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Apud nos foediora verba: 
Celsius' reluctant construction of the female body

Celsius dans ses Artes non seulement considère le genre sexuel comme une différence fondamentale entre les corps, mais offre en plus la première version romaine à peu près complète du corps féminin. Cet essai explore les questions soulevées par l'intersection de trois problèmes: I. La représentation du corps féminin, éparsie à travers les huit livres de Celsius, révèle-t-elle une quelconque cohérence ou consistence? Si tel est le cas, quelle idéologie s'y reflète? II. Quelles tactiques emploie Celsius dans sa transposition en latin d'un corps essentiellement grec? Cette transposition diffère-t-elle de façon significative, au niveau technique, de celle du mâle? III. En quoi Celsius a-t-il contribué à la standardisation de la terminologie latine pour les parties du corps féminin? Quel impact ont eu ses choix et ses innovations sur les écrivains postérieurs? Les résultats de ces explorations suggèrent, inter alia, que ses ambitions lexicologiques et stylistiques, tout comme sa sensibilité scientifique, se heurtent à l'idéologie du corps féminin dont il hérite. L'examen de son langage révèle les tensions et les résistances que cette confrontation provoque.

The intersection of three problems in Celsius' Artes presents an intriguing challenge: I. The nature of Celsius' construction of the female body — the first reasonably detailed version of the female body in Latin literature — as it emerges in observations scattered throughout his eight extant books. Celsius himself specifies gender, sexus, as a human differentia to which the reader should be particularly attentive. What, then, in his view, are the characteristic differences between male and female bodies? Furthermore, is his representation of the female body coherent and consistent, and, if so, what are its salient features? II. Celsius' tactics and

choices in his development of a Latin terminology for the parts, activities, and dysfunctions of the female body. How does he transpose an essentially Greek female body into the Latin language, and does this transposition differ significantly in technique from the «translation» of the male? III. The nature of Celsius' contribution, if any, to Latin terminological standardisation for the female reproductive parts. How much of an impact did his nomenclatural choices and innovations have on subsequent Latin writers?

The exploration of these three related problems not only yields a scientific amplification of what is known about Roman constructions of gender in the first century but also illuminates the nature of Greco-Roman interaction — including lexical interaction — in such constructions. Furthermore, it sheds unusual light on language as a refector of tensions between Celsius' scientific aspirations, his stylistic sensibilities, and his ideological commitments.

The female body displays features of which Celsius stands in awe. The only use of mirabilis in the extant books of the Ars is, for example, to refer to the «ante omna natura mirabilis» of the womb. For all his intense, admiring wonder at the constitution of the female body, however, Celsius does not relish the topic. Throughout, the male is his model and the female appears as an obligatory detour, as a reluctant yet necessary afterthought, and as a phenomenon requiring description and explanation outside the normal categories of bodily things. Not only do the male reproductive parts receive much more detailed treatment than the female, but recurrent patterns of analogy, of anatomical detail, and of pathological explanation contribute to a fairly consistent Celsian valorisation of female and male. In this first part I offer brief examples of Celsius' pathological, analogical, and anatomical construction of the female.

A. Pathology

The Roman female body of Celsius' Ars, not surprisingly, is essentially a Greek body. It is weaker, more labile, and bloodier than the male body; in Celsian taxonomy it belongs categorically among the susceptible

5 - Section 11.2, in secundum cf. I 11.2 (pp. 25-22 Marx).
6 - E.g., I 1,13; Ill 21,11; VII 26,4.
7 - E.g., I 11,13-14.
8 - Ill 21,1: morbus comitialis sed maior...seopiis uiros quam feminas occupat.
9 - Cf. IV 27,1D (maligna purgatio). For cases of amenorrhoea see I 7,7; IV 11,2; IV 11,5; V 21,13; II 8,25. See also I 8,7; II 8,41; IV 31,1. For hypermenorrhoea see IV 27,1D; for breasts suffused with blood as a sign of impending furor see II 7,27.
10 - See IV 27,1D; II 7,8; II 8,16; II 8,30; IV 11,2; IV 11,5; II 8,25; II 7,15-18; II 8,13; VI 6,8; II 6,5; II 8,7.
11 - IV 11,6; II 10,1-5; IV 27,1D (the 'Toledo fragment').
conceptual scheme a nosebleed accordingly is a pathological sign of menstruation gone awry, while inducing menstruation will cure a woman who is vomiting blood.

