




Her “Frigid Herbs”

*The “Secrets” of Contraceptives and
Reproductive Health Networks in Early
Modern England*

Content Warning: abortion, miscarriage,
menstruation, infant death, female body



“I must fill up this osier cage of ours / With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers. / The earth that’s nature’s mother is her tomb. / What is her burying grave, that is her womb; / And from her womb children of divers kinds / We sucking on her natural bosom find, / Many for virtues excellent, / None but for some, and yet all different. / O, fickle is the powerful grace that lies / In plants, herbs, stones and their true qualities...Within the infant rind of this weak flower / Poison hath residence, and medicine power.”

Romeo and Juliet, Act II.3.7-24





Legality and Disorder





*An Act to prevent the Destroying and
Murthering of Bastard Children.*

1624

Biological Life vs. Personhood



Anne, Lady Pope with her children, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger



Raphael Santi, Madonna of the Pinks, 1506, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London

Medical Theory



Adam and Eve, 1504, engraving by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

→ How could you
tell a woman was
pregnant?

→ You couldn't.



Mugwort



Rosemary



Wormwood/
Artemisia



Salvia officinalis L.

Illustration by Otto Carl Berg & Carl Friedrich Schmidt

Sage



Saffron



Pennyroyal

Privacy and Secrets



Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1612-1613

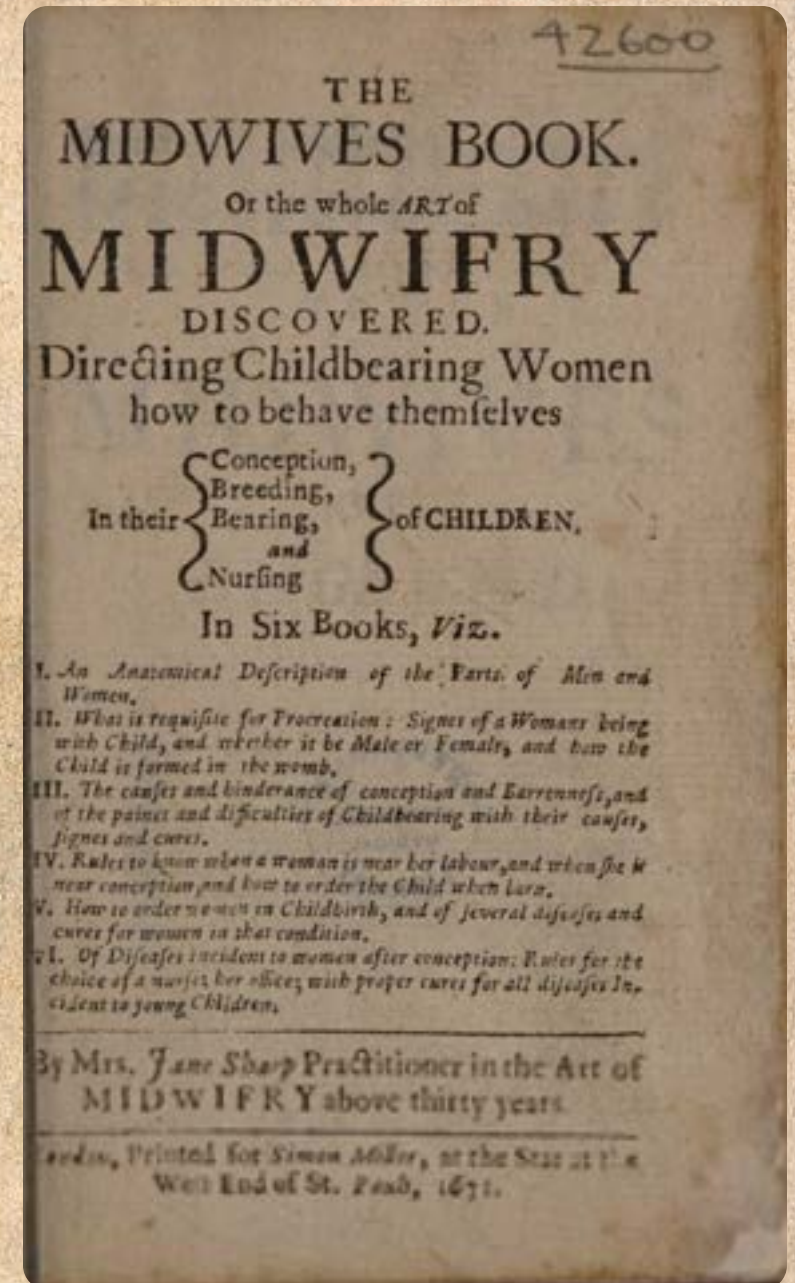


Sofonisba Anguissola, *The Game of Chess*, 1555

Midwives' Manuals

Nicholas Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, 1651

Jane Sharp, *The Midwives' Book*, 1671

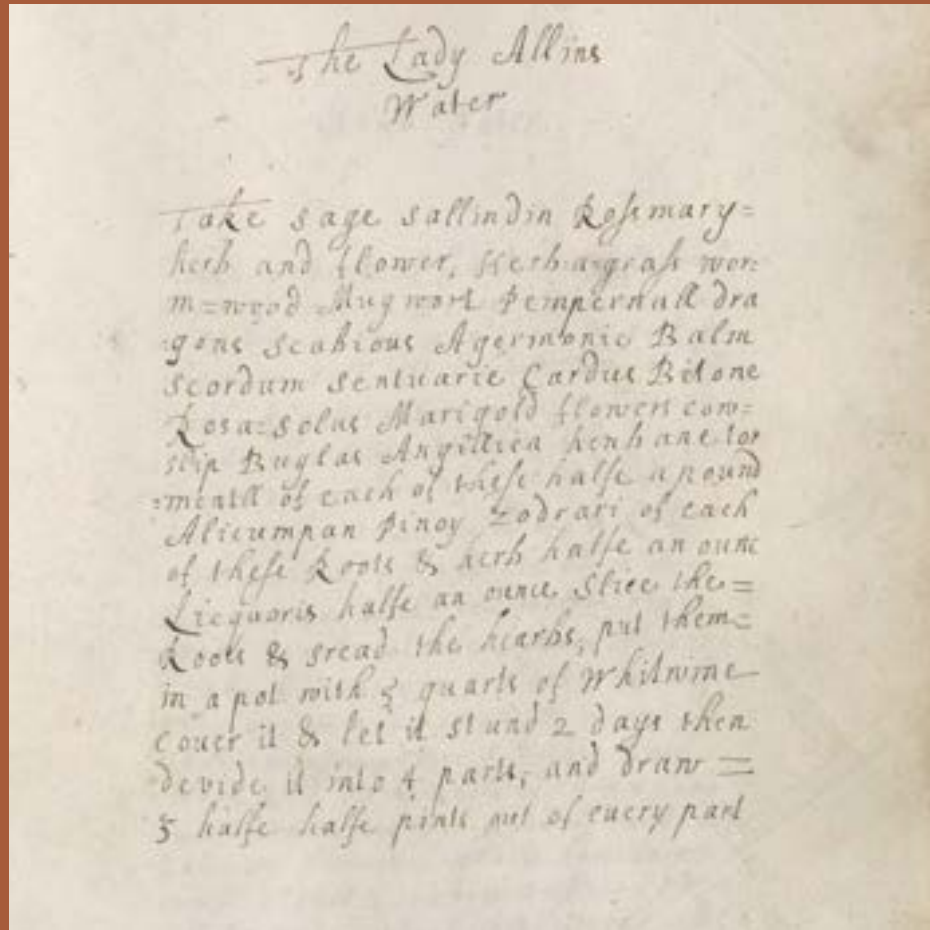


Receipt Books: More than just a cookbook



Receipt Book of Penelope Jephson [manuscript], 1671, 1674/5. Courtesy of Folger Shakespeare Library, LUNA V.a.396

Receipt Books!



"The Lady Allins Water"

Cookbook of Susanna Packe, 1674 v.a.215



"Lady Allens Water"

Receipt Book of Jane Staveley, 1693

“In times of Heathenism when men had found out any excellent Herb, &c. they dedicated it to their gods, As the *Bay-tree* to *Apollo*, the *Oak* to *Jupiter*, the *Vine* to *Bacchus*, the *Poplar* to *Hercules*: These the Papists following as their Patriarchs, they dedicate them to their Saints, as our *Ladies Thistle* to the *Blessed Virgin*, *St. Johns Wort* to *St. John*...Alas poor Fools, I am sorry for their folly, and grieved at their Blasphemy; God send them the rest of their Age, for they have their share of Ignorance already; O! Why must ours be Blasphemous because the Heathens and Papists were Idolatrous?
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certainly they have read so much in old rusty Authors, that they have lost al their Divinity...I never read or heard of such Blasphemy.”

Nicholas Culpeper, *The English physitian enlarged*

with strong Alle
arts of whilom

