baptized, but three were stillbirths.

**38 ca 1537.** The professor of gynecology at Ferrara, Luigi Bonaccioli, wrote a work on the Formation of the Foetus (Strassburg, 1537) in which he stated that he had known a woman in Italy who aborted seven fetuses at once.<sup>121</sup>

**39 1527.** The Japanese author Sisido mentioned in an article, published in 1901, that according to the journal Hakubun zassi a woman in China had seven daughters at one birth in 1527.<sup>122</sup>

**40 1600 A. D.** This is the celebrated case of septuplets best known to the geneticists and often described since 1894 when it made its first appearance in the medical (rather anthropological) literature. Curiously enough, there is no earlier reference to it anywhere in any book or in any printed or written document. It is the birth of septuplets in the German town of Hameln, at the Weser river, in

<sup>115</sup> DA CARPI B., *Comment. in Mundini anat.*, Bologna, 1521, p. cexxi.

<sup>116</sup> CORRADI A., *Storia dell'ostetricia in Italia*. Bologna, 1874, p. 161.

<sup>117</sup> GUZZONI DEGLI ANCARANI A., *A proposito di una gravidanza seigemina*. *Rass. sc. med.*, 1889, 4: 437, etc.

<sup>118</sup> "Hic est Bononiae quidam Julius Scatinarius adhuc vivens, et foecundus Bononiae civis: qui venit in lucem cum sex aliis foetibus, et ipse fuit septimus: et mater eius erat soror Domini Floriani de Dulphis mihi affinis...". Cf. also SCHENCK, *op. cit.*, p. 644.

<sup>119</sup> SCHENCK, *op. cit.*, p. 644: "Igneus praeses Curiae Rothomagensis... septemgeminos (imo etiam plures) ... sed inutiles...".

<sup>120</sup> DALECHAMPS J., *Chirurgie françoise*. Lyon, 1573, Chapt. 3. See also PARÉ A., *The works*. Lond., 1678, p. 591; also SCHENCK J., *op. cit.*, p. 645; also LINT J. G. DE, *Ned. tschr. geneesk.*, 1935, 79: 4648 &c.

<sup>121</sup> BONACCIOLI L., *De foetus formatione* (Strassburg, 1537). In Cap. 6: "Sed et in Italia septem, et aliam tres (quod assidue accidit) quam etiamnum nos ipsi novimus, abegisse certum est...". Also in SCHENCK, *op. cit.*, p. 645, where reference is made to the same work under the title Enneas muliebris.

<sup>122</sup> SISIDO, in *Iji Sinbun*, Tokyo, 1901, 862. The exact reference to the quoted journal was not given.

Hannover on 9 January, 1600. The unusual event occurred in a family house which is still in existence at Emmernstrasse No. 19, the residence of Mr Thiele Römer and his wife née Anna Breyers. Two boys and five girls were born to the mother at 3 o'clock in the morning on 9 January.<sup>123</sup> They were baptized, but by 12 o'clock on 20 January, 1600, all of them were dead.

This memorable event which occurred in the town of Pied Piper, the ratcatcher,<sup>124</sup> was described on a bas-relief stone plate which shows a scene in its upper half, and a legend in the lower half. The central object of the scene is a crucifix, with three men kneeling on the left and four women on the right; one of the men, the father, holds one tiny child in his hands while the other six are lined up in a row at the foot of the crucifix (See figure). The legend reads as follows:

“ Alhier ein Bürger Thiele Römer genannt  
seine Hausfrau Anna Breyers wohlbekannt  
als mann zählte 1600 Jahr  
den 9ten Ianuarius des Morgens 3 Uhr war  
Von ihr zwey Knäbelein und fünf Maedelein  
auf eine Zeit gebohren seyn  
Haben auch die heiligen Tauf erworben  
folgends den 20ten 12 Uhr seelig gestorben  
Gott wolle ihr geben die Saelligkeit  
Die allen Gläubigen ist bereit ”.

The stone plate was originally cut in the 17th century according to Hoppe, the Court Clerk, who in 1818 recovered it and erected it on the original house of the Römers, then in the possession of the mayor of Hameln, Mr. Domeier.<sup>125</sup>

In 1894, Weiszstein, a government architect, of Demmin, notified Professor Bartels of the existence of this memorial stone plate. Bartels then described it the first time to the German Anthropological Society. He had no doubt either in the authenticity of the memorial stone or in the truth of the inscribed event, arguing that one would not commit the sin of bringing the crucifix into a hoax or lie.<sup>126</sup> Barfurth added that it would have been extremely difficult to deceive people in

<sup>123</sup> Such a long survival was doubted by M. Bartels who was the first to report this case in 1894. Since the date of birth is based upon an inscription only, it might be possible that the stonecutter made a mistake in cutting 9 for 19. Should this be the truth, then the septuplets were born on the 19th and died on the 20th, which is more likely. *cf.* Verh. Berl. Ges. Anthropol., 1894, v. 26: 452.

<sup>124</sup> Hameln an der Weser belonged to the Abbot of Fulda in the period from the 8th to the 13th centuries. In 1259 it was sold to Bishop Wedekind, of Minden, who won victory over the inhabitants of Hameln at Sedemünde. The legend of the Pied Piper is attached to this event; after 1284 an adventurer kidnapped 130 children (the battle took away the youth of Hameln, no doubt).

<sup>125</sup> LOTZE R., *Zwillinge*. Oehringen, 1937, p. 77.

<sup>126</sup> BARTELS M., *Sieblinge*. Verh. Berl. Ges. Anthropol., 1894, 26: 452.



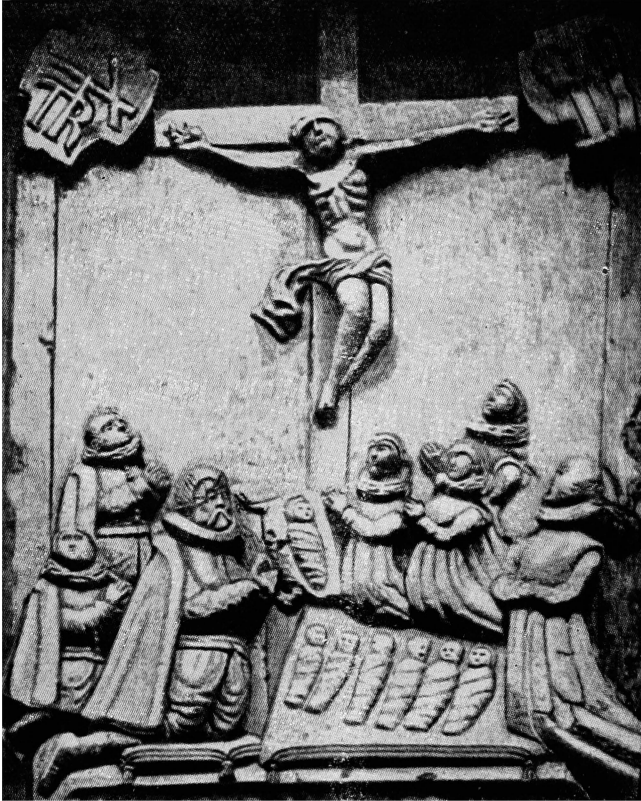
this particular case because the fetuses were all tiny and could not be easily matched by addition of dead fetuses of other mothers.<sup>127</sup>

The anatomist Waldeyer expressed the opinion that no similar case was ever published in the literature.<sup>128</sup> The case was accepted as completely authentic

by later writers.<sup>129</sup> Price also referred to the Römer septuplets as the "only" such case ever reported.<sup>130</sup>

**41 1614 A. D.** The Italian author Antonio Maria Venusti<sup>131</sup> wrote a book on the generation and birth of man. In this work he mentioned that he had the record of two women who each had seven children at once.

**42 1705 A. D.** This septuplet is a doubtful case and concerns the same Japanese couple mentioned under No. 6 among the sextuplets. The parents were Moemon Hirosimaya and his wife who lived in the neighborhood of the town of Marugame, of Sanuki Province, on the island of Shikoku.<sup>132</sup> According to



The Römer septuplets, of Hameln (Case No. 40); bas-relief monument on the house of birth; erected in 1818.

<sup>127</sup> BARFURTH D., *Ein Zeugnis für eine Geburt von Sieben-lingen beim Menschen*. Anat. Anz., Jena, 1895, 10: 330-32, picture.

<sup>128</sup> See BARTELS, *op. cit.*, under Footnote 126.

<sup>129</sup> E. g., COOK R., in *J. Hered.*, 1934, 25:193-7; also PRICE H. W., *Human multiple births*. Hist. Bull. Calgary, 1946-47, 11: 67-77. Also RICHTER J., *Mehrfache Geburt*. In: *Biol. & Path. Weib.* (Seitz & Amreich) 2. Aufl., 1945, 7: Lfg 15: 717-50. For illustration see also frontispiece of May issue, *J. Hered.*, 1934; also *Zschr. ärztl. Fortbild.*, 1936, 33: 264, fig. 8.

<sup>130</sup> PRICE H. W., *Human multiple births*. Hist. Bull., Calgary, 1946-47, 11: 69-77.

<sup>131</sup> VENUSTI A. M., *Discorso generale di... intorno alla generatione al nascimento degli uomini*, etc. Milano, G. B. Bidelli, 1614, cap. 59, p. 150.

<sup>132</sup> See footnotes 51 and 52. The case was reported by SISIDO, in *Iji sinbun*, Tokyo, 1901, p. 860.

the account of Isii, on the date of the last (sixth) birth, there was also a seventh child delivered whose sex was not stated. The seventh child was born on 27 February, at 9 P. M.

**43 1718 A. D.** Another case of septuplets which is completely unknown to the modern world occurred in Lisbon. According to the *Relationes Lipsienses*, of 12 March, 1718, a woman gave birth to seven boys at once who were all alive at the time of baptism. Thereafter, five died. The Leipzig newspaper remarked that the same mother had quadruplets a year before, and two of the “quad”-s were still alive after a year.

The case was recorded in the 1731 edition of the *Syllepsologia* of Martin Schurig, doctor of medicine in Dresden. I could not find the Leipzig newspaper, or a report of the extraordinary event from the land of its occurrence.<sup>133</sup>

**44 ca 1715-16.** An Italian woman gave birth to seven children at once, all of them alive. There were sons and daughters among them but their exact number was not stated. The woman was living near Milano, in the village called Robecco sul Naviglio which is about five kilometers N. N. E. of Abbiategrasso, between the Naviglio Grande and the river Tessin. She was quite famous for her extraordinary achievement.

The case of this septuplet was reported to Giambattista Bianchi<sup>134</sup> by Father David, a Theatine cleric regular<sup>135</sup> who said that he met the woman in 1726 or 1727 as he was going from Milano to Robecco. She was accompanied by two boys, of her septuplets, who then looked approximately 11 or 12 years old. The Theatine priest also mentioned to Bianchi that the delivery of the septuplets was very rapid but extremely painful.<sup>136</sup>

The 19th century Italian obstetrician, Alfonso Corradi, criticized this report of Bianchi and reproached the writer that he relied so much upon the testimony of a single person, a priest however trustworthy and pious he might have seemed.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> SCHURIG M., *Syllepsologia historico-medica; hoc est, Conceptionis muliebris consideratio physico-medico-forensis... deinde Didymotokia seu Gemellatio*. Dresden, B. Christ. Heckel, jr. 1731, p. 205: “In Lissabon hat eine Frau 7 Knäblein auf einmahl gebohren, welche auch alle getaufft worden, etc.”.

