

THE GENESIS OF ABORTION LEGISLATION IN ANCIENT TIMES AND ANTIQUITY: AT THE ORIGINS OF FORENSIC MEDICINE

Ellina M. Maleva^{1,2}

¹ Cluster University, Omsk, Russia

² Dostoevsky Omsk State University, Omsk, Russia

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The subject. The relevance of the topic chosen by the author of the article lies in its understudied nature in Russian historical and legal scholarship. While contemporaries may study the issue more broadly from a medical or forensic perspective, or delve deeper into legislation from the nineteenth century and Soviet periods, the author's article focuses on a specific aspect of this topic that has not been extensively explored.

The purpose of this article is to examine the development of abortion legislation in relation to changes in human ideas about the world and social order, the complex structure of society, and changes in the system of inheritance in society.

The research methodology is based on the fundamental principles of historical and legal knowledge: historicism and objectivity. While working with historical legal documents, the specific characteristics of law and legal thinking in the studied time period and the national legal traditions of the country were taken into consideration. Comparative legal analysis, system analysis, and interdisciplinary research methods were also employed.

Main results. The article provides examples of changing attitudes towards abortion through links to articles of legislation in antiquity and antiquity. The author illustrates this process by quoting the works of great thinkers and poets of the corresponding times. After conducting a systematic analysis, it was revealed how the interaction of civilizations and legal systems of Eurasia creates a complex chronotopic (time-spatial) picture of the development of ideas about abortion and infanticide from the syncretic mononormal concept – to the ownership rights of the head of the family – “the seed does not retain any qualities of the womb” to the idea that the head of the family has ownership rights over the fetus, and then to Roman law, “mothers of unworthy stealing citizens from the state” and the rights of fetuses in institutions such as “postumus” and “oeuvre postum”.

Conclusions. The author substantiates the importance of studying the genesis of abortion legislation in order to provide a complete historical context, within which the prerequisites appeared, and then forensic medicine began to form and become established at the legislative level. This is because the issue of live birth or stillbirth is closely linked to the question of succession to monarchical power and its legitimization.

1. Introduction.

The relevance of the topic chosen by the author for this article is determined by its insufficient exploration in Russian historical and legal scholarship. Contemporary researchers tend to examine the issue primarily from medical and forensic perspectives, or they delve more deeply into the legislation of the 19th century and the Soviet period.

Forensic medical knowledge is a crucial element in establishing the truth in cases of criminal abortions and infanticide. Without it, it is impossible to ascertain the facts of stillbirth and live birth, as well as the intentional or unintentional nature of actions related to abortion or the care of infants, etc.

The methodology of this research is based on fundamental principles of historical and theoretical-legal knowledge: historicism and objectivity. When working with legal documents from the past, the specific characteristics of law and legal understanding during the studied period, as well as the national legal traditions of the state, were taken into account.

2. Protection of Maternity and Childhood within Legal Conceptions of Primitive Society

Abortion, as a socio-legal phenomenon, is undoubtedly a product of a sufficiently advanced level of civilization associated with the era of the emergence of world religions. Ancient (archaic) societies did not particularly concern themselves with the issue of abortion and almost universally practiced infanticide as a means of regulating population numbers in the face of resource scarcity. In this context, there is little distinction between whether life is interrupted before or after birth; what matters is the life of an adult, fully-fledged member of the community.

On the other hand, the concept of caring for offspring is ingrained in *Homo sapiens* even at a biological level. This species is characterized by relatively low fertility rates, and its growth is further limited by the prolonged care required for children after birth. Ancient normative structures create a mechanism for the protection of motherhood and childhood. In the epic

consciousness of all ancient peoples, the protection of children (offspring) is closely linked to the cult of fertility:

*And let those Maruts, filled with joy,
Support our prayer and our offspring,
Bringing us rewards!
May the grazing cow not overlook us!
They have increased the wealth destined for*

us.

...

*To you, O Maruts, let this sound be directed,
To Vishnu, safeguarding the poured seed
with his supports!*

*And may they grant strength to the offspring
and to the singer!*

*Always protect us with your kindness!*¹

Rigveda,

Mandala VII, Hymn 36, Verses 7, 9.

