

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

ΔΙΕΘΝΕΣ ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΟ ΕΡΓΑΣΤΗΡΙΟ



**Lactating Breasts:
Motherhood and Breastfeeding
in Antiquity and Byzantium
(4th c. BCE-7th c. CE)**

**Γαλακτοφόροι Μαστοί:
Μητρότητα και Θηλασμός
σε Αρχαιότητα και Βυζάντιο
(4ος αι. π.Χ. - 7ος αι. μ.Χ.)**

**Thursday 8 & Friday 9
October 2020**

**Πέμπτη 8 & Παρασκευή 9
Οκτωβρίου 2020**

**Department of Byzantine and
Modern Greek Studies
University of Cyprus**

**Τμήμα Βυζαντινών και
Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών
Πανεπιστήμιο Κύπρου**

**Old Campus, Kallipoleos 75, Nicosia
Room A106**

**Κεντρικά Κτήρια, Καλλιπόλεως 75, Λευκωσία
Αίθουσα Α106**

Online Presentations via ZOOM

Διαδικτυακές Παρουσιάσεις μέσω ZOOM

PROGRAMME / ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ

THURSDAY, 8 October | ΠΕΜΠΤΗ, 8 Οκτωβρίου

WELCOME AND SHORT INTRODUCTION / ΚΑΛΩΣΟΡΙΣΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ

15.45-16.00

Stavroula Constantinou / Σταυρούλα Κωνσταντίνου

**BREASTFEEDING IMAGES AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES/
Ο ΘΗΛΑΣΜΟΣ ΣΕ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΛΟΓΟ**

16.00-16.30

The Early Byzantine Galaktotrophousa in Egypt
Elizabeth Bolman

16.30-17.00 Discussion / Συζήτηση

17.00-17.30

Milk and Blood: The Association of the Virgin Lactans with the Passion
Niki Tsironi / Νίκη Τσιρώνη

17.30-18.00 Discussion / Συζήτηση

18.00-18.15 Break / Διάλειμμα

MEDICINE AND PRACTICE I / ΙΑΤΡΙΚΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΕΣ I

18.15-18.45

Lactation Cessation in the Early Byzantine Period
Laurence Totelin

18.45-19.15 Discussion / Συζήτηση

FRIDAY, 9 October | ΠΑΡΑΣΚΕΥΗ, 9 Οκτωβρίου

MEDICINE AND PRACTICE II / ΙΑΤΡΙΚΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΕΣ II

10.00-10.30

Reading milk 'mochtheron' in Ancient and Early Byzantine Medical Treatises
Stavroula Constantinou / Σταυρούλα Κωνσταντίνου
Aspasia Skouroumouni Stavrinou / Ασπασία Σκουρουμούνη Σταυρινού

10.30-11.00 Discussion / Συζήτηση

11.00-11.30 Coffee Break / Διάλειμμα για Καφέ

11.30-12.00

The Role of Milk in Early Byzantine Medical Literature
Petros Bouras-Vallianatos / Πέτρος Μπούρας-Βαλλιανάτος

12.00-12.30 Discussion / Συζήτηση

12.30-14.30 Lunch Break / Διάλειμμα για Γεύμα

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TREATMENTS/
ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΙΚΕΣ ΠΡΟΣΕΓΓΙΣΕΙΣ**

14.30-15.00

Premodern Mothering: The Socio-ideological Position of the Lactating Woman in Antiquity and Early Byzantium

Stavroula Constantinou / Σταυρούλα Κωνσταντίνου
Aspasia Skouroumouni Stavrinou / Ασπασία Σκουρουμούνη Σταυρινού

15.00-15.30 Discussion / Συζήτηση

15.30-16.00 Coffee Break / Διάλειμμα για Καφέ

16.00-16.30

The Breast as Locus for Punishment
Dionysios Stathakopoulos / Διονύσιος Σταθακόπουλος

16.30-17.00 Discussion / Συζήτηση

17.00-17.30

Images of Breastfeeding in Late Antique Art: Form – Context – Function
Maria Parani / Μαρία Παράνη

17.30-18.00 Discussion / Συζήτηση

18.00-18.30

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION / ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ ΣΤΡΟΓΓΥΛΗΣ ΤΡΑΠΕΖΗΣ

19.00 Dinner / Δείπνο

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

Lactating Breasts: Motherhood and Breastfeeding in Antiquity and Byzantium (4th Century BCE-7th Century CE)

This workshop is organized in the framework of a three-year research project (2019-2021) entitled “Lactating Breasts: Motherhood and Breastfeeding in Antiquity and Byzantium (4th Century BCE-7th Century CE)”, which is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the Republic of Cyprus through the Research and Innovation Foundation. The Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of the University of Cyprus has also generously supported the workshop’s organization.