<sup>134</sup> BIANCHI G., *De naturali etc. historia*. Tor., 1741, p. 249. The book was written 14 years after Father David's meeting with the mother of the septuplets.

<sup>135</sup> The order of the Theatine Cleric Regulars was founded in 1524 by S. Gaetano Thiene and Giampietro Caraffa, under Paolo IV, They were bishops of Chieti and Brindisi (Chieti: in Lat. Theate).

<sup>136</sup> BIANCHI G., *op. cit.*, p. 249: “... in Insubriae Pago non diu ab hinc, septem simul in lucem prodire. Namque non ita pridem testatus est mihi R. P. David, Clericus Regularis Theatinus piissimus, nostrique Academici Sacelli praefectus; ante hos anno xiv progredientem se Mediolano Robeccum, ad navigabilem Canalem habuisse obviam mulierem, sibi jam fama notam, quae uno partu septem filios, masculos feminasque, vivos et vitales omnes, cito quidem, at non sine magnis cruciatibus, peperaret; tum vero ex iis primum aut alterum, masculumque obviam ipsius matris vidisse comitem; cujus tum aetas xi aut xii annorum esse potuisset”.

<sup>137</sup> CORRADI A., *Storia dell'ostetricia in Italia*. Bologna, 1874, p. 160: “Tanto meno credi-

45 1785. This is the date of death of an 88-year old woman who in her first parturition gave birth to seven children at once who all received baptism. The lady's name was Françoise Mathurine Bourru, and she was the wife of a certain Mr Jacques Riffault (or Briffault) who was the councillor of the King. She died a widow on 20 November 1785.

This event was described in the diary of M. Malle-Dupan of which a certified copy was made on 17 December 1785. The original document was transcribed by a descendant of Madame Briffault on 11 May 1870. It was certified by M. Briffault, then mayor of Loches, and given to Dr Roy who inserted it in the "Nouvelles" column on p. 255 of the first volume of the *Revue médicale française* in 1877.<sup>138</sup>

46 1799. In the Obstetrical Clinic of Wien a midwife told that a certain woman called Thiemen gave birth to septuplets in Bohemia. Froriep who made a note of the case in his work did not fully believe in the authenticity of the original report<sup>139</sup>.

47 1824. In the environment of Valencia, a woman called Josepha Navarra, had seven children at once, on 14 August 1824. The case was reported by v. Eldik.<sup>140</sup>

Froriep's note of this case seems to be earlier than Eldik's report. He received the news from Paris, with the date of 14 August. In his comments upon this instance of septuplets Froriep made the reference to No. 46 as another case of septuple birth which he heard from a midwife studying in the Wiener Gebärhaus. The midwife's mother was also an obstetrical nurse, and the septuplet birth occurred in her practice.<sup>141</sup>

48 1829. A certain woman called Baylis had been living at Lewis Street 15, London. On 9 May 1829 she had sevenlings. The septuple birth was attended by a Dr Golding whose office was at St Martinslane. The first child was born alive; it was fully developed but it soon died after birth. The second and the third children were at a developmental stage of a 7-month old embryo; they died immediately at birth. Thereafter, four other fetuses were born in a sort of sac, and none of them was longer than three inches.

bile è il parto di sette figli: il Bianchi di Torino ne porge un caso; ma ei non lo vide, e la sola testimonianza della persona fededegna, che glielo narrava, non ne è bastevole guarentigia". The case is report on p. 1496.

<sup>138</sup> ROY, *Couche avec sept foetus*. *Rev. méd. fr.*, 1877, 1: 55: "Les couches avec sept foetus n'étant pas très communes, signalons le document historique suivant que nous communiquons le docteur Roy, l'auteur bien connu d'un traité sur le rire et le sourire". Etc. The case was reported also in *J. méd. chir. prat.*, and was quoted by WICKERSHEIMER and BASTIN (*loc. cit.*).

<sup>139</sup> FRORIEP, in *his Notizen* 1824, vol. 8, No. 10, p. 154. Also quoted by LINT, *Ned. tschr. geneesk.*, 1935, 79: 4648-54.

<sup>140</sup> ELDIK, in *Pract. tschr. geneesk.*, 1825, p. 187. Also in LINT, *loc. cit.*

<sup>141</sup> FRORIEP, *Siebenlinge*. *Notizen aus dem Gebiete d. Natur und Heilk.*, 1824, 8: No. 10 (whole No. 164), p. 154: "... Sechslinge sind nicht so ganz selten; Siebenlinge aber so sehr, dass man die Erzählungen davon unter die Märchen zu rechnen geneigt war...".

The case was reported in the 1829 volume of the *Practische tijdschrift voor geneeskunde*, and quoted by Lint in 1935.<sup>142</sup>

49 1885. A case of septuplets was reported from Spain. The mother was Juliana, wife of Benito Queseda, who lived in San Ildefonso, near Valladolid, in the house of La Riverilla located in the Calle de Tenerías. The delivery was attended by Doctor Cantala-Piedra. Three children were born on 22 November, and four more on 23 November, 1885.

The case was first told by Alvarez del Manzano, a secretary of the Society for the Welfare of the Sick (“Sociedad de socorro para enfermos”), to *La Libertad*, a Valladolid newspaper. It was thence copied by a Spanish medical magazine<sup>143</sup> from where Dr J. N. Phillips translated it into English and sent a notice to the *Lancet*.<sup>144</sup> This is a case of septuplet abortion.<sup>145</sup>

50 1899. There was a miner family, colored people, in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. The father was 25 years old, and the mother, Mrs George Hackett, has already given birth to two children. In August, 1899, she gave birth to seven children who were all alive but, with the exception of one, all died within a few hours after birth. There were four girls and three boys. The hope was expressed that the one might probably live longer.

The event was contained in a one-paragraph short note, in the August-5 weekly “Echoes and News” column of a New York medical magazine. No further evidence could be obtained for the authenticity of the birth or the fate of the surviving child.<sup>146</sup>

51 1902. A Los Angeles, California, practitioner, called Dr R. C. Shultz, was called on 22 December, 1902, to Florence, California, in order to attend the premature confinement of a certain Mrs C. Escorza. Present was also the mother of the parturient woman, a Mexican of about 57 years of age. She was called Luiza Silva. It was she who told the doctor that two of her own several pregnancies ended in abortion in the second or third month, and at each abortion she passed seven fetuses. Of course, none of the seven lived. At the doctor’s further inquiry Luiza Silva stated that she could not recall whether any or what doctor attended her, but the embryos were sent as specimens to an European institute unknown to her.<sup>147</sup>

There is no doubt that the list of septuplet births could be greatly increased if accurate account and statistical figures were kept on all abortions. It stands to reason that many of the higher multiple conceptions will end in early abortion

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<sup>142</sup> See in *Pract. tschr. geneesk.*, 1829, p. 573. Also LINT J. G., (Multiple births) *Ned. tschr. geneesk.*, 1935, 79: 4648 etc.

<sup>143</sup> El genio médico-quirúrgico, 1885, 31: p. 660: “Fecundidad asombrosa”.

<sup>144</sup> PHILLIPS J. N., *Letter*. In *Lancet*, 1885, Dec. 12 issue. Also quoted by later writers, e. g., FOY G., *Plural births*. Med. Press & Circ., Lond., 1890, n. s., 50: 304-8.

<sup>145</sup> The Spanish magazine of Footnote 143 says: “... haber abortado dichos siete fetos...”.

<sup>146</sup> *Reported birth of seven children*. Med. News, N. Y., 1899, 75: 180.

<sup>147</sup> SHULTZ R. C., *Multiple pregnancy with a vengeance*. Med. Rec., N. Y., 1903, 63: 267. This was a Letter to the Editor.

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rather than in later normal deliveries owing to a functional overloading and structural inadequacy of the maternal organism.

52 1904. Strassmann mentioned in the obstetrical handbook of Winckel<sup>148</sup> that two cases of septuplets were described by Barrufaldi and Cattolica. Lint<sup>149</sup> made inquiries concerning these cases and he found out with the help of Capparoni that both instances were quintuplet births only. I have included this false reference for the sake of completeness.

53 1933. Finally, here is another case of septuplet which proved to be just a journalistic joke. It caused so much trouble, however, that its inclusion in this series is justified. The news was widely circulated in the daily papers as a report sent by Associated Press from Georgetown, British Guiana, on October 24, 1933. As the Syracuse Post Standard of 25 October, 1933, had the story, the septuplet birth occurred in Caracas, and the mother, Señora Carola Pérez, together with her seven children, was "doing nicely" while Señor Luis Pérez was granted government aid by the senate of "the Bolivar Department".<sup>150</sup>

The Syracuse Post Standard made inquiry to the New York Academy of Medicine where, according to the newspaper, it was stated that there is not in gynecological records a single case "absolutely substantiated" of multiple birth more than six.<sup>151</sup> The newspaper story was also quoted by Robert Cook whose critical article revealed the truth of the Caracas septuplets.<sup>152</sup> Cook inquired at the director of the National Museum of Caracas as to the veracity of the septet. Dr Henry Pittier, the director of the museum, replied that there was a Carola Pérez living in Caracas but she had several children of various ages.

Then, the director made general comments on the veracity of the Spanish-American Press and referred to a notice in the local "Espera" on the great fecundity of the women of Caracas. This daily paper came out with the statement that "parturitions of two, four, six eight and even ten children at one time are not infrequent" in that South-American town.<sup>153</sup> This is not supported by any birth-statistics, however.

#### b) Animal births

54 1837. In the year of 1837 a ewe in Frisland gave birth at once to seven lambs. Three of the lambs were dead at birth, three soon died, and one remained alive. The case was told by Van Der Poll, a veterinarian of Witmarson, and reported in a veterinary magazine by Rainard in 1845.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>148</sup> WINCKEL, *Handbuch der Geburtshülfe*, 1904, p. 738.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. LINT, *loc. cit.* in Footnote 142 above.

<sup>150</sup> "Woman gives birth to seven sons at once; believed unique in medical history". Syracuse Post Standard, 1933, Oct. 25.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Footnote 150.

<sup>152</sup> COOK R., "Septuplets" with different birthdays. *J. Hered.*, 1934, 25: 193-7. He referred also to the Römer case (No. 40 in my series).

<sup>153</sup> COOK R., *loc. cit.*

<sup>154</sup> RAINARD, *Quelques réflexions sur le part multiple chez les femelles unipares*. *J. méd. vét.*, Lyon, 1845, 1: 117-29. The septuplet birth of lambs is described on p. 128.