The deity protects the embryo not as an independent value, but as an element of fertility. Similarly, the ancient Turkic spirit (deity) Versus governs the embryos of children, livestock, and forest animals [1, p. 265], and so forth. The functions of this archetype are akin to those of the Roman goddess Juno Osgina (who provides the skeleton to the embryo) or Lucina (who brings forth life and acts as a midwife) [2, p. 646]. This archetype is universal in the mythologies of peoples around the world and stems from the understanding that abortion and infanticide are not condemned; these actions are neither criminal nor immoral—mononormative consciousness is syncretic and does not fundamentally differentiate norms based on social regulators [3, pp. 226–227]. However, the embryo is part of nature, and its destruction without a valid reason is considered undesirable, as it may anger the spirits and thereby threaten the existence of the entire lineage/tribe.

3. Patrilineal System of Rights over the Unborn Child

With the development of society, the idea of fatherhood and the protection of paternal rights begins to evolve, as well as the rights of the community regarding its future member. The notion

¹ Rigveda: Mandalas V–VIII / prepared by T.Ya. Elizarenkova; ed. by P.A. Grincer. Moscow, 1995. P. 217.

of male rights over the fetus, in this case, does not primarily concern care for the future child but rather serves as an element in the formation of hereditary legal relations. It is difficult to imagine today, but ancient societies had a different understanding of property and its inheritance. Anthropologists document numerous ritual forms where property is not transferred but is buried with the deceased, often deliberately destroyed during burial, or consumed during a funeral feast. Among all Indo-European peoples, there are recorded rituals of inheritance in the form of funeral games [4, p. 25; 5, p. 203]. For example, Homer vividly describes in the "Iliad" the funeral games held in memory of Patroclus², where the inheritance is divided into portions awarded to the victors of athletic competitions, while blood relatives receive nothing.

Everything changes when property, especially power, begins to be inherited, making the question of a child's descent from a specific man fundamentally important. Consequently, legalized forms prohibiting abortion performed by a woman without her husband's knowledge and/or consent emerge; for instance, in Hinduism, there is a prohibition on artificial abortion when conception occurs from a member of the higher castes. According to the Laws of Manu, all rights over the embryo and child belong to the man, since "the husband, having penetrated into the wife and becoming an embryo, is reborn in this world, for the essence of the wife lies in that he is reborn within her" (Chapter 9, Verse 8), because "the seed does not retain any qualities of the womb" (Chapter 9, Verse 37)³.

From fragments of Sumerian laws, it is known that one who causes a miscarriage to a "daughter of man" pays ten shekels of silver if unintentionally pushed, and one-third of a mina if struck, which is about twice as much (§ 1-2) [6, p. 211]. In Hammurabi's laws, a person who strikes a daughter of man and causes a miscarriage pays ten shekels (§ 209), while striking a daughter of a muskenum results in a fine of five shekels (§ 211),

and striking a slave woman incurs a penalty of two shekels (§ 213). If, in addition to the miscarriage, the woman dies, then for the death of a free woman, the perpetrator must kill his daughter (§ 210), for a daughter of a muskenum – half a mina of silver (§ 212), and for a slave woman – one-third of a mina of silver (§ 214) [6, p. 232].

Hittite laws imposed significant fines on those causing miscarriages: in one version, depending on the term of pregnancy – one half-shekel per month of pregnancy up to ten months inclusive and half that for a slave woman (§ 17-18. Table I) [7, p. 260]; in another version – twenty half-shekels for a miscarriage in a free woman and ten for a slave woman (§ 16-17. Table III) [7, p. 282].

The Middle Assyrian laws particularly highlight the primacy of paternal rights: "If a woman has miscarried and she has been convicted by oath and proven against her, she shall be impaled on stakes and shall not be buried. If she dies while miscarrying, she shall be impaled on stakes and shall not be buried. If this woman is concealed while she is miscarrying and not reported ... [the text is damaged]" (§ 53. Table III A) [7, p. 223]. There was also provision for penalties for striking a pregnant woman and causing her to miscarry (§ 50-52), with special mention that "if the husband of that woman has no son ... and she has miscarried [and the fetus is not a girl], then for her fetus, the one who struck shall be killed" (§ 50) [7, p. 223]. At the same time, for a miscarriage involving a daughter of man (i.e., presumably not under her husband's authority), the offender paid two talents of lead, received fifty strokes with rods, and one month of labor for the king (§ 21) [7, p. 215].

A similar logic is attributed to Peter I, who sentenced English lady-in-waiting Maria Hamilton to death for having "lived immorally and was three times pregnant; she aborted two children with medicine and gave birth to one whom she strangled" [8, p. 253]. Contemporaries suggested that despite numerous advocates, including the Empress herself, mercy was denied to Hamilton because her children could have been "of royal blood" and were killed without the Emperor's knowledge.

