

*Introduzione/Introduction*

HISTORY OF THE BREAST:  
A CROSS-CULTURAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The present book explores the history of the breast and of breastfeeding from Antiquity to the Renaissance. Consulting a large range of sources – including medical sources, literary *testimonia*, sculptural and painting representations – the contributors look at the breast and breastfeeding from sacred, religious, erotic, psychological and scientific perspectives. This interdisciplinary approach is also socio-anthropological in the sense that the authors offer new cultural-historical interpretations that enrich our knowledge of the female breast as a symbol of beauty, fertility and femininity. In addition, the contributors provide a study of the socio-cultural aspects of breastfeeding practices.

The volume is divided in two separate issues. The first issue contains the following contributions:

Lydie Bodiou and Véronique Mehl focus on the signification of breasts in Greek antiquity. As a body part that needs special attention, the breasts are often scented or exhale a naturally occurring good smell. From archaic times to the Hellenistic period, perfume has been a substance that makes the body identifiable both olfactively and visually and particularizes the body's regions, thus creating a cartography of the limbs on which it is applied. In this cartography of the intimate, breasts occupy an important place: as sensory organs, they are felt, touched and tasted; they kindle maternal love, erotic desire and provoke the feeling of love. The smell of emotions is not only perceived by olfaction but it is also part of the memory activated by the senses of smell, touch, sight and taste and is therefore at the origin of sensory and memory relationships.

Next, Florence Gherchanoc explores feeding in the divine world. She studies two cases of breastfeeding represented on Italiote vases from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC: Hera breastfeeding Heracles and Aphrodite breastfeeding Eros. The study of these two cases of divine breastfeeding highlights the beneficial role of feeding in the formation of a hero and of a god in the imagination of the Greeks in southern Italy. She also investigates which parts of this mythology related to the divine breast can be transposed to the human world. Like divine nourishment, human nourishment plays a determining role in individuals' identity construction and in the foundation of family and social bonds.

In the following essay, Elsa Garcia Novo examines descriptions, concepts, ailments and remedies for the female and male breast, as well as their names throughout Greek medical writing. The majority of the paper deals with the female breast. After considering its anatomical form and physiological function in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* and Galen, the author discusses the relationship between gravidity and the breast. She then turns to a long development of the genesis of milk, which is thoroughly elucidated in Hippocrates, Aristotle, Empedocles of Akragas, Soranus of Ephesus and Galen. This description is followed by the study of symptoms and treatment of diseases related to the breast. The last part of the essay refers briefly to the male breast as it is considered by Hippocrates in *Epidemics* and Paulus of Aegina, who is the first to mention the problem of male gynecomastia and explain the way to treat it. Manuel E. Vázquez Buján's essay is next. He investigates diverse aspects related to the female breast in Latin medical texts from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. He examines the breast as the basis of baby feeding and subsequently its nutritional role. He also discusses its erotic and aesthetic aspect. Special attention is paid to the aspects of the breast related to pathology and therapy because of its central role in the process of child rearing. Finally, considering the ideal wet nurse's breast and its relationship with the womb, he illustrates the breast as it relates to puberty, pregnancy and the production of milk.

In the following essay, Lawrence Bliquez surveys conditions of the female (and male) breast that require medical treatment, specifically surgical, parasurgical and pharmaceutical intervention from Greco-Roman times to the Renaissance. The first part is devoted to the study of surgical operations in the Greco-Roman worlds, as they are described in the ancient literary testimonia written by Hippocrates and his disciples, Celsus, Soranus, Galen, Oribasius, and Aëtius, Paul. The second part discusses operations on the breast performed by medieval surgeons who inherited the Greco-Roman tradition. The author concentrates on the middle and later Byzantine sources written by Leon Iatrosophist, John Actuarius and Michael Psellus. Special attention is given to the compendium of three treatises on female diseases and conditions known collectively as the *Trotula*; the *Practica Chirurgiae* or “Practice of Surgery”, a compilation issued around 1170 or 1180 under the name of Roger Frugard, a native of Parma; Bruno da Langoborgo’s (aka Longobucco) *Chirurgia Magna* written in 1253; Theodoric Borgognoni’s *Cyrurgia* or *Chirurgia*, which appeared around 1265; William of Saliceto’s *Grand Surgery* or *Chirurgia Magna* completed in 1275; Guido Lanfranchi’s (also called Lanfranco or Alanfrancus) *Chirurgia Magna* produced in 1296; Henri de Mondeville’s *Cyrurgia* published in 1312; Guy de Chauillac’s (alias Guigo De Caulhiaco) *Inventarium sive Chirurgia Magna* published in ca. 1363; and Johannes Scultetus’s (also known as Johannes Schulte, 1595-1645) *Armamentarium Chirurgicum*. Diachronic study of written sources on surgery focused exclusively on the breast from Hippocrates to the Renaissance demonstrates that medieval surgeons applied the same treatments throughout this period with the same or almost identical therapies and with fundamentally the same instruments. However, they occasionally introduced innovations by diagnosing conditions not indicated in classical sources (e.g. inverted nipples) and by using new terminology for the surgical tools.