**55 1855.** In his 4th quarterly report for the year 1855 the veterinary officer of the Grimmen District, a man named Curdt, included a reference to a septuplet abortion of a cow. He said that this happened in the village of Zarnegla, and the seven calves were seen by a veterinarian named Koch. According to his testimony all calves were well formed, and some of them were already covered with hair. The quarterly report of the Grimmen veterinarian was attached to an article written by Kleinschmidt, a military student of the Veterinary School.<sup>155</sup> The case is occasionally quoted by textbooks of veterinary obstetrics.<sup>156</sup>

**56 1897.** A seven-year old cow of a farmer called Enrico Dell'Orto aborted seven calves at once in the village of Trucazzano, Italy. Francesco Pasetti, veterinarian of Melzo, reported the case though he had seen six fetuses only. One was already eaten by the dog, and two others were damaged. There were four bulls and three heifers among the aborted fetuses. The cow died of puerperal sepsis.<sup>157</sup>

**57 1906.** It happened on 20 March, 1906, at Pleasant Valley, Methuen, on the farm of M. S. Hill that a cow gave birth to seven calves at once within the period of two hours. The cow was of Durham breed, and her total weight was 1,100 lb. All calves died either during or directly after the birth.

There were four bulls each of 30 lb. and three heifers each of 25 lb. The aborted calves were examined by J. F. Winchester, veterinarian of Lauren, Massachusetts, who laid the dead calves on the snow in front of the barn door and photographed them. The photo, together with the short note, was first printed in an American veterinary magazine, and reprinted by a British journal.<sup>158</sup>

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A search of the previous literature shows therefore that a good number of septuplet births are on record though the mathematical likelihood of such births is extremely small. It is also remarkable that — with the exception of the Lara septuplets in the legend — almost all fetuses of the septuplet birth were either dead at birth or they soon died after delivery. Only in a few instances is there found a report on a septuplet who survived and reached adulthood (e. g., No. 35, No. 44). Among the large domestic animals, a septuplet delivery might be more frequent than the recorded observations show.

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<sup>155</sup> KLEINSCHMIDT, *Grosse Fruchtbarkeit von Kühen*. Magazin f. Tierheilkunde, 1857, 23: 125-6. The 15-plet birth described in this article of K. will be listed later below.

<sup>156</sup> FLEMING G., *Textbook of veterinary obstetrics*. Lond., 1878, p. 143, where reference is made to Kleinschmidt's paper.

<sup>157</sup> PASSETTI F., *Aborto in una vacca con espulsione dei 7 feti*. Clin. vet., 1897, 20: 547-8.

<sup>158</sup> WINCHESTER J. F., *Seven calves at one parturition*. Vet. Rev., N. Y., 1906-07, 30: 224, with photo (bad). Also anonymously as: *Cow(A) with seven calves*. Vet. Rec., Lond., 1905-06, 18: 818, photo (better).

## III. Octuplets

The mathematical frequency of a delivery of eight children at one birth is 1: 80<sup>7</sup>, or one such delivery in every 2.097,152.000,000 according to Hellin's rule (see Footnote 89). Whether such small frequency puts an event out of the world of reality is not the concern of my paper.

**58 1557.** In his book on Prodigies, published in 1557, Conrad Lycosthenes, referred to Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533?) who asserted that according to old sources the Egyptian women sometimes gave birth to as many as eight children at once and one woman produced 30 offspring in four different pregnancies.<sup>159</sup> It needs little effort to find the similarity between the Egyptian "octuplets" of Della Mirandola and the "septuplets" of the same country referred to by Trogus and Strabo (No. 26 and 27 in this paper).

**59 1650.** The wife of Lord Darre (sometimes incorrectly written as Dane) gave birth to eight perfectly formed children from a single pregnancy. The reference to this event is contained in the work of a contemporary physician, Pietro Borelli. I did not find any other evidence of such birth in other contemporary sources.<sup>160</sup>

**60 1869.** According to a newspaper notice of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, an Italian woman of Quinto gave birth in March 1869 to eight living children who died soon after delivery. The obstetrical textbook of Mayer, published in 1874, has a brief reference to this case. There are no further details known to me.<sup>161</sup>

**61 1872.** The following is the most celebrated hoax of octuplets which was created as a fantastic revenge of a jilted beau and which was so cleverly planted that three-quarters of a century ago it could fool many daily papers of the United States and quite a number of gullible medical magazines. It took almost half a century to detect it, and as late as 1948 there were still some who were deceived by it. Here is the "story" as we know it now.

Eunice Mowery who lived in Trumbull County, Ohio State, had a suitor, a printer by occupation, whom she rebuffed in favor of Timothy Bradlee. In 1872, when the girl apparently became Mrs Bradlee, the jilted printer wanted to get even with her. Hence on the night of August 20 to 21, he broke into the offices of a local newspaper at Warren, Ohio (East of Cleveland, not far south of Lake Erie), and removed a block of type from the first page of next morning's paper, and inserted in its place his squib about Mrs Bradlee. He struck off 20-30 copies with the story of octuplets, then he reset the local paper in its original form. The spu-

<sup>159</sup> LYCOSTHENES C., *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronica*. Basel, 1557, p. 509: "... et earum unam quattuor partibus triginta filios protulisse, ex antiquorum monumentis hausit".

<sup>160</sup> BORELLI P. (1620-1689), *Historiarum et observationum medico-physicarum centuriae IV*. Par., 1657, on p. 143, Observ. 44 of Cent. II: "Anno 1650. uxor nobilis D. Darre unico puerperio octo foetus enixa est probe conformatos, quod valde in hisce regionibus insolens est". The case was later mentioned by Foy G., *Plural births*. Med. Press & Circ., Lond., 1890, n. s., 50: 304-8.

<sup>161</sup> MAYER G., *Trattato di ostetricia*. Napoli, 1874, Cap. 4, p. 107.

rious issues he dispatched to various daily papers in the Eastern U. S., and the story with the octuplets was reprinted several times during August and September of 1872 both in the daily newspapers and in the various scientific and medical magazines.

Here is what the jilted suitor printed. On 21 August, 1872, Mrs Timothy Bradlee, Trumbull Co., Ohio, gave birth to 8 children, 3 girls and 5 boys. They are all living and healthy, but quite small. She was married six years previously when, on the day of her marriage, she weighed 273 lbs. She has given birth to two pairs of twins, making 12 children in six years. She herself was a triplet, her mother and father also both having been twins, and her grandmother one of five pairs of twins. Quite an elaborate chain of lies!

I do not know the number of dailies and weeklies which picked up the story first. One of the earliest was the Cincinnati-Lancet for August, 1872, from which it was taken over by the Columbus Democrat for September, 1872, published at Columbus, Wisconsin.<sup>162</sup>

In the September 26, 1872, issue of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal there were 12 and a half lines devoted in the "Medical Miscellany" column to the narrative of the Ohio octuplets,<sup>163</sup> and the Medical Times and Gazette also carried the same faked report. It was also repeated by Foy in 1890,<sup>164</sup> and by many such works as the one written by Gould and Pyle in 1897<sup>165</sup> on the Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine.

On March 24, 1914, Dr G. H. Parker, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, became curious about the Bradlee octuplets in Ohio and sent a letter of inquiry to the County Clerk of Trumbull County for further details. The Clerk of Courts, Mr M. B. Tayler, wrote to Parker on 30 March, 1914 that there was no truth in the report on the Trumbull County octuplets and it was just the work of a practical joker.<sup>166</sup> Parker published the clerk's letter in Science,<sup>167</sup> and wrote to the Editor of the

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<sup>162</sup> A clipping from this daily was preciously kept until ca 1946-48 by a certain Mrs Bert Tanner, of Lodi, Wisc., who then sent it to Dr Newman, the geneticist who wrote his subsequent article evidently without knowing that the hoax had been already detected about 1915. Cf. his: *Report of octuplets and sextuplets in the United States*. J. Hered., 1948, 39: 204-5. Cf. also ALAN F. GUTTMACHER's article on *Type-knapping and the Ohio octuplets*. Ibid., p. 294, where he refers to the 1915 article of Parker. See later.

<sup>163</sup> See Boston M. & S. J., 1872, n. ser., 10: Sept. 26, p. 224. The story was not retracted until 1915. See Footnote i 168.

<sup>164</sup> FOY G., *loc. cit.*, Med. Press & Circ., Lond., 1890, 50: 304-8.

<sup>165</sup> GOULD & PYLE, *Anomalies, etc.*, 1897, p. 153.

<sup>166</sup> The letter of the Clerk of Court says that "... after inquiry I am informed that there is no truth in the statement (of the medical journal). It seems that a practical joker of those days went into one of the newspaper offices here and set up an article which he succeeded in having printed in one or two copies of the paper... (etc.)". The letter is dated from Warren, Ohio.

<sup>167</sup> PARKER G. H., *A spurious case of multiple human births*. Science, 1915, n. ser., 41: 648-9. Here the original notice of the Boston Medical of 1872 is also reprinted.



Boston Medical & Surgical Journal who then corrected the 1872 misstatement.<sup>168</sup> 62 1878. In the community of Mégnac, situated in the Département de la Gironde, the wife of a Mr Fédré who lived in the chemin Long had been pregnant for several months in 1878 when she felt sudden colic. When she saw that in place of a normal bowel movement she delivered her offsprings she was surprised. The doctor who was called to help her examined the fetuses and found that there were eight of them enclosed in one sac. They were suffocated in the womb owing to the intrauterine growth.

The case was briefly reported two years after it happened, in the local paper La Gironde where the attending physician's name was given as Dr Watering. The newspaper report was reprinted fully in the 16 June, 1880, issue of *La France médicale*<sup>169</sup> from where it was taken over by the *Lancet*<sup>170</sup> with the remark that, in view of all the Malthusian theories and practices, Nature was apparently able to assert herself in spite of art.

63 1947. The 30 September, 1947, issue of the Italian "Il Popolo"<sup>171</sup> carried a short note of an octuplet birth which occurred in September in a village called Yang-Pang-Chen, in the state of "Tishing", about 200 Km from Shanghai. The birth was reported by the father of the octuplets, a certain Mr Chang-Pi Wei, and the registrar of births, a government official, sent the news to Shanghai. All eight children were supposedly males, and, with the exception of one who died immediately after birth, all were healthy.

#### IV. Sets of nine children

It is interesting to see that there are more references to ninefold deliveries in the literature than to octuplets. Hellin's rules should not be even mentioned here because the mathematical infrequency of such plural births is beyond the borderlines of statistical observations.

64 *n. d.* One dateless legend of ninefold human birth concerns the wife of the lord of Beauville. The lord paid too much attention to one of the maids who then

<sup>168</sup> Parker's letter is dated 29 March, 1915. Cf. Boston M. & S. J. 1915, 172: 610: A misstatement corrected. Parker's discovery was later mentioned by H. W. PRICE, *Human multiple births*. Hist. Bull., Calgary, 1946-47, 11: 69-77. See also footnote 162.

<sup>169</sup> *La France médicale*, 1880, 27: No. 48 (16 June), 382; in the "Nouvelles": "Un accouchement de huit enfants. - On lit dans La Gironde: Nous avons eu souvent à citer des cas de fécondité, mai nous croyons que les annales médicales n'en renferment aucun aussi extraordinaire que celui qui a eu lieu, il y a deux ans, dans la commune de Mégnac. La femme du sieur Fédré... (etc.)". There was an expression of hope that such a prodigious case of fecundity would be later reported to the Académie de médecine. I did not search the bulletins of the Bordeaux Society of Medicine for such report, however.

<sup>170</sup> *Lancet*, Lond., 1880, 1: 1011. Also quoted by Foy in 1890 (*loc. cit.*, see footnote 164).