4. Classical Ancient Civilization on the Regulation of Abortion

² Homer. The Iliad / trans. from Ancient Greek by N. I. Gnedich. Moscow, 1960. pp. 369–371.

³ The Laws of Manu / translated from Sanskrit by S. D. Elmanovich. Moscow, 1992. pp. 110-111.

The formation of ancient medicine manifested in the emergence of several medical schools: the Croton school (Alcmaeon), the Cnidus school (Euriphon), the Sicilian school (Empedocles), and the Cos school (Hippocrates). Contrary to many prevalent assumptions, ancient civilization did not introduce fundamentally new ideas regarding the regulation of abortion. Indeed, in the original text of the Hippocratic Oath, there is a prohibition stating, "I will not give a woman a pessary for an abortion."⁴ However, Hippocrates further stipulates that he forbids "the cutting of those suffering from stone disease, leaving this to those who are engaged in such matters,"⁵ indicating that the issue is not about the prohibition of abortions themselves but rather that a physician should not stoop to such manipulations; this would be left to less qualified individuals (surgeons). As noted by E.E. Berger, "the separation of surgery and medicine is observed... in antiquity and continues throughout the Middle Ages. Researchers identify several reasons for this. First and foremost, surgery was in its infancy, its capabilities were extremely limited, and mortality from surgical interventions was very high. Death could result not only from the operation itself but also from shock or postoperative complications" [9, p. 218]. According to Hippocrates, a physician simply should not risk the high status of the profession.

For example, this thesis is supported by the fact that in the treatise "On Seed and the Nature of the Child" (Section 12), there is a description of an abortion at an early stage of pregnancy that Hippocrates himself induced through physical exercises on a slave artist, as her pregnancy diminished her value⁶, and there is no moral dilemma for the physician. Overall, in Hippocratic writings, the question of ethics and the permissibility of abortion is not raised at all.

Similarly, in the works of Aristotle, there is no condemnation of abortion. Notably, in Aristotle's work "History of Animals," Books 7 and 10 are dedicated to human biology, the processes

of puberty, conception, pregnancy, and childbirth, as well as the causes of infertility. The author demonstrates a high level of medical knowledge but only speaks of cases of natural miscarriage or infant death. The topics of abortion or infanticide are not discussed in principle; they are neither approved nor condemned⁷.

The nature of a fully-fledged legal norm condemning abortion emerged during the Roman period. This legislation also provided impetus for the development of forensic knowledge, which is a crucial element in establishing the truth in cases of criminal abortions and infanticide. Without it, it is impossible to ascertain the facts of stillbirth or live birth, as well as the intentional or unintentional nature of actions related to pregnancy termination or infant care, etc. [10, 11]. Previously, these issues simply did not arise; the evolution of law formulated the problematic for ancient science.

Classical Roman law operated under the formula "filius in utero matris est pars viscerum matris," viewing the fetus as part of the woman's body and not recognizing abortion as a violation of law. On the contrary, various forms of Platonism were popular in Rome, and Plato's ideal state excluded the family as a social institution, asserting that "all offspring born immediately fall under the control of officials appointed specifically for this purpose"⁸ (Book V, 460 b). The great Russian philosopher A. F. Losev writes: "Platonism, as paganism, is fundamentally a cult of the body... One should love God, not parents and children... Abortion and infanticide are a dialectical necessity for a woman thinking in a Platonic manner... Ultimately, it is not so important who is related by blood" [12, pp. 847, 850, 852]. Among contemporary authors, cultural scholar E. N. Suvorkina points to the problem of rational child-rearing projects in Plato's ideal state "for the purpose of productive analysis of the issue of the child's position in society" [13, pp. 124-129].

⁴ Hippocrates. Selected Works / Translated from Greek by V. I. Rudnev. Moscow, 1932. p. 87.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. P. 233.

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⁷ Aristotle. History of Animals / Translated from Ancient Greek by V.P. Karpov. Moscow, 1996, pp. 281–298, 397–412.

⁸ Plato. The Republic / Translated from Ancient Greek by A. N. Egunov // Works in 4 Volumes, Vol. 3, Part 1 / Edited by A. F. Losev, V. F. Asmus. St. Petersburg, 2007. p. 278.

It is noteworthy that in 1906, M. Benemansky observed that most European legislations prohibit abortions, yet legal scholars of that time considered this approach unprogressive⁹. The contemporary de-Christianization and dehumanization of Western ideology under the banner of political correctness have plunged legal systems worldwide into an era of juvenile justice systems that eerily resemble Plato's utopias.

