

**Female Bodies and Female Practitioners  
in the Medical Traditions of the Late Antique  
Mediterranean World**

Gynaecology and obstetrics form an important part of human medical knowledge. As early as Graeco-Roman antiquity, gynaecology emerged as a distinct discipline within medical theory. This subfield of medical inquiry comprised a large store of ideas about anatomy ('seeds', embryo, sexual organs, etc.), bodily functions and physiological processes (conception, pregnancy, menstruation, etc.). Furthermore, several diseases or dysfunctions were specifically described and examples of diagnosis, prognosis and therapy were discussed and collected (e.g. by Soranus of Ephesus).

Although Galen did not write a treatise specifically about gynaecology, his immense oeuvre contains many remarks about women's illnesses or obstetrics. These and material from Soranus and other sources, some of them now lost, were collected and used selectively by the compilers of the late antique/early Byzantine medical encyclopaedias, who also discuss the criteria for choosing the right midwife or wet-nurse. Oribasius, Aetius of Amida and Paul of Aegina all transmit earlier knowledge, some of it filtered through their own experience, and in the case of Paul it was his gynaecology in particular that made him famous in the Arab world, where he was known as 'the Obstetrician'.

Questions about gynaecological issues in the broadest sense play an important role in the rabbinic, Talmudic tradition. This is due to the detailed commandments regarding ritual purity and other religious (halakhic) prescriptions that touch upon, sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth. Since no particular work can be found which is exclusively related to gynaecology, the literary or discursive embeddedness of Talmudic passages on this topic in their differing contexts are of crucial importance.

The conference aims at discussing the emergence and transmission of gynaecological knowledge from different angles in ancient medical theory and practice. Beside the medical approach, we will consider cultural practices and socio-religious norms that enable and constrain the production and application of gynaecological know-how (e.g. certain taboos on examining or touching the female body, etc.). The role and function of female specialists (e.g. healers, midwives or wet-nurses) as objects and subjects within ancient medical discourses will also be elaborated in further detail.

The combination of topics from various disciplines will provide ample possibilities for a comparative exploration of this field. The multi-perspective approach will help to sharpen our understanding of similarities and differences between Talmudic knowledge on this topic and the medical traditions in Ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Graeco-Roman, Persian, Byzantine, and Syriac cultures.

International Conference organized by project A03,  
The Transfer of Medical Episteme in the 'Encyclopaedic'  
Compilations of Late Antiquity (SFB 980)

**Contacts**

Lennart Lehmhaus: lehmhaus@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Matteo Martelli: martellm@hu-berlin.de

Christine Salazar: christine.salazar@hu-berlin.de



**Female Bodies  
and Female Practitioners  
in the Medical Traditions  
of the Late Antique Mediterranean World**

**International Conference, 27 – 29 October 2014**  
Collaborative Research Centre „Episteme in Motion.  
Transfer of Knowledge from the Ancient World to the  
Early Modern Period“ (SFB 980)



MONDAY EVENING, 27/10/2014

SFB-Villa, Schwendenerstraße 8

Conference Opening: 18.00

Keynote Lecture

Charlotte Fonrobert (Stanford)

*Talmudic Gynecology and its Relationship to Late Antique Medical Literature: Transfigurations of ‚Women’s Affairs‘ (Gynaikaia).*

Reception

TUESDAY, 28/10/2014

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Unter den Linden 6,  
Institut für klassische Philologie, Room 2103

Session 1: 9.30 – 11.00

Tanja Pommerening (Mainz)  
*Ancient Egyptian Concepts of Female Anatomy, Physiology, and Specified Pharmacotherapy.*

Ulrike Steinert (FU Berlin)  
*Women’s Healthcare in Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine: Texts, Problems, Interpretations.*

Coffee Break

Session 2: 11.30 – 13.00

Giulia Ecce (BBAW Berlin)  
*Women’s (and Men’s) Infertility in Galen’s Commentary on Aphorisms, Book 5.*

Siam Bhayro (Exeter)  
*Gynaecology in Syriac Sources: Theory and Practice.*

Lunch Break

Session 3: 14.30 – 16.00

Caroline Musgrove (Cambridge)  
*Finding the Authorial Voice in Late Antique Medicine: Maternal Bodies and the Generation of Seeds in the Encyclopaedic Traditions.*

Tirzah Meacham (Toronto)  
*Reality or Theoretical Discussion: Pre-Menarchal Pregnancy, Superfetation, and Pregnancy during Lactation in Rabbinic Literature.*

Coffee Break

Session 4: 16.30 – 18.00

Monika Amsler (Zürich)  
*„My Mother Told Me ...“. An Evaluation of the Treatments of the Sickly Newborn in bShab 134a.*

Hannah Tzuberi (FU Berlin)  
*The Difficult Birth in Mishnaic Law: Regulation, Failure and Empathy.*

WEDNESDAY, 29/10/2014

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Unter den Linden 6,  
Institut für klassische Philologie, Room 2103

Session 1: 10.00 – 11.30

Tal Ilan (FU Berlin)  
*Salome’s Medicinal Recipes and Jewish Women Doctors in Antiquity.*

Carmen Caballero-Navas (Granada)  
*On the Medieval Beginnings of Jewish Gynaecology.*

Coffee Break

Session 2: 12.00 – 13.00

Sean Coughlin (TOPOI Berlin), Marzia Soardi (Palermo)  
*The Female in Aristotle’s Biology and its Byzantine Reception.*

Lunch Break

Session 3: 15.00 – 16.30

Petros Bouras-Vallianatos (London)  
*Byzantine Criticism of Galenic Theories on Conception: the Case of Symeon Seth’s Refutation of Galen.*

Rebecca Flemming (Cambridge)  
*Women’s Medicine in Late Antiquity.* (provisional)

Final discussion/Concluding remarks: 16.30 – 17.00