<sup>171</sup> "Otto gemelli maschi partoriti da una cinese". *Il Popolo*, 30 Sept., 1947. The photostatic copy of this news was given to me by Prof. GEDDA who himself included the case on p. 161 of his work on *Studio dei Gemelli* (Roma, 1951).

was forced by her ladyship to get herself a husband. The maid married, and had three children from her first pregnancy. The lady accused the maid of having had relations with the lord since it seemed to her impossible to conceive three children from the semen of a single man. She thought that twins would be the maximum of offspring for a couple, the husband having only twin testes and the wife twin breasts. As a punishment of God the lady herself became pregnant and gave birth to nine children whom she wanted to kill in order to hide her shame. This medieval legend occurs in many local variants.<sup>172</sup>

**65 ca 1000.** The Countess of Querfurt is also involved in a similar medieval legend. She is supposed to have given birth to nine children at once whom she wanted to kill, but the infants were saved by the father.<sup>173</sup>

According to some other sources quoted by Schlieben<sup>174</sup> the Countess of Querfurt had nine daughters at once. Her husband, Count Gerhard was absent at the time of the parturition so that the countess wanted to drown eight of the infants in the well and to keep only the nicest one. The brother of the count, Bishop Bruno of Prussia (died 1008) returned from a journey, prevented his sister-in-law from killing the infants whom he gave to the miller of the castle for further care and education.

**66 ca 1200.** There was a famous family which played a very important role in the history of Provence during the Middle Ages. It was the family of the Porcelets (also spelled Pourcelet, Porcellet, Porcelez). "Porcelet" in all of its variants of spelling means "pig", of course, and there developed a legend about the origin of the family's name. As such legends usually do, this one was also locally modified at various parts of France.

According to the basic legend there was once a grand lady called Sabattier who was the wife of the lord of Arles. She became pregnant. Once she went to walk in the country when an old woman approached her and asked for alms. She refused to help the beggar who then cursed the lady and wished that she should have a parturition that would fit such a swine as she was.<sup>175</sup> When her term came

<sup>172</sup> It was described in the *Erreurs populaires* (etc.) of L. JOUBERT, whom WITKOWSKI quoted in his *Hist. d. accouch.*, Par., 1887, 258. I took the legend from Witkowski's work.

<sup>173</sup> Included in Book 4, Chapt. 4, of the *History of the Anhalt Princes* by Botruffus. It was quoted by SCHENCK J., *Observ. med. lib.* 7 (Frankf., 1609), p. 643: "Comitissa quaedam Querfurtensis uno partu fertur edidisse novem infantulos, quos omnes ad unum usque voluit interimere; sed patre forte fortuna adventante conservati sunt".

<sup>174</sup> Cf. SCHLIEBEN E., *Mehrlingsgeburten in Sage und Geschichte*. *Zschr. ärztl. Fortbild.*, 1936, 33: 233; 263. He refers to the Zimmermannsche Chronik, written by Froben Christoph Graf von Zimmermann (d. 1563) and edited by Bernhard Ihringer; also to the *Handbuch des Joachim v. Wedel*, edited by Julius Freiherr v. Bohlen-Bohlendorf (Tübingen, 1882).

<sup>175</sup> Witkowski, who quotes this story after Joubert, puts the following words into the beggar's mouth: "Vous êtes méchante comme une truie, et comme cette bête immonde, vous donnerez un exemple dégoûtant à ceux qui assisteront à votre accouchement". Cf. his *Hist. d. accouch.*, Par., 1897, pp. 259. Also his *Curiosités & c.* Par., 1892, pp. 18-19.

she gave birth to nine little pigs. But, after sufficient penance, her later pregnancies became normal. However, the family was given the nickname "Porcelet".

The members of the Porcelet family occurred in medieval documents as early as 26 February, 1220 (Robertus P.). A Henricus Porcelez was mentioned in an 1277. martyrology. In 1304, the Cartularium of St Quentin mentioned a Jehan Pourcelet.<sup>176</sup> There is no doubt, therefore, that the House of the Porcelets was in existence.

A slightly different variant of the legend was mentioned by Bastin<sup>177</sup> in which the cursing of the beggar woman afflicted an unnamed baroness who, when her nine children were born, ordered the chambermaid to throw three into the river. She met a lord of the neighborhood upon whose inquiry the maid told that she carried pigs (: porcelet) in her basket to kill them in the river. The lord recognized that the fetuses were human and took them away for education and rearing. The three children were later called Porcelet. Their mother was executed.

Another variant of the Porcelet niner was told by Witkowski.<sup>178</sup> In winter time a lady passed a poor widow with her twins. She reproached the the woman for the laxity of her morals, and her infidelity which to the lady's mind was sufficiently shown by the twinning. The poor widow asked the Holy Virgin that She should prove her innocence to the rich lady. In that moment a sow passed by with her pigs, and the widow cursed that the lady should have as many children at one birth as the sow had pigs. Nine months later the lady gave birth to nine small children.

The attitude of later writers toward such legends was different. There was, for instance, the Italian Giambattista Bianchi who in his work on the various kinds of generation of man<sup>179</sup> found it unnecessary even to mention the legends of such incredible fecundity which were thriving more upon the credulity of some people than upon the historical truth. On the other hand there was such a scientific organ as the *Journal des Savants* which in its May 1, 1684, issue used the history of the House of Porcelets as an argument for the veracity of another multiple-birth report.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Cf. GODEFROY F., *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et tous ses dialectes du ix. au xv. siècle*. Par., 1889, v. 6: p. 283.

<sup>177</sup> BASTIN A., *Accouchements multiples*. Aesculape, Par., 1929, 19: 282-98. The Porcelet story is on p. 292.

<sup>178</sup> WITKOWSKI, *Curiosité, etc.*, Par., 1892, 19-20.

<sup>179</sup> BIANCHI G., *loc. cit.*, Tor., 1741, p. 247: "An vero tot prodigiosi, saeculis pene omnibus celebrati quarundam feminarum numerosi conceptus, nostrae huic de monstis humanis narrationi adnecti debeant, non satis scio. At non dubito, quamplures ex iis, qui passim leguntur narranturque, multorum foetuum partus, nimiae aliquorum credulitati potius, quam historiarum veritati esse adscribendos. Quapropter... neque incredibilem primarum Gallicae *Porceletiae* familiae parentum foecunditatem neque alia hujusmodi, tonsoribus lippisque notissima recensebo".

<sup>180</sup> In *Journal des savants*, 1 May, 1684, p. 92: "L'histoire de la maison des Pourcelets en France, où a vu neuf jumeaux devenir de fort grands hommes, rend ce fait croyable...".

**67 ca 1200.** The next set of nines is almost the same legend as the one related under No. 66, just the scenery and the actors are changed. It happened in the fortress of Montigny-le-Ganelon, on the right side of the Loire, in Le Vendomois. While the lord of the castle was in the Holy Land during one of the Crusades, his lady was cursed by a beggar woman (or a sorceress according to others) to have as many babies at once as a sow has pigs. The lady became a mother of 9 children 9 months after the cursing.<sup>181</sup>

There is also a variant ending to this legend according to which the husband suddenly arrived from the Holy Land. Wishing to avoid a scandal the lady ordered her confidential servant to destroy eight of the children and to let one be nourished by a nurse. The crusaders arrived just when the maid was going to throw the sack with the 8 infants into the river. She said that little puppies were in the sack. But the deceit was detected, and the infants were secretly educated.

Meanwhile the one boy who was kept by the lady grew up and his mother had great pleasure with him. She asked her husband to adopt the boy and take him away from the nurse who had cared for him until then. Once when all nine children became 7 years old the husband arranged that all were dressed alike and he let them enter into his wife's room. Their mother was unable to distinguish one from the other. Then, the lord executed his wife so that she almost died with nine deaths (See in Witkowski; Footnote 181).

**68 1430 A. D.** A 24-year old woman who was living in Messina gave birth in 1430 to nine infants at once. Soon after the parturition the mother died together with her babies. The case was told by Rhomas Fazelus and repeated by Schenck in the 16th century.<sup>182</sup>

**69 1500.** The wife of Kristel Losel who lived at Rotenpuch near the Italian border in Tirol became the mother of nine children from one pregnancy. She gave birth to four children on 22 October, to three more on 29 October, and to two more on 4 November, 1500. Five of the children were males, and four were females. She was the famous "Dorothea" whose extraordinary fecundity was also reported by Pico della Mirandola. Since the second pregnancy of Dorothea resulted in eleven children at one birth, further details of her achievements are given in this paper under No. 75.

**70 1579.** In the year of 1579 when Pedro Pablo Pereda published his *Scholia*<sup>183</sup> in Barcelona there was still alive a stocky, obese Spanish woman named Salustra

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In other words, by the middle of the 17th century, the legend (or historical tradition?) let all nine "porcelets" grow up into strong big men.

<sup>181</sup> WITKOWSKI, *loc. cit.*, see Footnote 178; pp. 20-21.

<sup>182</sup> RHOMAS FAZELUS, *De rebus Siculis*, Lib. 6; quoted by SCHENCK, *loc. cit.*, Frankf., 1609, p. 644.

<sup>183</sup> PEREDA P. P., *Scholia in Mich. Joh. Paschali Methodum curandi*. Barcelona, 1579, Lib. 1, Chapt. 59, Scholion. The case was also quoted by SCHENCK (*loc. cit.*, p. 564 and 645): "Vivit adhuc hoc anno qui est 1579 mulier Salustra nomine, obesa et staturae humilis, quae novem uno partu enixa est, quod non semel sed bis ei evenisse certissime scio".

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who gave birth to nine children at once in two successive pregnancies. Nothing was said of the further fate of the infants.

**71 1684.** It was in 1684 that the *Journal des Savants* inserted the following short note on plural births. A woman of Xaintonge (i. e., Saintonge province) had nine well-formed children at one birth and the same woman gave birth to eleven at once one year before. This extraordinary event was told to Dr Seignette, physician of La Rochelle who then wrote a letter about it to Mr Lémery for the journal. Immediately after the notice there follows in the paper a reference to the House of Porcelets (see Case No. 66) with a comment that the extraordinary fact in the birth reported by Seignette was that it happened to the same woman in two consecutive pregnancies.<sup>184</sup>

It is not clear from Seignette's report whether this event happened in his own time or several centuries before. The reference to "Xaintonge" is also disturbing since the ancient province of Saintonge ceased to exist as a separate district in 1372. The mention of the Porcelets is a further indication that Dr Seignette's case is perhaps a historically dislocated medieval legend.

**72 1890.** The Japanese newspaper *Hakubun zassi* reported in its 5 November issue in 1890 that according to a Brazilian German daily paper the wife of a laborer there gave birth to nine children at once and that the mother and children were well. The notice of the Japanese daily was reprinted in medical and other scientific journals<sup>185</sup> without further verification.

#### V. Decuplets

**73 12th cent. A. D.** Reference is made here to Abú'l-Qásim, of Cordova, who in discussing the possible number of fetuses which could develop in the uterus expressed the opinion that even ten fetuses might be formed during a single pregnancy (Cf. Footnote 40 for quotation from his surgical work).

#### VI. Undecuplets

**74 ca 800 A. D.** An allusion should be made here to the legend of origin of the House of Guelphes in which eleven boys, born from the same pregnancy, were to be drowned by the Countess of Altdorf who wanted to keep only another (the twelfth) of the set. Since the legend actually is about a set of twelve infants it is mentioned later under No. 79.