5. Roman Law during the Periods of Principate and Dominate

A different ideological theme was put forward by the Late Stoa with its cult of "Roman virtue" ... pietas (piety), fides (faithfulness) ... [14, p. 33]. Marcus Tullius Cicero views abortions as unworthy behavior, a violation of public and private interests: "I remember that during my time in Asia, a native of Miletus was sentenced to death for having, ... through various potions, induced an abortion herself. She fully deserved this ..." (Tit. 32)¹⁰. Long before Cicero's visit, in 129 BC, the city of Miletus had come under Roman control, but local laws and customs (*mos regionis*) were still in effect there.

At the turn of the new era, the poet Ovid, known as the "master of thoughts," actively criticized abortions as a social phenomenon:

*She who set the example of casting away
the tender embryo*

*Would have been better off perishing in
battle with herself! ...*

*Can one pluck unripe grapes from the vine?
Can one tear immature fruit with cruel
hand? ...*

*How can one poison unborn children with
deadly potion?*

*All blame Medea, the Colchian, stained
with the blood of infants; ...*

They are beast-like mothers ...

*Let my predictions become mere empty
sound!*

⁹ Benemansky, M. Author's Commentary No. 2 // On the Procheiros Nomos of Emperor Basil the Macedonian. Its Origin, Characteristics, and Significance in Canon Law. Vol. 1. Sergiev Posad, 1906. p. 394.

¹⁰ Cicero, Marcus Tullius Oratio pro Aulo Cluentio Habito In court, 66 BC // Speeches / translated by V.O. Gorenstein. Volume 1: (81-63 BC). Moscow, 1962, p. 196.

*Benevolent gods, allow her once to sin
harmlessly...*

But enough: afterwards let her bear
punishment.¹¹

Ovid. Love Elegies. Book II.

XIV. Strophes 5-6,
21-22, 26-27, 29, 40-42.

In Roman law, penalties for abortions were introduced by Cornelius Sulla's law "De sicariis et veneficis" ("On Assassins and Poisoners") between 80-88 CE. Commentaries on this law were written by the third-century Roman jurist Julius Paulus: "If anyone administers a drink causing abortion or love-potion, even if he does so without malicious intent, nevertheless, since such acts serve as bad examples, if he belongs to common folk, he shall be sentenced to mines; if noble-born, then temporary exile to islands with partial confiscation of property; if, however, a man or woman dies as a result, then they face execution"¹² (C. 14, Title 23, Book 5). In the sixth century, several norms against abortions entered Justinian's Digest: "If it becomes known that a woman used violence against her womb to expel the fetus, then the provincial governor will send her into exile"¹³ (D. 8, Title 8, Book 48). This provision is duplicated in the title "On Punishments"¹⁴ (D. 38.5, Title 19, Book 48). Additionally, clarification is given concerning the rationale behind introducing this legal norm: "Divine Severus and Antoninus decreed by rescript that the woman who deliberately induced abortion should be exiled temporarily by the provincial governor; for it would seem improper that she should go unpunished for depriving her husband of children"¹⁵ (D. 4, Title 11, Book 47).

It is worth recalling the great Roman physician Galen (129-c.200 AD), who studied

¹¹ Ovid, Publius Naso. Elegies and Minor Poems / Translated from Latin by M. Gasparov, S. Osherov. Moscow, 1973. pp. 58-59.

¹² Paulus, Julius Sententiarum ad filium libri quinque. Fragmenta Domitii Ulpiani / Translated from Latin by E.M. Shtaerman, edited by L.L. Kofanov. Moscow, 1998, p. 141.

¹³ Justinian's Digests = Digesta Iustiniani: Translation from Latin / Chief Editor L.L. Kofanov. Volume 7, Half-volume 2: Books 48-50. Moscow, 2005.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. Volume 47, Half-volume 1: Books 45-47. Moscow, 2005.

embryology, after whom the Galenic Test—still used today to determine stillbirth—is named. He and his patron Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 AD) were stoics whose ideals differed significantly from Christianity 15, 16. Galen's interest in "distinct characteristics distinguishing the fetus from a living newborn"¹⁶ (Book XV, Chapter VI, §241) was socially conditioned and criminally justified.