Next, Margaret Trenchard-Smith elucidates how medical standards for breastfeeding affected the lives of women and infants. These standards defined two types: on the one hand, the woman fit to breastfeed and, on the other hand, the newborn fit to be breastfed. Therefore, the study is divided into two sections. The first section explores the status of independent wet nurses and household wet nurses as well as maternal breastfeeding. The second section deals with the infants' fitness to be fed and their acceptance or rejection by the family following a midwife's evaluation according to pediatric criteria.

The second issue comprises the following essays:

Belle Tuten examines corrective surgery for breast "deformities" such as gynecomastia, as displayed in the Seven Books of *Pragmateia* of Paul of Aegina (7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), and Paul's impact on other medieval surgeons of the thirteenth century. According to the author, the transmission of Paul's discussion of performing surgery on men with overdeveloped breasts possesses two strands. Both depend on adaptations of Paul of Aegina made by other authors. The first strand comes from the translations of al-Majusi's work by Constantine the African (d. before 1099) in the eleventh century and by Stephen of Antioch in the early twelfth century. The second strand is the transmission of the work of al-Zahrawi (aka Albucasis) (936–1013) by means of the translation of Gerard of Cremona (ca. 1114–1187), Lanfrance of Milan (1250–1307), and Théodoric Borgognoni (1205–1296). The interesting features of this transmission are its accurate language, its practical directives, and the use of diagrams.

Raffi and Aslin Gurunluoglu reconsider breastfeeding and breastmilk in the Middle Ages from socio-cultural and medical perspectives. From the socio-cultural perspective, they examine the reasons for hiring a wet nurse, the socio-economic status of the hiring family, psychological aspects of breastfeeding and the use of feeding tools. From the medical perspective, they study the impact of medicine from Antiquity to the Renaissance in the field of breastfeeding and the role of physicians

in determining child rearing practices as well as physicians' considerations of the relationship between maternal breastfeeding and wet nursing, the physical qualifications of a wet nurse, the criteria for choosing a wet nurse and the qualities of the ideal breastmilk.

Christian Jouffroy examines sculptural and painting representations of the Virgin Mary *Lactans* by using works depicting divine breastfeeding that inspired artists from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century in Europe and America. To do this, he uses works originating from Lorraine, a region in northern-east France, and preserved in the museum of the Golden Court in Metz. By examining these from a medical and artistic point of view, he highlights the path from the figurative breastfeeding of the Son of God to the allegory of the Virgin Mary as the nourisher of the whole human race, through the symbolic visions of "Lactation" of Saint Bernard and Saint Pierre Nolasco.

Esther Diana outlines the physician's interest in the female body and, consequently, in the diseases related to the genitourinary system and the differences between the sexual organs. This interest tended to concentrate on philosophical traditions whose origins were rooted in anthropological, religious, magical and superstitious notions rather than making use of biological observations. According to Diana, even when the great authors spoke of "woman's illnesses", they almost all referred to pregnancy and childbirth and thus celebrated their exclusive and recognised social role as "breeders". However, when dealing with diseases that could affect the female breast and, in particular, tumour pathology, special attention was paid. This is explained by the fact that this organ was considered the personal "property" of men due to its identification as a more immediate sexual attraction for them. The author remarks that this consideration of the female breast resulted in a "history" of the organ that followed two parallel and often overlapping paths in the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries: the first, pigeonholed as "traditional knowledge", was expressed in Recipes and Secret Advice dedicated exclusively to women while the

second took form in the production of treatises in the medical field, which exploited the progress in anatomic knowledge of physiology and pathology carried out on respectively healthy and sick organs.

In the penultimate essay in the collection, Magdalena Kozluk highlights the interest of 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century physicians in the enigma of milk production and the phenomenon of breastfeeding (*lac quomodo fit?*). First, she discusses the problem of the breast from the anatomical point of view in the scientific sources (*mammarum figura, magnitudo, veneae, arteriae*, etc.). Examining surgery manuals, she then identifies the most common breast diseases at the time and presents the ways to treat them. She also examines the curative and beauty care that was prescribed in all kinds of pharmacopoeia, galenic and chemical (poultices, plasters for an ulcerated nipple or those against “breast hardness” etc.).

In the final essay of this collection, Philippe Charlier investigates the breast cancer of Anne of Austria, the Queen of France. He shows how the doctors and surgeons of the Court inherited from the doctors of the Antiquity a tradition that considered breast cancer a chronic parasitic disease attacking women in the form of a progressive “nibbling”. Also, he explores all kinds of therapies applied to the patient, especially the alimentary therapy consisting of feeding the tumor with animal meat in order to prevent it from feeding at the expense of the patient’s body.

I hope that the output of these scholarly works sheds light on theories about the breast and breastfeeding as they evolved over the centuries across medical and surgical sciences, religious beliefs and socio-cultural contexts.

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