**75 1501.** Dorothea, the German girl who was the wife of Kristel Losel and has

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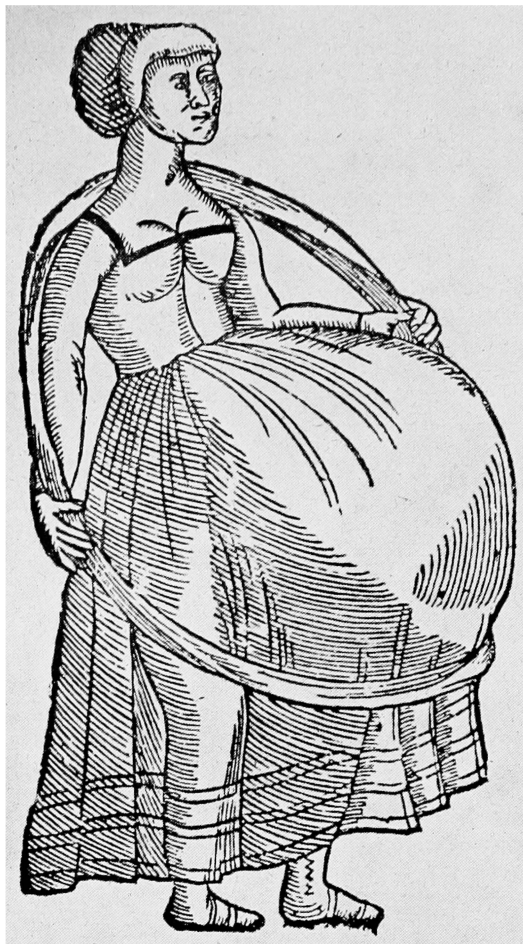
<sup>184</sup> *Journal des savans*, Par., 1684, p. 92. Also reprinted in *Collection Académique*, Dijon, 1755, 1: 300. The date of the original communication is 1 May 1684.

<sup>185</sup> *Hakubun zassi*, 1890, Nov. 5. See also Hasiba Y.: in the *Bull. Tokyo Anthropol. Soc.*, vol. 8, No. 84, 233-6. Also Sisido: in *Iji sinbun*, Tokyo, 1901, 862 etc.

been already mentioned as the mother of the set of nine children of Case No. 69 in the year 1500, also gave birth to eleven children in 1501, according to contemporary statements. Apparently, Francesco Pico della Mirandola was the first who described the fecundity of Dorothea in a poem.<sup>186</sup> All later writers referred to him as their sources.<sup>187</sup> A seemingly independent description of the same event is contained in Heinrich Deichsel's *Chronik der Stadt Nürnberg*.<sup>188</sup> According to this source the eleven children were delivered at about 10 days distance: eight on the 15th of November, 1501, and three on the 25th of November. Six were boys and five were girls.

The Nürnberg Chronicle names "Rotenpuch am Pas Lueg a. d. Salzach in Tirol" as the place of residence of the Losel family. The woman's Christian name was not mentioned by this document. It was added that her first pregnancy was with twins; the second pregnancy was then evidently the one with the nine infants, and the third was with the eleven infants. Della Mirandola, and many others after him referred to this woman as "Dorothea, mulier quaedam Germana" who somehow lived in Italy.

The Deichsel Chronicle of Nürnberg mentions that "her belly was



<sup>186</sup> PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA F., *Opera omnia*. Reggio Emilia, 1506. The Hymn which contains the Dorothea story was reprinted by Conrad Lycosthenes in his *Prodigiorum & c. Chronicon* Basel, 1557, p. 644.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. PARÉ A., *The works*. Lond., 1678, on p. 592, with woodcut. Also ALDROVANDI U., *Monstrorum historia*. Bologna, 1642, p. 52. Also many modern writers.

<sup>188</sup> DEICHSEL H., *Chronik der Stadt Nürnberg* (1875). This volume forms Band 5, of the series *Chronik der fränkischen Städte*. Also quoted by SCHLIEBEN (*loc. cit.*, p. 236).

The illustration which was first used by Lycosthenes for indication of plural births; later it was used by Paré to show the size of the abdomen of Dorothea (Case No. 75) (Reprod. from Paré's surgical work; Dordrecht, 1592).

one Munich ell and two fingers broad at the navel".<sup>189</sup> Paré wrote that "she was forced to bear up her bellie, which laie upon her knees, with a broad and large scarf tied about her neck".<sup>190</sup> A primitive woodcut showing a pregnant woman with a sling around her neck to hold up her enormously enlarged belly was first used as an illustration of *any* reported case of plural pregnancy in the book of Lycosthenes in 1557 in which the schematic woodcut was repeated seven times as an easily recognizable mark of the references to plural births.<sup>191</sup> It was reprinted in an enlarged form in the works of Paré where it already was considered as a sort of portrait of Dorothea.<sup>192</sup> Aldrovandi marked his fullpage woodcut as "Icon mulieris sobole multiplici gravidae".<sup>193</sup>

76 1684. Reference is made here to Case No. 71 where a Saintonge woman was mentioned as the mother who has given birth first to eleven, next to nine children at one birth as reported to the Journal des savants of 1684 by Dr Seignette, physician of La Rochelle.<sup>194</sup>

### VII. Duodecuplets

77 4th cent. B. C. It was stated in the 7th book of the History of Animals of Aristoteles (or rather, of Pseudo-Aristoteles) that "... a case has occurred in which twelve imperfect embryos have been produced at one time".<sup>195</sup> This statement whether by Aristoteles himself or by someone else assuming his name was later accepted by many, among them Albertus Magnus (1193-1280) in his own *Historia Animalium*.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Footnote 188. "Jir pauch ist gewesen von nabel einer Münchner elen und zwen vinger breit". An English ell is ca 45 inches.

<sup>190</sup> PARÉ, *loc. cit.*, p. 592.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. LYCOSTHENES C., *Prodigiorum & c. chronicon*. Basel, 1557. Lycosthenes puts the date of Dorothea at A. D. 1499.

It was Lint in 1935 (*cf. loc. cit.*) who asserted that the Paré woodcut of Dorothea originated in the work of Lycosthenes. I found the woodcut repeated in this work on the following pages: a) p. 284 with the story of Algemund, the Lombard King; b) p. 405 to the year of 1126 A. D. when quadruplets were born in Brabant; c) p. 441 to the year 1269 A. D.; d) p. 509 to A. D. 1499 with the Dorothea story of Della Mirandola; e) p. 590 to the year 1545-50 with reference to retention of foetus; f) p. 592 to the year of 1546 in reference to the faked pregnancy of Margaret Ulmer; and g) p. 644 to the year 1554 in reference to the Gislinger twins and quintuplets in Bern.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Footnote 190.

<sup>193</sup> ALDROVANDI U., *loc. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Footnote 184. "Monsieur Seignette, médecin de la Rochelle, écrit à M. Lémery qu'on lui a appris qu'une femme de Xaintonge est accouché de neuf enfans ... & que cette même femme avoit eu l'année précédente onze enfans d'une seule couche...".

<sup>195</sup> ARISTOTELES, *The History of Animals*; transl. by R. Cresswell. Lond., 1883, p. 186 (Book Seven, Chapter Five).

<sup>196</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Historia animalium*; ed. H. Stadler. 2v. Münster, 1920 (Forms Bd xv & xvi of Beitr. z. Gesch. d. Philos. d. Mittelalters). The reference is in Book 9, Tract. 1, Chapter 5 (on p. 695 of this edition).

**78** *1st cent. A. D.* Another classical authority who supported the possibility of an abortion of duodecuplets is Plinius, sen. He himself accepted this knowledge as a tradition. On the other hand, later writers as Paré and Aldrovandi in the late 16th century took Pliny's words as evidence for the existence of duodecuplet abortions.<sup>197</sup>

**79** *ca 800 A. D.* The medieval legend of origin of the House of Guelphs goes back to about the 9th century A. D. The ancient Swabish house of the Guelphs had its tribal estates north of the Bodensee, in and around Altdorf, Ravensburg, Weingarten, Inntal, Norital, etc. According to the legend, Irmentrude the Countess of Altdorf, gave birth to twelve children at once while her husband, Count Isenbert, was away on a long-lasting mission. The duodecuplets were a sort of punishment because she scolded a poor mother of triplets for her loose morals. The Countess Irmentrude was shocked by the 12 newborn infants since they proved her own lustiness according to her own views on reproduction. Therefore, she requested the midwife that she should throw eleven of the infants into the Scherz River while she should keep and nourish the twelfth. When the midwife wanted to drown the infants she met the Count; at his questioning she told that she wanted to drown a few newborn "welf"-s (meaning puppies in her language). The count wanted to keep some of the puppies as hunting hounds, discovered the truth, and ordered the midwife to feed and rear all twelve of the infants. When they grew six years old the count took them to the castle, pardoned his wife, and ordered that the boys should be called not counts of Altdorf but Guelphs. For the memory of this event he built a cloister of nuns in Altdorf.<sup>198</sup>

It is hard to reestablish the historical truth about the origin of this noble house. The Guelph name dates back to the ninth century when there was a Count Guelph or Welf whose daughter Judith became the wife of Emperor Louis the Pious in 819. The legendary origin of the family name was also mentioned by such biographical reference works as the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*.<sup>199</sup>

**80** *13th to 14th ct. A. D.* A late medieval version of the Guelph legend is attached to a French castle and its lady. The lady of the castle of Batie d'Urfé, in the county of Le Forez, had 12 children at one birth as a punishment of God. Some of them she gave to a servant who was supposed to drown them in the Lignon, a river emptying into the Upper Loire. She was found out; a great reconciliation

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<sup>197</sup> PLINIUS, *Historia naturalis libri xxxvii*. 5 vol. Lpz., Tauchnitz, 1830. The reference is in Book Seven, Chapter Nine (p. 12 of vol. 2 of my copy of Pliny): "Extat in monumentis etiam medicorum, et quibus talia consecrari curae fuit, uno abortu duodecim puerperia egesta".

Cf. Also ALDROVANDI (*loc. cit.*, p. 52); PARÉ (*loc. cit.*, p. 591).

<sup>198</sup> BRUSCH K. (1518-1557 or 1559), *De monasterio Vinearum*. The legend was also quoted by Schenck (*loc. cit.*), p. 643, and by other later authors as M. G. LEVI, *Dizionario classico di medicina* (15v. Venez., G. Antonelli, 1834: under article "Gemello").