At the same time, the humanism of the Stoics should not be overstated; the legal significance of the fact of live birth was based on the recognition of the fetus's limited right to inheritance. This is reflected in the opinions of Paulus in the Digest, stating that an inheritance cannot be fully divided until the birth of the potential heir or heirs (D. 3, Tit. 4, Book 5)¹⁷, while Ulpian specifies that the right to inherit applies only to those born within three months of the death of the testator (D. 1/9, Tit. 9, Book 37)¹⁸. Thus, the institution of "postumus" (the last) emerged, which was interpreted as "posthumously born." This institution is widely represented in the Digest (D. 6, Tit. 2, Book 26)¹⁹; (D. 28 and 29/pr.1-16, Tit. 2, Book 28); (D. 3/pr.1 and 3, Tit. 3, Book 28); (D. 127, Book 30)²⁰; (D. 3, Tit. 1, Book 37)²¹ and served as a precursor to the institution of French medieval law known as "oeuvre postume" (posthumous work), which was the basis for the coronation of King John I of France, who was crowned at birth and died on the sixth day of his reign (November 15-20, 1316).

The institution of "postumus" indicates the legal capacity of the fetus and, in specific cases, significantly enhances the social importance of the

yet-to-be-born child, effectively excluding the possibility of abortion. For example, the case of "Peter I – Lady Hamilton" is not explicitly outlined in legislation, but it was perceived by contemporaries as a clear and undeniable unlawful act against the monarchical order—one cannot kill potential heirs, whether they are embryos or infants, without the knowledge and consent of the emperor. The duty to the state is prioritized over personal rights and freedoms. Although clemency is formally permissible under the law, it is practically impossible, as the perpetrator is not formally accused of committing the "primary crime," yet impunity is unacceptable due to the threat it poses to the authority of power. Importantly, these institutions objectively point to the strengthening of the foundations for the formation of forensic knowledge, as the question of live or stillbirth is directly linked to the inheritance of monarchical power and its legitimization [17].

6. Conclusion

The conducted systematic analysis illustrates how the interaction of civilizations and legal systems in Eurasia creates a complex chronotopic (time-space) picture of the development of concepts surrounding abortion and infanticide. This evolution ranges from a syncretic mononormative concept—"the fetus is part of the woman"—to the proprietary rights of the head of the family—"the seed retains no qualities of the womb"—and further to Roman law, which characterizes "unworthy mothers stealing citizens from the state," alongside the rights of the fetus within the institutions of "postumus" and "oeuvre postume."

In the modern world, where the influence of abstract humanism (political correctness, feminism, and other hedonistic concepts of a gnostic nature) leads to a loss of traditional values and orientations, humanity is undergoing a process of decivilization. Under the guise of progressive views, deeply archaic values that are contrary to human nature are being proclaimed. It is vitally necessary to distinguish between progress and regression or degradation.

From this perspective, reflecting on the past and examining the genesis of this process is absolutely essential. As noted by D. A. Pashentsev, in his exploration of paths for legal development "within the framework of the post-

¹⁶ Galenus, Claudius *De usu partium corporis humani* On the Usefulness of Parts of Human Body / Translated from Ancient Greek by S.P. Kondratyev; edited by V.N. Ternovskiy. Volume 1. Moscow, 1971, p. 498.

¹⁷ Justinian's Digests / Translated by I.S. Petersky // *Monuments of Roman Law: Textbook*. Moscow, 1997, p. 267.

¹⁸ Justinian's Digests = *Digesta Iustiniani: ...* Volume 6, Half-volume 1: Books 37-40. Moscow, 2005.

¹⁹ Ibid. Volume 4: Books 20-27. Moscow, 2004.

²⁰ Ibid. Volume 5, Half-volume 1: Books 28-32. Moscow, 2004.

²¹ Ibid. Volume 6, Half-volume 1, Books 37-40. Moscow, 2005.

nonclassical paradigm... anthropocentrism implies the 'humanization' of the legal system" [18, p. 18]. It is this "humanization" that serves as the only measure of the "traditional values" proclaimed by the Russian Federation as political guidelines.

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INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHOR

Ellina Mikhailovna Maleva – ¹Senior Lecturer,
Department of Private Law; ²Postgraduate Student

¹*Cluster University*

²*Dostoevsky Omsk State University*

¹ app. 32, 4, Zelenyi bul., Omsk, 644119, Russia

² 55a, Mira pr., Omsk, 644077, Russia

E-mail: linucija@yandex.ru

ORCID: 0000-0001-9977-7618

RSCI SPIN-code: 3637-1404; AuthorID: 1090571

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