Το επιστημονικό αυτό εργαστήριο έχει διοργανωθεί στο πλαίσιο ενός τριετούς ερευνητικού προγράμματος (2019-2021) με τον τίτλο «Γαλακτοφόροι Μαστοί: Μητρότητα και Θηλασμός σε Αρχαιότητα και Βυζάντιο (4ος αι. π.Χ.- 7ος αι. μ.Χ.)», το οποίο συγχρηματοδοτείται από το Ευρωπαϊκό Ταμείο Περιφερειακής Ανάπτυξης και την Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία μέσω του Ιδρύματος Έρευνας και Καινοτομίας. Επίσης, αυτή η επιστημονική διοργάνωση έχει υποστηριχθεί γενναϊόδωρα από το Τμήμα Βυζαντινών και Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών του Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου.



ABSTRACTS



Elizabeth Bolman

The Early Byzantine Galaktotrophousa in Egypt

By far the largest body of surviving images of Mary nursing Christ comes from monasteries and hermitages in Egypt. Monks often chose to locate monasteries in the desert, which greatly aided the preservation of buildings and their sometimes extensive decoration. After the monasteries were abandoned, dry sands covered them and preserved them exceptionally well. The proliferation of depictions of the nursing Virgin Mary – at least compared to the very scant examples elsewhere in the empire – suggest that the ubiquitous Egyptian depictions of Isis nursing Horus may have been a powerful force.

Paintings of the *Galaktotrophousa* (Nursing Virgin Mary – literally, She Who Nourishes with Milk) cannot properly be evaluated without first considering twentieth- and twenty-first century ideas about women, motherhood, babies, and nursing. Various early Byzantine functional contexts for these paintings illuminate these subjects, as do historical ideas about milk, blood and the Eucharist. Within a Christian context, the iconography of the *Galaktotrophousa* becomes a metaphor for the consumption of the Eucharist and the path to salvation.

Petros Bouras-Vallianatos

The Role of Milk in Early Byzantine Medical Literature

This paper aims to critically examine the use of milk in early Byzantine medical texts by authors such as Oribasios, Aetios of Amida, Alexander of Tralles and Paul of Aegina. It is also informed by other contemporary sources, including texts of a superstitious nature (e.g. magical/medical papyri, Cyranides). It focuses on the use of milk as a dietary agent, including, for example, the advice offered to mothers and wet nurses. It also discusses the role of milk as an ingredient of composite drugs in the treatment of disease. Finally, special emphasis will be given to when and why human milk was preferred over animal milk, and in particular mare's milk, and vice versa.

**Stavroula Constantinou and
Aspasia Skouroumouni Stavrinou**

***Reading Milk Mochtheron in Ancient and Early Byzantine
Medical Treatises***

Medical Treatises of antiquity and Early Byzantium repeatedly foreground human milk both as a therapeutic and nutritional *agathon*, but also as potential reason for malfunctioning and disease. Malicious milk resurfaces as a subject of discussion in Soranos, Galen, Oribasios and Aetios, primarily in the context of debates around infant nutrition and infant health. Discussion focuses on the examination of the choice of terms used for describing malicious milk (terminology of *galaktology*) and the mode and style of their utilization within the medical narratives, via the employment of figures of speech and simple literary forms (art of *galaktology*). The close study of milk vocabulary and rhetorical devices and of their evolution in terms of usage in the Greco-Roman and early Byzantine medical treatises reveals the highly connotative and rhetorical character of the medical texts in question. Our investigation of how milk is written and rewritten via the poetics of medical *galaktology* has mainly a twofold purpose: first, to bring to the fore an overlooked, yet prominent, aspect of these texts, that is their literariness; and second, to show how this very literariness functions as a powerful tool in the medical authors' hands in their attempt to promote their medical agendas and to prove the correctness of their medical approaches. By examining medical works dating from the first to the seventh centuries, we also demonstrate how medical ideas about milk vices and virtues evolve throughout time.

**Stavroula Constantinou and
Aspasia Skouroumouni Stavrinou**

***Premodern Mothering: The Socio-ideological Position of the
Lactating Woman in Antiquity and Early Byzantium***

In an attempt to understand the socio-ideological position of the lactating woman, either mother or wet nurse, from Antiquity to early Byzantine times, this paper takes a matricentric perspective in its investigation of a number of texts which have a contradictory approach to the common practice of wet nursing that points to an infant-feeding debate. Moralists, philosophers, theologians, and medical authors are concerned with the question of who should breastfeed the infant: the biological mother or a wet nurse. Arguments for or against maternal or surrogate breastfeeding establish the lactating woman as a social and moral category through which maternity, biological and surrogate, is defined and regulated. While the institution of motherhood that is created by the examined societies is oppressive to the lactating woman, our sources allow also a glimpse into the ways in which the triangular bond of mother-wet nurse-child provides mothering women with a power to resist against the social forces constraining them. The choice for an investigation encompassing antiquity up to early Byzantium, an uncommon extension in the chronological range of studies on premodern breastfeeding, further enlightens the mechanics and dynamics of the complex patterns concerning premodern mothering and the lactating woman's role, as these are preserved or evolve in time.