<sup>199</sup> *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*. Lpz., v. 41: Welf I, p. 666: "An den Namen der Familie knüpft die auch anderwärts wiederkehrende Sage von elf Knäblein, welche die Mutter ertränken lassen will, die damit beauftragte Alte dem Vater als junge Wölfein ausgibt".



and happy ending followed. The legend was described in a medieval Gothic manuscript which was kept at the abbey of Sainte-Claire de Montbrizon until 1851 when it was found and described by Aimé Vingtrinier (1812-1903), well-known French local historian.<sup>200</sup>

**81 14th cent.** Matthias Golancevius, Bishop of Poland under the rule of King Vladislav (the Second? 1386?) said that he was the only surviving member of a duodecuplet birth. The reference to his unusual origin was made in Book 11 of Martin Cromer's Polish History published in 1589.<sup>201</sup> It was then repeated by later writers.<sup>202</sup>

**82 ca 1530.** In the town of Valencia a woman gave birth to twelve children at once. Somebody told the news to Cristobal de Vega (1510-1573), the physician of Charles V., who included the event in his work on medicine.<sup>203</sup>

#### VIII. Tridecuplets (13 at one birth)

**83 13th cent. A. D.** A few legends of origin are connected with the name of the House of Trazégnies in France, also with the name of a village called Treize-nés, North-East of Hainaut, in the Charleroi District. The Guelph legend is almost repeated (see Case No. 79), with the number of children now raised to thirteen and the scenery shifted to France. It was also stated that one of the thirteen was Gilles, seigneur of Trazégnies who went to Palestine with the crusade of St Louis.<sup>204</sup>

**84 1811, 9 May.** Thirteen children were born to an Italian woman in Roma on 9 May 1811. The infants were delivered within the time of one hour. The attending midwife called an obstetrician to help. There were six boys and seven girls, all born alive, and all well formed but of small size. All were baptized, but thereafter they died and were put into specimen jars in alcohol. The case was reported in the May issue of the *Moniteur* of 1811, published in Roma. An issue of the paper was found by a certain Peter Radics in the Laibach Library, and he reproduced the Italian text in German.

Two quarto-size German translations of Radics were reprinted in the reputable medical journal called the *Gynekologische Rundschau* and commented on by Valenta von Marchthurn who accepted the birth as authentic.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>200</sup> VINGTRINIER M. E. A., *Histoire des journaux de Lyon*. 1852 His description of the manuscript is referred to by Bastin (*loc. cit.*, 282-98).

<sup>201</sup> MARTIN CROMER (1512-1589), *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum libri xxx*. Köln, 1589; p. 197. Mentioned in Book 11.

<sup>202</sup> E. g., SCHENCK (*loc. cit.*, p. 643); "Matthias Golancevius, etc."

<sup>203</sup> VEGA C. DE, *Artis medendi libri*. Lyon, 1565 (in sect. 10, chapt. 23). Also reprinted shortly by SCHENCK (*loc. cit.*, p. 645).

<sup>204</sup> VINCHANT (1580-1635), *Annales de la Province et comté d'Haynau* (quoted by BASTIN, *loc. cit.*, p. 291). He puts the place of birth in Bruxelles, and the date at 1276 A. D., strangely coinciding with the date of the multiple birth of the Countess of Hennenberg (which see later). See also WITKOWSKI, *Histoire des accouchements & c.*, Par., 1887 (p. 256).

<sup>205</sup> VALENTA V. MARCHTHURN A., *Eine Geburt von 13 Kindern*. Gyn. Rdsch., Berl., 1908, 2: 192. This is an entirely forgotten report, formerly not quoted by anyone. The case would be easily traceable in Roma.

### IX. Quindecuplets (15 at one birth)

**85** *12th cent.* Reference is again made to the Arab surgical work of Abú-l-Qásim (see Footnote 40) who asserted that one woman had aborted 15 well-formed fetuses at one single delivery.<sup>206</sup>

**86** *1855.* The following case is the observation of a veterinarian, Dr Kleinschmidt, student of a military veterinary school, who witnessed the plural birth in a cow while he was staying on vacation in Dauer bei Prenzlau. On the 25th of December the peasant Engle saw his cow deliver a healthy single calf. The cow remained sick and had to be slaughtered. When she was opened, fifteen *more* calves were found partly in the uterus partly in the vagina.

Kleinschmidt was not present at the autopsy, but came on the 27th of December when he still saw eight or ten of the small calves; the rest were eaten by the dogs. The fetuses were similar in size, most of them not larger than a large rat, some of them as small as a cattle fetus of 6 weeks. He searched for eyewitnesses and found five adults who were present when the cow was slaughtered. The normal calf was also killed.<sup>207</sup>

### X. Sedecuplets (16 at one birth)

**87** *1485 A. D.* This is a peculiar case in which 16 infants of human shape were born at once together with a 17th fetus which, according to the old sources which describe it, looked more like a horse. Each fetus was the size of a human palm, and each was alive. All were enveloped in a single sac. The mother was Bartholomea, the wife of Gianantonio Dei Bocanigris. The event was told by two different bishops, by Agostino Giustiniano who himself described the prodigious birth,<sup>208</sup> and by Alessandro de Campo Fregoso, bishop of Ventimiglia who told it under oath to Berengario Da Carpi, the commentator of Mondino's *Anatomy*.<sup>209</sup> The 19th century Guzzoni laughs at the report "con tutti il rispetto all'autore."<sup>210</sup>

<sup>206</sup> In his *Kitáb at-tasrif*, Book 2, Chapt. 75: "Je tiens pour certain qu'une femme a avorté de sept et une autre de quinze, tous formés. Cela est l'œuvre de Dieu...".

<sup>207</sup> KLEINSCHMIDT, *Grosse Fruchtbarkeit von Kühen*. *Magazin f. Tierheilk.*, 1857, 23: 125-6. This is indeed a case of 16-plets. It was also quoted by FLEMING G., *Textbook of veterinary obstetrics* (Lond., 1878, p. 143).

<sup>208</sup> AUGUSTINO GIUSTINIANO, *Annales Ianuenses*, Lib. 5 (quoted by SCHENCK: *loc. cit.*, p. 645.)

<sup>209</sup> DA CARPI B., *Comment. in Mundini anat.*, Bologna, 1521: "Et dixit mihi fide dignissimus Dnus Alexander de Campo Fregoso Episcopus Ventimiliensis et iuravit supra pectus suum fide Episcopali: quod una mulier lamiae (? : Bartholomea in other sources) de egregia familia de Buccanigris peperit sexdecim foetus humanos magnitudine palmi, qui omnes habebant formam humanam, peperit etiam unum animal habens formam equinam, et etiam habebat motum, et omnes septemdecim... erans involuti in una secundina".

<sup>210</sup> GUZZONI (*loc. cit.*, p. 495).

## XI. Twenty or more offsprings at one birth

88 *4th ct. B. C.* According to some recent authors<sup>210</sup> the books of the History of Animals are supposed to have a reference to a Greek woman who gave birth to twenty children at once. I could not find this statement in this work of Aristoteles, and in view of the pseudo-Aristotelian doctrine on the capacity of human wombs it seems to me unlikely that the philosopher ever made such a statement. Indeed, no one in antiquity spoke of more than twelve fetuses which could be delivered in one single abortion.<sup>211</sup>

89 *11. ct. A. D.* The belief in excessively high conceptions and an almost limitless number of fetuses produced by a single pregnancy originated in the times of the western advancement of the Arabs and the eastern diffusion of the western culture. Often it was a misunderstanding or a mistake in writing which served as a basis for reports on births with a stupendously exaggerated number of offspring.

It was the famous Arab physician, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980-1037) who in his work on the History of Animals — an imitation of the Aristotelian books on the same subject — stated that a woman aborted twenty two fetuses at once, and another delivered seventy fetuses.<sup>212</sup> Two hundred years later, in the 13th century, the statement of Ibn Sina was quoted by Albertus Magnus according to a contemporary manuscript,<sup>213</sup> and it was included in later works on reproduction and on monsters published in the 16th century.<sup>214</sup> But Pietro di Abano's copy of the Ibn Sina manuscript had the figure 22 distorted to 78, and Schenck had 33 as the number of fetuses printed in his collection.<sup>215</sup> To make things worse, the 20th century Schlieben ascribed the statement of the Arab physician to Albertus Magnus himself, which is a serious historical error.<sup>216</sup>

90 *ca 1276 A. D.* In the thirteenth century the most celebrated naturalist was Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), Dominican monk whose work is also called the History of Animals (*Historia animalium*), a peculiar mixture of animal and human biology and medicine.<sup>217</sup> In the 5th chapter of the First Tract of the Ninth Book,

<sup>210</sup> SCHLIEBEN E., *loc. cit.*, p. 233 & c.

<sup>211</sup> ARISTOTELES, *History of Animals*, Book VII, Chapt. 5: where you find reference to the 12-plet abortion.

<sup>212</sup> IBN SINA (980-1037), *De animalibus*; transl. by Michael Scott (19 libri). 54 p. n. p., n. d. (ca 1499 ?). I relied upon the quotation which Albertus Magnus had. The statement is in Book 9 of the Arab work.

<sup>213</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS (1193-1280), *Historia animalium* (Stadler ed.; Münst., 1920) p. 693 etc.

<sup>214</sup> ALDROVANDI, *loc. cit.*, p. 53; has 22 at once.

<sup>215</sup> SCHENCK, *loc. cit.*, p. 642: "Mulier quaedam abortivit xxxiii (Petrus Aponensis legit LXXVIII) formatos uti a fide dignis accepi" (IBN SINA).

<sup>216</sup> SCHLIEBEN, *loc. cit.*: The statements of Ibn Sina and of Albertus Magnus are mixed up, and misunderstood.

<sup>217</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Historia animalium libri*. Ed. H. Stadler. 2 v. Münster, 1920 (Forms Bd xv & xvi of Beitr. z. Gesch. d. Philos. d. Mittelalters) Liber 9, Tractatus 1, Caput 5: De geminis (on p. 693, etc.).

Albert the Great discussed plural pregnancies, and referred to the experience of a “truthful and expert physician” in Germany who mentioned various instances of fertility from his own practice.

Beside the German noble woman who in twelve successive births, each time quintuplets, has delivered a total of 60 infants the German physician — who belonged to the circle of friends around Albert the Great — had also another noble lady among his patients who once aborted a mass that looked like lots of worms to her. The doctor was present and examined the mass. It consisted of 150 worm-like individual pieces, each having the size of the human little finger; they had a kind of human form, but no eyes were present, and the fingers and toes appeared as small capillaries. They were put in a basin, and several of them moved.<sup>218</sup> The case was later quoted by Aldrovandi and Schenck with some distortion.<sup>219</sup>

I have no doubt that the German noble lady of this story is identical with the Countess of Hennenberg, the unfortunate woman whose abnormal parturition occurred in 1276, just four years before the death of Albert the Great. It could have been her physician who informed the Dominican monk of the unusual features of the delivery which, in later years and in later hands, were changed into a fabulous legend as described below.