Since she is bloodier than the male, the woman is both more threatened by excessive blood and less endangered by a loss of blood. In his description of lithotomy, for example, Celsus assures his reader that «there is no need to be frightened if more blood flows from a woman» than from a man: «neque terreri convenit, si plus ex muliebri corpore sanguinis profuit» (VII 26,4). And in Book II, discussing female patients in whom the suppression of menstruation supervenues upon tabes, he assures us not only that if a bloody abscess or tumida erupts it will bring the woman relief but also that the bloodier, the better: «quaerite, quaerite cruenterum, eo melior est.»

Among other disorders peculiar to women, Celsus singles out uterine ulcerations and aches; miscarriage and failure to conceive; difficult labour; pains, fever, and vaginal discharges after parturition; uterine retention of a dead foetus or of afterbirth. He also discusses a rupture of the inner membrane of the abdomen as a consequence of pregnancy; a wounded or pierced womb which at times results in aphonias and death; prolapse of, or haemorrhoids in, the mouth of the womb; inflammation and induration of the womb. Affections of the female breasts are of special concern to him as well: involuntary lactation, withering of the breasts during pregnancy, suffusion of the breasts with blood, carcerina in the breasts, mammary accretions of blood and pus, and so on. This enumeration, too, reflects the fact that in the case of women Celsus' primary pathological concern is disturbances of their reproductive capacity.

The female body in a healthy state, then, is above all a reproductively functional body; and to keep or to render it such is first and foremost a matter of the quantitative and topographical regulation of the blood traffic that courses through and out of a woman's body.

Hysteria? If female blood can cause mischief by wandering where it should not, can Wanderlust stir the Celsian womb too? A suggestive pattern of coincidences hints that Celsus, perhaps under the influence of Herophilus' demystification of the womb, tacitly distanced himself from the notion of the «wandering womb» as the cause of hysteria, even while

16 - V 28,3a; V 21,8; IV 27,1a-c.
17 - IV 27,1b: si diutius aut iacet aut aliquo laccro conscuetis, odmouere sportus naribus extinctum ex lucernae lineamentam, ut alibi ex is, quaem feculcit vosis esse rettili, quod mulierem excitat.
18 - Ibid.
19 - IV 1,11, a passage also of interest for its observations on the different positions of the female and male bladder.
20 - V 1,12.
22 - IV 27,1a.
comparisons too hard for functional or semantic co-extensiveness between the correlated objects, but it is noteworthy that this comparison does not accommodate any concept of organ movement. Finally, Celsus presents no Latin version of the Hippocratic πυτήχα, πυτήρας, πυτήρας or πυτήρας κώνων ἵπτανεν. Female strugulatio, commonly linked to the womb by Latin writers such as Pliny the Elder, never makes its appearance in Celsus. Not that Celsus is a stranger to strugulare; he uses it thirteen times to refer to suffocation and choking, but he does not associate suffocation with female fits, and he never depicts it as a disorder to which women are particularly susceptible. Praefacatio and praefacare, used by many later Latin writers and translators to designate hysterical suffocation, also never appear in Celsus' text.

While silece is insidious, cumulatively these considerations suggest that, on the one hand, Celsus accepts the traditional view that certain female fits are due to uterine or genital disorders while, on the other hand, he displays a consistent reticence, perhaps inspired by his acquaintance with Alexandria medicine, to endorse the traditional pathologization ("wandering womb") of this view. It would not be the only instance in which Celsus tacitly distances himself from Hippocrates' before whom he elsewhere makes the customary obeisance. 23

B - Anatomy

A sense of reluctant but obligatory detour is also discernible in some of the scattered anatomical comments on women. Detour nevertheless becomes contour here, too, as Celsus introduces a formidable array of details. I offer a few brief examples.

