



## CALL FOR PAPERS

### **Breast Borders: Motherhood and Breastfeeding in the Middle Ages**

The Cyprus-based interdisciplinary research project “Lactating Breasts: Motherhood and Breastfeeding in Antiquity and Byzantium” (<https://ucy.ac.cy/motherbreast/en/>) warmly invites proposals for a series of sessions at the International Medieval Congress 2020 (University of Leeds, 6-9 July 2020).

Taking as its point of departure Susanne Dixon’s dictum: “The biology of infancy is universal, but the human perceptions of it and what it requires are socially conditioned and subject to historical change” (*The Roman Mother* 1988: 129), this series of sessions aims at contributing to the “breastfeeding turn”, by promoting the investigation of the various aspects of the strong affinities between woman—as mother and nurse—and her lactating breast, as well as the social, ideological and medical meanings and uses of motherhood, childbirth and breastfeeding, and their visual and literary representations in the Middle Ages.

In order to develop the model of the lactating woman as a new critical frame for approaching medieval motherhood alongside its medical, familial, social, ideological, religious, and artistic uses, proposals are expected to address questions such as the following:

- What is the predominant rhetoric and semantic value of the breast in the Middle Ages? What kind of larger discourses (medical, environmental, philosophical, religious, political, legal, and literary) contribute to its meaning at a given time? What are the continuities and discontinuities between the different meanings of and discourses on the breast throughout time?
- What do the various discourses on the breast record about women’s, as well as men’s, given roles and identities, either sexual, social or religious? How is the ancient ideology about women’s and men’s roles advanced through the breast’s semiology?
- What is the bodily language of breastfeeding? Does it change throughout time? Which gestures take the lead in the performance of mothering?
- Which health and medical practices are used in the Middle Ages for the initiation and maintenance of lactation? What are the medical uses of breast milk?
- What is the relationship between the ideology (social, political and religious) and biology of the breast? Is it a conflicting or a mutually supportive one? What are the reasons behind the formulation of this relationship?
- What role does breastfeeding have in Medieval art and literature? What is the cultural and ecological logic of the visual and literary works, which incorporate the lactating woman as a thematizing structure?
- Which general and/or varied typologies can be derived from approaching a broad spectrum of artistic works (visual and literary) investigating rhetoric, symbolisms, meanings and functions, as well as the reception of the lactating theme in Medieval art and literature?
- When is the breastfeeding metaphor used to describe animal, human or divine behaviour, and in which contexts? For example, how do the Church Fathers and other male authors employ the image of the nursing mother or the wet nurse for achieving religious or other ends?

We welcome paper proposals which explore and theorize the lactating woman, her place and various meanings and uses in Medieval cultures in any of the above and/or other interrelated ways. We are open to various approaches, especially the ones which explore the interconnections between different methods and disciplines, such as Late Antique and Medieval Studies, Philology, Art History, Archaeology, History of Medicine, Sociology, Anthropology, Theology, and Gender and Performance Studies.

Please send your abstract (200 words maximum) and a short CV including your email and affiliation no later than the **10<sup>th</sup> of August 2019** to **Stavroula Constantinou** ([konstans@ucy.ac.cy](mailto:konstans@ucy.ac.cy)) or **Aspasia Skouroumouni Stavrinou** ([a.skouroumouni@yahoo.gr](mailto:a.skouroumouni@yahoo.gr)). Please note that the organizers cannot cover conference registration fee and travel or accommodation expenses.

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