Maria Parani***Images of Breastfeeding in Late Antique Art: Form – Context – Function***

Images of women nursing in late antique art of the third down to the seventh century AD are admittedly rare, and, rightly or wrongly, have been identified as representations of the Virgin Mary suckling the baby Jesus in an iconographic type known as the *Galaktotrophousa* or *Virgo Lactans*. The origins, geographic dispersion, and meaning of this type in relation to Christological dogma, on the one hand, and the rise of the cult of the Virgin, on the other, have monopolized the interest of scholars down to the present day. Though brief reference to the most important outcomes of this on-going debate will be unavoidable, the present paper will adopt a wider scope. Through a survey of extant late antique images of breastfeeding, the paper will discuss both the context into which such images were introduced and the way this activity was represented in terms of postures, gestures, and the interaction between the nursing woman and the suckling child. By focusing on the contextualization of the theme, its pictorial treatment, and the relation of the latter to the realities of breastfeeding at the time as may be reconstructed from written sources and archaeological evidence, one hopes to contribute to our understanding of the practices, ideas, and perceptions associated with breastfeeding that informed its representation in late antique art.

Dionysios Stathakopoulos***The Breast as Locus for Punishment***

At the heart of this paper lies a discrepancy: in edifying religious texts (such as apocrypha, for example) and the images that sprung from them (attested, perhaps, as early as the ninth century) there are numerous instances in which women are punished in the afterlife for various sins by having torments inflicted on their breasts.

The earliest textual evidence comes from the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, a first-century Jewish apocryphon, a fragment of which is preserved in an eighth-century Latin manuscript containing the *Epistle of Pseudo-Titus*. It is seen as the oldest of the “tours of Hell” genre. In this text we read that “[i]f some women are punished with torment in their breasts, then these are women who for sport have surrendered their own bodies to men.” The next text to feature in this discussion is the Greek *Apocalypse of Esdras*, dated roughly between the second and the ninth century. In this *Apocalypse* there is another instance of breast-tormenting for mothers who refused to nurse and committed infanticide: “And I saw a woman hanging, and four wild beasts sucking her breasts. And the angels said to me: She grudged to give her milk, but even threw her infants into the rivers.” Finally, in one of the most popular Byzantine apocalyptic texts, the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, written in Greek and dated between the ninth and eleventh centuries we witness deaconesses who defiled their body in fornication: they are hanging on a cliff while a two-headed beast is gnawing at their breasts. With the exception of a law from the code of Hammurabi, no Greek, Roman or Byzantine legal texts record such punishments for any crimes. This suggests a tension around the creation of this universe of punishments: if they do not spring – or at least draw some distant inspiration from – a legal tradition, then their invention needs to be explored.

If the textual record is sparse, the same cannot be said of the images that this tradition spawned. The earliest case is from the Yılanlı Kilise, at the Ihlara valley in Cappadocia and has been

dated between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. It features a woman whose breasts are bitten by two serpents and the inscription “She who turns away from the infants”. The bulk of the surviving pictorial evidence, however, comes from the late Middle Ages, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. The lion’s share of the surviving depictions comes from Crete and to a lesser extent Cyprus. All images under discussion feature women whose breasts are bitten by serpents. The most common scenes are those of women who refused to nurse and harlots, but slanderers, gossipers and witches are also occasionally depicted with the same punishment. The textual evidence is only lightly connected to the images at hand – especially when it comes to the torments inflicted on female breasts – and this throws open a further set of questions that this paper will explore.

Laurence Totelin

Lactation Cessation in the Early Byzantine Period

Ancient medical texts contain well-known advice on how to breastfeed and how to choose a wet nurse. Less noted is the advice on how to make the milk dry up and how to deal with engorgement and other symptoms associated with lactation cessation. In this paper, I examine recipes and regimens meant to help women stop breastfeeding, which are to be found for instance in the works of pseudo-Galen, Oribasius, Aetius of Amida, Alexander of Tralles and Paul of Aegina, as well as the medical collection preserved under the name of Metrodora. I study the symbolism of some of the ingredients used in those treatments. I also explore the cultural expectations that are implicit in this advice. Thus, recipes to stop breastfeeding are sometimes followed by tips to keep the breasts pert, perhaps implying concerns over the perceived physical effects of breastfeeding. On the other hand, advice regarding lactation cessation also points to worries about women whose infants had died and their suffering.