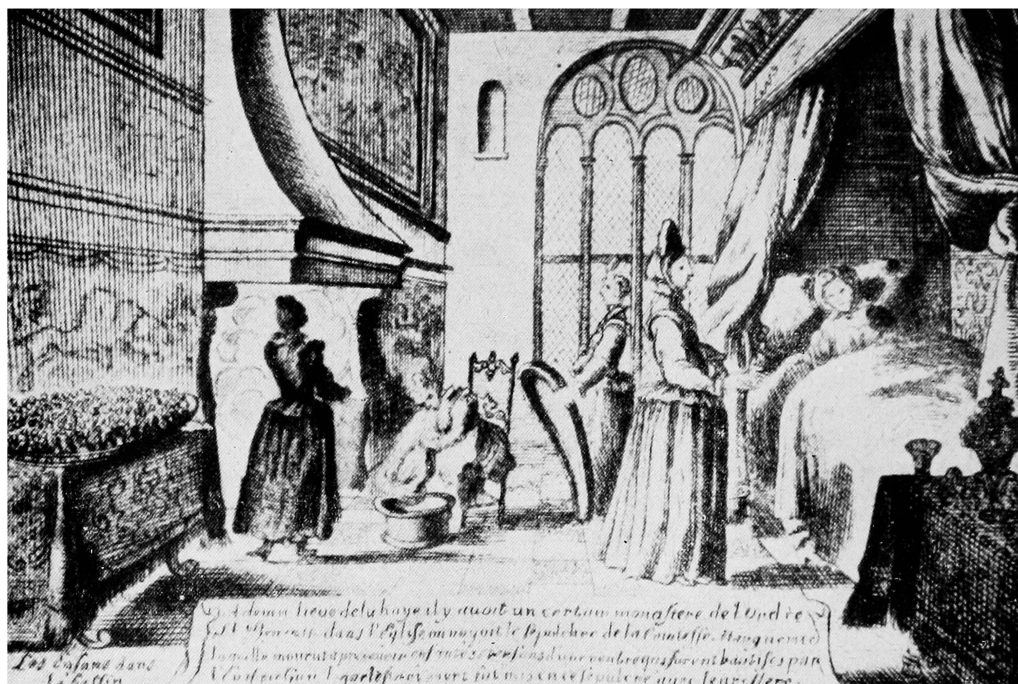
**91 1276.** Margaretha, or Machteld van Hennenberg, known also as the Countess of Holland or of Hennenberg, was a historical person. She was the daughter of Count Floris IV, of Holland, and of Machteld (Mathilda) of Brabant. She was the spouse of Count Herman of Hennenberg. According to the legend she met a poor beggar woman who, with her twins in arm, asked for alms. The lady scolded her for her twins, the proofs of her immoral life; then, the beggar cursed the lady that she should have “as many children as there are days in the year”.<sup>220</sup> On 25

<sup>218</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *loc. cit.*, p. 693, line 17 etc.: “et narratum est mihi a veridico et experto medico, quod quaedam nobilis mulier in Germania peperit sexaginta filios qualibet vice quinque, et nullus eorum venit ad aetatem dimidii anni”. Also Line 24 & c.: “... Et narravit mihi medicus, de quo supra fecimus mentionem, quod ipse vocatus fuit ad curam cuiusdam mulieris nobilis, quae fecerat aborsum de centum et quinquaginta simul, et putabat se vermes emisisse de matrice, et cum aperirentur telae, inventi sunt pueri figurati habentes quantitatem, sicut est auricularis digitus hominis: et plures eorum habebant motum contractionis et dilatationis et plura alia signa vitae, et in pelvi omnes jacebant ante oculos eius, et erant oculi eorum incompleti, et digiti manus quasi capillares, et similiter digiti pedum”.

<sup>219</sup> ALDROVANDI, *loc. cit.*, p. 53. SCHENCK, *loc. cit.*, p. 643.

<sup>220</sup> Here is the version of the legend according to the French obstetrician, MAURICEAU (*Traité d. mal. d. femmes grosses*, éd. 6., Par., 1712, v. 1: 103): “Mais j’estime pour miracle l’histoire ou le conte de cette Dame Marguerite Comtesse d’Hollande, qui en l’an 1276 accoucha de trois cens soixante et cinque enfans, en un seule et même jour, qui reçurent tous le Baptême, et moururent le même jour aussi-bien que leur mère: ce qui lui arriva, dit-on, par l’imprécation d’une pauvre femme, qui souhaite qu’elle en pût faire autant qu’il y a de jours en l’an, à cause que lui demandant l’aumône, en lui représentant sa misère et celle de deux enfans jumeaux qu’elle portoit entre ses bras, cette Dame lui répondit, que si elle en souffroit de l’incommodité, elle avoit eue du plaisir à les faire, lui reprochant aussi qu’elle ne pouvoit pas avoir conçu ces deux enfans d’un seul homme”.

March, 1276, on Good-Friday she delivered a great number of "infants" at 9 A.M., but all of them died after baptism, together with their mother. The date of birth as well as the number of the children is differently reported according to the dif-



The imaginary scene of the birth of the 365 children of the Countess of Hennenberg; after an anonymous 16th cent. engraving (Repr. also in Aesculape, Par., 1929, 19: p. 288).

ferent narrators. Even the scene of the events and the personalities were shifted by some sources.

It was stated that the fetuses were not larger than a thumb, or a mouse, or a roach. The number of fetuses was given as 350, 365, 366, even 1514.<sup>221</sup> The date is correctly 1276, but it was also given as 1214, 1266, 1273, 1278, even 1313.<sup>222</sup> The age of the mother was given as 40, 42, and even 52 years. It is mentioned here

<sup>221</sup> SCHENCK (*loc. cit.*, p. 643) refers to various sources which make several events out of one; cf. also *Ibid.*, p. 562-563. Variants: a) Mechtild, 1514 children (after Aventinus, i. e. Joh. Thurmair, of Abensberg); b) 350 infants (after Joh. Spiesshammer (Cuspianus)); c) Margarita, 364 infants, 42 years old, in 1276; d) see No. 92 & 93.

<sup>222</sup> MAUBRAY J., *The female physician*, 1724; has 1278 for the year. It was repeated by FOY (*loc. cit.*, 1890, v. 50: 304-8).

that by a strange coincidence this disputed period has produced other evidences in other countries for an increased degree of fertility. There was, for instance, Antonia, the famous prostitute in Modena, who in 1277 was about 40 years old and was already the mother of 42 children according to Tommasino De Bianchi<sup>223</sup> and Petrarca.<sup>224</sup>

According to the basic legend 182 of the infants were males, 182 females, and one was a hermaphrodite. They were put into separate basins during the baptism, and all the males were named Jan, and all the females Elizabeth. The ceremony was performed by Guido or Otto, Bishop of Utrecht, the uncle of the countess. The event occurred in Loosduinen, a village, ca 7-8 Km southwest of 's-Gravenhage, near the coast. The countess and the children were buried in the local church which was part of a cloister of nuns. The house of the countess was destroyed as a second Sodome.<sup>225</sup>

It was stated by the 16th century Battista Fregoso<sup>226</sup> that the fetuses were preserved up to the time of Charles V (1500-1558) who had them in his hand and admired them. The two basins in which the infants were separated by sex were kept in Loosduinen, on the northern side of the church, where a painted sign in Latin gave a version of the legend and showed the birth scene as late as 1843.<sup>227</sup>

The Church of the cloister in Loosduinen had also the sarcophagus of the countess, but the inscription of the stone coffin does not tell anything beyond the short

<sup>223</sup> DE BIANCHI T., *Cronaca Modenese*. Parma, 1867 (Forms v. 6, of Ser. d. Cronache, of Monumenti di Storia patria delle provincie modenesi); on p. 80 of vol. 5.

<sup>224</sup> PETRARCA, *Vita de' pontefici*. Firenze, 1478 (on inserted leave betw. p. 80 and 81).

<sup>225</sup> AA J. J. VAN DER, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden*. Haarlem, 1867, v. 8: pt. 1, 592 etc. (under HENNENBERG).

<sup>226</sup> FREGOSO B., *Dictorum factorumque memorabilium libri 9*. Antwerpen, 1565. See also SCIPIONE MERCURIO, *La comare o raccogliatrice...* (Verona, F. de Rossi), 1642, pp. 60-61.

<sup>227</sup> MAUBRAY J., *The female physician* (1724): "The basons are still to be seen in the village church of Losdun, where all strangers go on purpose from the Hague, being reckoned among the great curiosities of Holland". Also in Foy *loc. cit.*, 1890).

For the reproduction of the picture see the enclosed illustration which was reproduced from the article of J. G. de Lint (Ned. tschr. geneesk., 1935, 79: 4648).

A Dutch translation of the Latin sign was published in Aa's Biogr. woordenb. d. Nederl., Haarlem, 1867, v. 8, pt 1, pp. 593 & 594. The Latin inscription is quoted by Guzzoni (*loc. cit.*, 1889, p. 491) as follows:

"En tibi monstrosum nimis et memorabile factum  
Quale nec a mundi conditione datum.

Margareta Hermanni, Comitissae Hennebergiae uxor, Quarti Florentii Comitissae Hollandiae et Selandiae filia, Gulielmi regis Romanorum ac postea Caesaris seu Gubernatoris Imperii, atque Altheiae Comitissae Hannoninae soror; cujus patruus episcopus Traiectensis, ... Haec autem illustrissima Comitissa anno XL circiter nata, ipso die Parasceues, nonam circiter horam, anno MCCLXXVI trecentos et LXV enixa est liberos, qui prius a Guidone suffraganeo Traiectensi omnes in duabus ex oere pelvibus baptizati sunt, quorum masculi quotquot erant, Joannes, puellae autem omnes, Elisabethae vocatae sunt: Qui simul omnes cum matre, uno eodemque die fati concesserunt, atque in hoc Lausdunensi Templo sepulti jacent... (At bottom):

Haec lege mox anima lector stupefactus abibis".

biographical data of the countess.<sup>228</sup> An additional outgrowth of the legend stated that the Castle Pouderoijen (also named Puideroijen or Puirroije) had also the name "Arx puerorum" (: Fortress of the children) because, in memory of the countess, it had as many windows as the countess had children.<sup>229</sup>

It seems to me that the first account of the extraordinary abortion of the Countess of Hennenberg is contained in the work of Albertus Magnus (see Case No. 90) though she is not mentioned by name. The legend probably started in the 14th century when the canon Johannes of Beka (died 1394) put it in writing as he heard it,<sup>230</sup> adding to the original story a few wrong explanations of his own. He did not take in consideration that in the 13th century Netherlands the calendar year began with Easter Sunday; hence, a cursing on Good Friday by the beggar woman could have meant twins or triplets since there were only 2-3 days left of the old year.<sup>231</sup> Another possible explanation might be that the Countess of Hennenberg's case was an example of *hydatid mole*.

While there was no doubt about the existence of the persons mentioned in the legend the attitude of the physicians and laymen varied toward the authenticity of the birth. Westerbaan, a physician, just looked at the story as a good topic for one of his poems in 1654,<sup>232</sup> while Pieter Schrijver (: Schriverius) mentioned it as a fable, too.<sup>233</sup> Theodor Kerckring (ca. 1670) held the same view.

<sup>228</sup> SCHRIJVER P. (1576-1660), *Inferioris Germaniae Provinciarum Unitarum antiquitates*. 4 pts. Leiden, 1611. Also quoted by BASTIN (*loc. cit.*) and LINT (*loc. cit.*). The inscription was the following:

"Ista tenet fossa matronae nobilis ossa  
Quae, dum vivebat, Lausdunis laeta manebat.  
Atque vocabatur Margreta, quiete fruatur,  
Quae fuit Germana Wilhelmi illustris  
Regis Germaniae, et Comitissa in Hennebergh  
Quae obiit anno Domini MCCLXXXVI ipso die  
Parasceves hora nona. orate pro ea."

<sup>229</sup> MATTHAEUS A. (1635-1710), *Veteris aevi analecta* ('s-Gravenhage, 1698-1710, v. 1: 33) Cf. also AA's *Biogr. woordenb. d. Nederl.* v. 8, p. 594.

<sup>230</sup> BEKA J., *Chronicon Episcoporum Ultrajectensium* (up to 1393) included in v. 5 of A. MATTHAEUS, *Analecta* (8. ed.).