The female anatomical features on which Celsus comments include the womb, the "mouth of the womb" (os uulæae; see II. infra), the crux uulæae, the latera uulæae, the vagina, the labia, the bladder, the urethra, and the hip bones. He draws attention to the size of the womb (in virginibus... exigua and, in non-pregnant women, not much larger than

what can be grasped in one’s hand) and comments with considerable felicity on the shape, course, and position of the womb: it begins with a straight, narrow neck, broadens into the uterine body, and inclines a little towards the right hip joint before rising above the rectum; its sides, he says, are attached to the ilia (presumably by the ligamentum latum). The special protection afforded the womb by the remarkably strong hip bones (coxarum os) also is noted by Celsus, as is the peculiar female construction of the pectines or pubic bone — so shaped, Celsus remarks in a rare gesture to functional anatomy, in order not to impede parturition. These anatomical details bespeak an acquaintance with post-Hippocratic anatomy (though many details of Hellenistic female anatomy are strikingly absent from Celsus' text, notably the ovaries and the tubes which Herophilus, with whose work Celsus professes familiarity, had described). A similar anatomical attentiveness to size, shape, position, and course — in striking agreement with anatomical criteria attributed to the "rationalists" by Celsus — is displayed in his discussion of the distinctiveness of the female bladder and urethra. Indeed, for anatomical accuracy and detail nothing in the Hippocratic Corpus or in Aristotle matches Celsus' description of these parts; in all likelihood Hellenistic anatomy informed his text here too.

C - Analogy

Perhaps as telling as such anatomical, pathological, and therapeutic details are the analogies, explicit and implicit, deployed by Celsus in his representations of the female body.

Marginalising analogies are most notable, in their categorical susceptibility to certain disorders, for example, women are depicted as analogous (a) to children, (b) to the aged, and (c) to castrati. There are several variations on this theme, but such analogies have the consistent impact of aligning women, as a group, both in good health and in illness, with the marginal, dependent, or vulnerable male members of society. Thus with reference to certain joint troubles women, in their relative insusceptibility, resemble two kinds of males: eunuchs, or adolescent boys before their first experience of intercourse. If amenorrhoea supervenes upon

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23 - E.g., Pliny, Nat. Hist. XX 162 (strangulationes uulæae), XXI 149 (oolurum strangulationes); XXV 182 (oolurum strangulationes).

24 - For examples of praefacatio and praefacare used of hysterical suffocation see Mstin (Seramis lat.) pp. 47, 3 Ross (vulæae praefacatio), 53, 3 et if. (praefacatio maxima: uulæae, que et Cruce s isterque pens dixit est); Cæsarius Aurelianus Acad. II 9, 57 and II 10, 75, 77; III 5, 58; id., Chron. I 4, 71, 116; IV 8, 109, Theodorus Priscianus, Epitomae III ii 6 (p. 228, 9, Rose); Cassius Felix Med. 77 (pp. 187, 10-189, 3 Rose). Pliny never uses praefacatio or praefacare.


26 - IV 1, 12. Cf. VII 26, 1A-C (male vs. female urethra); IV 1, 11 (female vs. male bladder). For os uulæae see VI 18, 9A and 18, 10; VII 28, 1; VIII 29, 1; VII 29, 5; VII 29, 8.
this might be unobjectionable, but the frequency and prominence of such comparisons in Celsius’ representations of the passage to, and the orifice of, the womb marks a noteworthy difference between the Latin writer and his Hippocratic precursors. The Hippocratic writers had admittedly suggested that the womb is especially susceptible to dirt and impurity, but Celsius’ insistent comparison of the uterine orifice with a passage for faecal discharge is not Hippocratic in emphasis. Furthermore, Celsius tends to analogise the penis with aesthetically less disturbing, less fecal parts of the body – the penis, it is implied, resembles the nose, or the tonsils, or the uvula, or the mouth – while the vagina remains arms-like, reinforcing the general sexualisation of the female body.

Other comparisons strengthen the reader’s sense that the female, more than the male, prompted associations of impurity and of the aesthetically disagreeable, and that such associations extend beyond the genitalia. Nasal polyps (in naribus carunculae), for example, remind Celsius of a woman’s breasts or nipples (similes malleibridibus mammis). The male parts provoke no such pathological associations on Celsius’ part.

Some of Celsius’ terminological choices might have similar overtones, but here we tread on more speculative soil. To refer to the labia, for example, Celsius, alone among Latin authors, consistently uses orae or orae naturalium (and, for the labia minora, imae orae). Ora can, of course, be an innocuous word, at least to the extent that any word ever is innocuous; depending on context and reference, it can even suggest the most pleasant of associations. Celsius, however, overwhelmingly uses orae as a pathological term to refer to the margin or edge of an ulceration, of a wound or of an incision: ora ulceris, ora vulneris, ora plaga, and so on. The field of semantic expectation evoked by the appearance of orae in Celsius’ text hence is that of an open wound or a festering sore or a surgical incision. Given the uniqueness of Celsius’ choice of orae as the term for the labia, it is not inconceivable that the folded edges or margins of the pudendal cleft aroused, in an unwitting Celsius, associations with the edges of ulcers, wounds, and incisions. Even if this unusual use of orae is an attempt to render the Greek κρημνοί, as Adams plausibly argues, the Greek term has similar pathological overtones: the Hippocratic author(s) of De locis in homine, for example, uses κρημνοί both of the edges of a

