

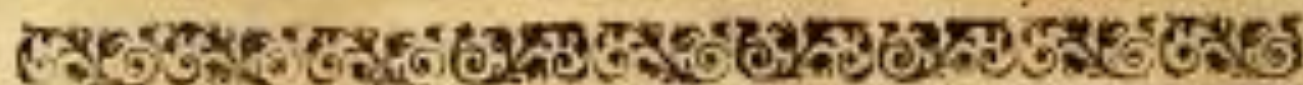
# **The ancient medical sources in the chapters about sterility of Rodrigo de Castro's *De Universa Mulierum Medicina***

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# Rodrigo de Castro Lusitano

## *Rodericus a Castro Lusitanus*

- Portuguese physician of Jewish origin (b. 1546-d.1627); later in his life adopted the Jewish name David Nahmias.
- Studied in Évora and Salamanca.
- Achieved some notoriety in Lisbon in the 1580's.
  - He was invited to travel to India to study medicinal plants, but declined King Phillip's invitation;
  - He worked as a physician with the soldiers of the Spanish Armada, before they set sail from Lisbon.
- In 1590 (?), he fled the persecutions of the Jews, establishing himself in Hamburg, where he edited his most important book, ***De Universa Mulierum Medicina - The general medicine about women*** - (Hamburg 1603; Hamburg 1617; Hamburg 1628; Venice 1644; Hamburg 1662; Cologne 1689).



RODERICI A CASTRO  
LUSITANI

De Morbis Mulierum  
LIBER TERTIVS  
SECTIO PRIMA.

DE STERILIBUS.

*Ne confusionis obscuritatem paret male harum affectionum distincta tractatio, eas, quæ citra conceptum aut partum accidunt superioribus libris conclusimus, reliquas quæ vel prægnantes, vel puerperas exercent, in proximo relaturi.*

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*De sterilitate naturali.*

C A P. I.

*ana candidi A. 1614.*  
RODERICI à CASTRO LUSITANI, PHI-  
LOSOPHIÆ AC MEDICINÆ DOCTO-  
ris per Europam notissimi,  
*De universa mulierum*

# MEDICINA. NO- VO ET ANTEHAC A NE- MINE TENTATO ORDINE

OPUS ABSOLUTISSI-  
MUM.

*Et Studiosis omnibus utile, Medicis verò pernecessarium.*

Pars prima Theorica.

*QUATUOR COMPREHENSA LIBRIS, IN QUI-  
bus cuncta, quæ ad mulieris naturam, anatomen, semen, menstruum, con-  
ceptionem, uteri gestationem, fœtus formationem, & hominis or-  
tum attinent, abundantissime expli-  
cantur.*

CUM TRIPLICI INDICE,

*Primo, Capitum totius Operis.*

*Secundo, Dubiorum, & Problematum, quæ pleraq; pulcherrima, utilissima  
ac jucundissima passim inserta sunt.*

*Tertio, Eorum quæ toto opere scitu digniora habentur.*



*Cum Gratia & Privilegio Cæsareæ Majestatis.*

COLONIÆ,

Imprimebatur Anno 1614.

TRACTATUS BREVIS  
DE NATURA,  
ET CAUSIS PESTIS, QUAE HOC  
ANNO M. D. XCVI. HAMBURGEN-  
sem Civitatem affligit.

*In quo succinctè, sed accurate demonstratur, qua-  
nam in presenti lue praecavendi & curan-  
di ratio sit observanda.*

Utrum universa urbs tum etiam unusquisque sese possit  
ab exorienti malo praeservare, ac subinde  
occupantem jam perniciem faci-  
lius propulsare.

*Multa etiam in hac re haecenus subobscura  
obiter declarantur*

Per

Rodericum à Castro, Philosophia & Me-  
dicina Doctorem.

Ad Amplissimum splendidissimumq; ejusdem  
urbis Senatum.



HAMBURGI.  
Excudebat Jacobus Lucius junior.  
Anno M. D. XCVI.

RODERICI à CASTRO LVSITANI  
Philos. ac Medic. Doct. per Euro-  
pam notissimi.  
MEDICUS-POLITICUS:

Sive  
DE OFFICIIS MEDICO-POLITICIS TRA-  
ctatus, quatuor distinctus Libris:

IN QVIBVS NON SOLVM BONORVM MEDI-  
corum mores ac virtutes exprimentur, malorum verò fraudes & imposturae  
detruguntur: verum etiam pleraq; alia circa novum hoc argumentum multa  
atq; jucunda exaltissime proponuntur.

OPVS ADMODVM VTILE MEDICIS, ÆGROTIS,  
ægrotorum assistentibus, & cunctis aliis litterarum, atque adeo po-  
liticæ disciplinæ cultoribus.

CVM DVPLICI INDICE, VNO CAPITVLM:  
*alio verum præcipuum.*

ANNO

clb. l. C. XIV.



HAMBURGI, Ex Bibliopolio FROBENIANO.



# Chapter “De sterilibus” (*“On sterile women”*)

Book 1 *De morbis cunctis foeminis communibus*, (Diseases that are common to all women)

Book 2 *Liber secundus de affectibus, qui viduis, ac virginibus accident*, (Diseases that affect virgins and widows)

Book 3 *Liber tertius*, Section 1 *De sterilibus* (*On sterile women*)

«In part 2, I will provide that no disease among those who often afflict poor women and have so far been treated by different writers in a dispersed way is omitted. I will examine the essence, the species, the differences, the causes, the symptoms and the prognosis of these, keeping this order, and if any issue requires a more wordy debate, I will relegate it to the *scholia* that are attached to almost every chapter, in order that you, reader, that hurry to the treatment, do not be late».