<sup>231</sup> See SCHLIEBEN (*loc. cit.*, p. 235). A slightly different chronological explanation was offered by the February 1758 issue of the *Journal des savans*. The journal stated that the year in Holland used to begin with 25 March; on 26 March, 1276, when the countess delivered her babies, the year was still 2 days old. In other words, the cursing of the beggar woman meant: "I wish you would also have twins." Cf. WITKOWSKI, *Curiosités & c.*, Par., 1892, 21-23; also his *Hist. d. accouch.*, Par., 1887, p. 258.

<sup>232</sup> WESTERBAAN (MD 1622): *Ockenburg* was the title of the poem. The poem gives the beggar's cursing as follows:

"... De Hemel wille gonnen  
dat soo veel kinderen mevrouwe teffens baar,  
gelijker dagen syn in een volkomen jaar."

Cf. reprint in LINT (*loc. cit.*).

<sup>233</sup> Cf. *loc. cit.*

A 1683 “fugitive leaf” which was issued on occasion of a quadruplet birth also made reference to the countess of Hennenberg with the remark that it should be left to the reader’s discretion whether he would be taken in by such a story. Dr Ludolp Smids, the coworker of Stephan Blankaart, described the Loosduinen birth in the *Schatkamer der Nederlandsche Oudheden* (Amst., 1711, p. 210). He held the birth possible; he even added the brief account of an ovary with a very large number of ova,<sup>234</sup> which in his opinion would make the story of the countess more acceptable.

92 1269 to 1296. The legend of the Countess of Hennenberg was repeated up to the 17th century in many different variations, to be listed subsequently. None of the variants have any authenticity. They are listed here in order to make their existence and relationship clear and to refute their sources.

One of the variants of the legend narrates that Margaret, wife of Count Virboslaus, gave birth to 35 live infants on 20 January 1296 near Krakow. Martin Cromer, Polish historian, was the first to report this version of the legend in the 16th century.<sup>235</sup> It was then quoted by other 16th century writers, but with several distortions.<sup>236</sup> Undoubtedly, we are dealing with a disguised form of the Hennenberg story.

93 1313 A. D. Another variant of the medieval legend which was first reported by Albert Krantz (died 1517) stated that the Marguerit was the countess of Holstein, and that she gave birth to 364 children at once in the year of 1313.<sup>237</sup> The same story was told by Jobus Fincelius (ca. 1554) so that Marguerit was made a countess in Ireland and the scene of the birth was shifted to Clare County in that country.<sup>238</sup>

94 1546 A. D. There will always be some people who, by the eternal “auri sacra fames”, will fake physical disabilities, monstrosities, and prodigious pregnancies. A very characteristic example of this type of deception was kept for us by Lycosthenes. It happened in 1546 in the German town Esslingen, by the River Neckar in Württemberg. There lived another Margaret, the daughter of Johann Ulmer, who feigned that she was pregnant. Her abdomen was ten palms wide at the girdle, and when one listened over it one could hear murmurs and voices of all

<sup>234</sup> It should be inserted here that the ovarian follicles and the human ova were first described in 1672.

<sup>235</sup> CROMER M., *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum libri 30* (Köln, 1589). There must have been an early edition of this work in 1556 because in 1557 Lycosthenes made a reference to Cromer’s story on p. 441 of his *Prodigiorum chronicon* (Basel, 1557).

<sup>236</sup> LYCOSTHENES (*cf. loc. cit.*) put the date at 1269. Paré had it at the same date (*cf. loc. cit.*, p. 592). SCHENCK had 1270 (*cf. loc. cit.*, p. 643). MARTIN WEINRICH, *De ortu monstrorum commentarius* (Breslau, 1595) refers to the case as a 36-fetus parturition of a woman which he found in certain Silesian annals (p. 219 of his work). *Cf.* also SCHLIEBEN (*loc. cit.*, p. 234) where the name of the Countess is given as “Virbostai”.

<sup>237</sup> KRANTZ A., *Annales Brunsvicensis* (quoted by Schenck: *loc. cit.*, p. 643). See also his *Chronica Regnorum Aquilonarium*. Strassb., 1546.

<sup>238</sup> FINCEL J. (physician of Zwickau), *Wunderzeichen* (*cf.* SCHLIEBEN, *loc. cit.*).



kinds of animals. She also asserted that about 150 worms and "serpents" came out of her womb, and requested a surgical opening of her abdomen. When she was examined by physicians they found a very skillfully made artificial "abdomen" which was filled with pillows and other light material,<sup>239</sup> over the girl's body.

95 1726 A. D. Another famous hoax in the field of multiple reproduction occurred in 18th century England when Maria Tofts, of Guilford, took advantage of the misbelief of a credulous surgeon that human beings might give birth to animals.<sup>240</sup>

\* \* \*

Thus, we come to the end of a long story in which truth and human errors, wisdom and quackery, sagacity and credulity, history and legend are in a bountiful mixture. The mysteries of human reproduction were slowly unveiled in the late 17th century with the detection of human ovum by Régnier de Graaf in 1672, and of the human spermatozoon by Ludwig Ham and Leeuwenhoeck in 1677.<sup>241</sup> Thereafter, biological speculation turned toward new hypotheses for the explanation of plural conception, plural pregnancy and parturition.

Our modern theories accept the old beliefs of superfecundation and superfetation<sup>242</sup> for mechanisms in plural conceptions and plural births. It is also considered possible that several ova ripen at the same time; that each ovum may have several nuclei; and that a single nucleus may possess a special genetic factor which provides for multiple organizational centers for the development of many embryos during the same pregnancy.

No historical survey is apt to decide problems which belong to the realm of biology. It would be therefore foolish to attempt to answer the two questions which we showed at the start of this article to be the central problems of multiparity, i. e., the maximum capacity of the human uterus and the minimum number

<sup>239</sup> LYCOSTHENES C., *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon*. Basel, 1557, p. 593: "...ventrem magno artificio manibus fabricatum invenierunt, pulvinaribus ac reliqua laevi materia suffultum".

<sup>240</sup> The woman was supposed to give birth to a large number of rabbits. Howard, surgeon of Guilford, and Dr Saint-André, a physician, were fooled and they became the object of many satirical compositions. Two plates of Hogarth (a) Cunicularii, and b) Credulity) depicted Maria Tofts and her rabbits. Cf. WITKOWSKI, *Les accouchements dans les beaux-arts, &c.*, Par., 1894, p. 193, where these plates are reproduced. See also WITKOWSKI, *Histoire des accouchements*. Par., 1887, pp. 248-50.

<sup>241</sup> REGNIER DE GRAAF, *De mulierum organis generationi inservientibus*. Leiden, 1672. Also Letter of Leeuwenhoeck to the President of the Royal Society of London, in *Philos. Transact.*, Lond. (1677 Nov.) No. 142, 1678, Febr., pp. 1040-1046.

<sup>242</sup> See especially KHRENINGER-GUGGENBERGER J. v., *Das Problem der Superfecundatio und Superfetatio, Lösungsversuche und Lösung*. Halle a. S., 1949 (Forms Heft 3, neue Folge, Samml. Abh. Frauenk. & Geburtshilfe). He gives definite evidence of superfecundatio on the basis of factorial analysis of twins. See also STIEVE H., *Ovulation ohne Corpus-luteum-Bildung beim Menschen*. Med. Klin., 1946, p. 479.

of sexual intercourses necessary for a plural conception. Some of the described cases were under the observation of highly respected, truthful contemporary experts, e. g., Case No. 86 in 1855 in which a cow, a normally uniparous animal, aborted 16 small calves at once. Such cases are to be looked upon with the humbleness of a Morgagni who was willing to accept a unique phenomenon of Nature in spite of his incapacity of understanding<sup>243</sup> because Nature does not always lend itself to the measuring rod of the mathematician or to the observing eye of the scientist.

#### SUMMARY

This is a critical, systematic review of all known, historically authentic or legendary cases of births in which the mother delivered six or more fetuses from a single pregnancy. Ninetyfive cases from all centuries are grouped according to the number of fetuses (sextuplets, septuplets, etc.), including a few plural parturitions of uniparous animals. Each case is briefly described, and the original source of its report indicated and, or, evaluated. Many data are included on the development of knowledge on human generation and related topics. The study is based upon primary printed sources and reveals a great number of forgotten and buried cases of, and facts about, plural births.

<sup>243</sup> GIAMBATTISTA MORGAGNI, *De sedibus et causis morborum libri*; ed. J. Radius. Lpz., 1828. Cf. v. 4, p. 454 (Epistola xlviij, art. 54): “Sed nimis multa essent in physicis, quae a me negari deberent, si propterea neganda essent, quia modum, quo fiunt non assequor”.

### RIASSUNTO

Questo lavoro presenta una rivista critica e sistematica di tutti i casi, storicamente autentici o favolosi, nei quali la madre aveva partorito sei o più gemelli da una singola gravidanza. Nella rassegna si trovano 95 casi, ricavati dai secoli del passato, che sono esposti in gruppi secondo il numero dei gemelli (sestupli, settupli, ecc.). Si ricordano anche alcuni casi di parti multipli nelle bestie domestiche.

Le notizie dei singoli casi sono brevi, ma con indicazione e valutazione delle fonti originali e vengono riassunti molti fatti relativi alla evoluzione della conoscenza della generazione umana e di soggetti affini. Basato su fonti bibliografiche di prima mano, questo articolo rivela dati perduti e molti casi di parti plurimi che sono oggi dimenticati.

### RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude offre une revue, critique et systématique, de tous les rapports connus au historien, authentiques ou bien légendaires, des accouchements dans lesquels la mère a donnée naissance à six ou plus d'enfants de la même grossesse. Il y a 95 cas arrangés selon le nombre d'enfants (sestuplets, septuplets, etc.), y compris quelques parturitions plures d'animaux habituellement unipares.

Chaque cas est concisement décrit, avec une indication et évaluation de sources originales historiques, aussi un grand nombre des données se trouve dans le compte rendu, relatives au développement de la science de génération humaine et aux sujets associés. L'étude se fonde sur des sources originales imprimées, révélant de faits divers et de nombreux rapports, aujourd'hui oubliés et perdus, des accouchements plures.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Verfasser gibt eine kritische systematische Uebersicht aller beschriebenen, historisch verlässlichen und fabelhaften Wundergeburten, in welchen die Mutter mit sechs oder mehreren Zwillingen aus derselben Gravidität niedergekommen war. Fünfundneunzig solche Fälle sind hier aus der Litteratur von vielen Jahrhunderten versammelt, einschliesslich wenige Niederkünfte von Haustieren. Die Fälle sind der Kinderzahl gemäss (Sechslinge, Siebenlinge, usw.) geordnet.

Ein kurzer Bericht wird von jeder Geburt, mit Anzeige und Bewertung ihrer respektiven Originalquellen, erstattet. Die Studie enthält viele nützliche Angaben an der Entwicklung der Kenntnisse von Menschenzeugung und von anderen verwandten Tatsachen. Als Grundlage der Studie die wenig bekannten, gedruckten Originalquellen sind bevorzugt, die den Verfasser im stande setzen, eine Reihe von vergessenen und verloren gegangenen Mehrgeburtsergebnissen ins Gedächtnis zu rufen.