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33 - II 8,25 (adolescentes: virgines: mulieres quibvs super tabem menstrua suppresse sunt).
34 - II 10,2.
35 - II 10,3.
36 - VI 18,10.
37 - VI 18,9A.
38 - VII 26,4. (A virgo is, however, to be treated the same as a male patient, presumably in order to keep intact her virginity.)
39 - Cf. VI 18,2D: cedem...compositio fse, «as for an ulcerated, suppurating penis»
40 - VI 8,2A.
41 - Cf. VII 26,1C (imae orae); II 7,16 (orae naturalium); VII 26,4 (ima ora); VII 28,1 (orae).
42 - Ora is used only four times of the labia but thirty-two times of the edge of a wound (orae vulneris, plaga, plagarum), of an ulceration (ulceris), of a lesion, or of an incision.
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In passages dealing with the penis, testicles, and scrotum Celsius freely introduces Greek words and Latinised versions of Greek anatomical and pathological terms. These include, for example, *kremaster, ehytróides* (scil. chiton), *dardos, escheos, enterokele, epikleke, hydrókele, hieroskele, sarkekele, phiinosis, phagedainia, ragadanion*, and *haimorrhois.* He also makes liberal use of what might be calques on Greek words, such as *coles* for penis (18 occurrences); a calque on Greek *kalos*, *glans* for the head of the penis (17 instances; a calque on Greek *balanos*), and *cutis* for prepuse (20 occurrences; Greek *derma*). In comparable passages on female parts, by contrast, Celsius tends to resort either exclusively to Latin terms or to Latin circumlocutions. Even allowing for the fact that Celsius dwells at greater length on the male parts than on the female, this gender-specific discrepancy in the deployment of Greek words and of expressions derived from Greek remains noteworthy, particularly given Celsius' unequivocal complaint about the fundamental inadequacy and impropriety of Latin.

The Latin words introduced by Celsius to designate female parts include, centrally, *aulia* (aulia) to refer to the womb. Celsius uses it thirty times, all but twice to refer to the human womb. *Uterus,* by contrast, he employs more often to refer to the belly or the abdomen (seven times) than to the womb, and none of the 113 occurrences of *aulia,* nor any of the almost one hundred instances of *uuter,* refers unequivocally to the womb.

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44 - Cf. VII 18.1-3.7.9-10; VII 25.2; VI 18.4.7 A.9A. On the question of whether Greek words in Celsius' text should be written in Greek or transliterated or Latinised see G. Beader, *Überlebensprobleme des Ä. Cornelius Celsius,* *Pfirschelena* 34.7 (1960), p. 217.

45 - *Coles* occurs only in botanical usage (*stalk* of a plant: II 18.3; II 27), but coles is used both of the penis (e.g. IV 7.14; IV 1.12; VI 18.2,ACIK 3(Ok,b); VI 18.5; VII 18.6; 25.1B-C; 26.1B-C; 27.1-2, 27.6) and (once) botanically (II 33.3). *Kolos* is used of the penis as early as *Hep., Int. 14* (p. 202, 2 Littré). Cf. von Staden, *Herophilus,* pp. 393-394 (on *kaphlos*).

Celsius also uses *glans* as a botanical term (twice) and of a lead bullet (once), but most of its occurrences (seventeen) designate the male glans (e.g. VI 18.2,ACIK 4; VII 25.1B-C; VII 26.1C). *Glans* for the glans penis is attested well before Celsius: cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 413; Aristotle, *Hist. An.* I 13,493a27 (σαίντα). *Bλαστάνον* seems to imply current, accepted usage.

For *cutis* of the prepuse see, e.g., VI 18.2,ACIK 3A; VII 25.1B-C.2.3; VII 26.1C. H. Morb., I 8 (VI, p. 156.13 Lii. κατα παράδοσον ἰντονά ; perhaps is too general to be a precedent (Renate Wittern, p. 25, plausibly translates: *die Haut in der Schamengegend*).