Castro, *De Universa Mulierum Medicina* I, praef., 352 (unless stated otherwise, translations of Latin or Greek texts are my own.)

# *De sterilibus (On sterile women)*

## **Definition**

*Sterilitas est quaedam impotentia ac difficultas mulieris, viro utentis, ad concipiendum debito tempore.*

(Castro, *De Universa Mulierum Medicina* Part II, l. 3, c. 1, 350)

«Sterility is some sort of inability or difficulty that a woman who sleeps with a man has in conceiving at the convenient time.»

*Structure of Section 1, Book 3, Part 2: De Sterilibus (On Sterile Women)*

<b><i>I Sterilitas naturalis</i></b>	Sterility caused by a natural and known defect.
<b><i>II Sterilitas foeminae per collationem ad virum</i></b>	Sterility that is caused by the relationship between husband and wife.
<b><i>Scholium</i></b> <b><i>(appended comment or note)</i></b>	
<b><i>III Sterilitas morbosa, seu diversis affectionibus quae conceptum impediunt</i></b>	Pathological sterility or caused by different illnesses that prevent conception.
<b><i>IV Sterilitas ad tempus</i></b>	Sterility related to time, that is, of a woman who after the birth of the first or second child has become sterile.
<b><i>V. Sterilitas virorum</i></b>	Male sterility.



# Fertility tests

*(...) allium expurgatum pessi forma dormiturae utero subdito, & si odor vel sapor postridie ad os pervenerit foecunda est, sin minus, sterilis.*

«Garlic used in a pessary put in the womb of a woman and left overnight. If in the next morning, she feels the taste and the odour of garlic in her mouth, she is fertile. Otherwise, she is not.»

(Castro, *De Universa Mulierum Medicina* II, 3, 1, 352)

«If a woman does not conceive, and you wish to know if she will conceive, cover her round with wraps and burn perfumes underneath. If the smell seems to pass through the body to the mouth and nostrils, be assured that the woman is not barren through her own physical fault.» (Hippocrates, *Aphorismi* 5, 59 [transl. Jones (1923) 175])

# Women with weight problems

«Women with child who are unnaturally thin miscarry until they have grown stouter.»

Hipp. *Aphorisms* 5.44 [transl. Jones (1923) 159]

«If a pregnant woman aborts a month-old embryo and cannot carry it to full term, she is abnormally thin. Have her cleanse her uterus and use drugs to make her fat: for she cannot carry a child to full term until she is restored to health and her uterus is strong.»

Hipp. *On sterile women* 237 [transl. in Hanson (2004) 294] (=identical text in *On female nature* 19)

# Women with weight problems

«When unnaturally fat women cannot conceive, it is because the fat presses the mouth of the womb, and conception is impossible until they grow thinner.»

Hipp. *Aphorisms* 5. 46 [transl. Jones (1923) 171]

«If a woman is excessively fat, she does not conceive, for her *omentum*, lying thick and abundant, presses the mouth of her uterus closed so that it does not receive seed. You must make her thin with a downward purgative and uterine pessaries that cleanse and inflate.»

Hipp. *On sterile women* 229 [transl. in Hanson (2004) 295 (=identical text in *On female nature* 20)]

# «Love reconciles seed»

*Inviti coitus utriusque aut alterutrius, ut fieri solet inter eos qui inviti matrimonium contrahunt, steriles censeantur, **amor enim ut inquit Aetius, conciliat genituram**, quocirca amantes foeminae crebrius pariunt.*

*(Castro, De Universa Mulierum Medicina II, 3, 2, 360)*

«Unwanted sex for one or the other, as usually happens between those who are married against their will, must be considered infertile. **Love, indeed, as Aetius says, reconciles seed.** Therefore, women who are in love have more children.»

# Scholium

*Impotentia* in Law:

**Frigidi** : those who are impotent by nature (includes all congenital physical pathologies that prevent coition)

vs.

**Maleficiati**: those who are impotent by accident (men and women under spells, eunuchs, *castrati*, etc.)

# Abortion

*Quaestio hic euenit, an medico liceat sterilitatem inducere, quae duas habet partes prima est, an conceptum impedire, secunda, an abortum prouocare liceat.*

(Castro, *De Universa Mulierum Medicina* II, 3, sch, 366)

«In this place the question arises: is it legitimate for the doctor to induce sterility? This question has two parts: one being if it is legitimate to prohibit conception, the other is it legitimate to induce abortion.»



# Abortion

*(...) idem circumspectissimus senex, qui in iureiurando mulieri ad corrumpendum conceptum vel foetum, medicamentum non esse exhibendum, asseuerantissime confirmat.*

*(Castro, De Universa Mulierum Medicina II, 3, sch. 366)*

«In the Oath the same old wise man earnestly establishes that no drug should be shown to a woman in order to prevent conception or destroy the foetus.»

*(...) οὐδὲ γυναικὶ **πessὸν φθόριον** δώσω.*

«I shall not give to a woman a pessary to cause abortion»

[transl. Jones, vol. I (1923) 298]

# Works cited

Hanson, A. E. (2004). *Aphorismi* 5.28-63 and the gynaecological texts of the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. In: H. F. J. Horstmanshoff & M. Stol (eds) (2004) *Magic and rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman medicine*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 277-304.

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