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# Why do only Women breastfeed?

Stephanie Lynn Budin

This article is an examination of the fact that only females are shown breastfeeding (and caring for infants generally) in the arts of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, which are taken here as a roughly interconnected unit spanning the Bronze and Iron Ages. This is admittedly a lot of time and space, but the evidence indicates that the ideology was quite constant over this span. By way of comparison, evidence from pre-modern Japan will also be considered to open a discussion on how universal these constructs might actually be.

To begin, we might start out by admitting that it sounds like an absurd question: Why do only women breastfeed? After all, only women have the necessary equipment. This goes for humans and all other mammals, where only the female of the species has the milk-producing mammary glands that gave the class *mammalian* its name. Biologically, anatomically speaking, only women *can* breastfeed.

But humans are language-using creatures, meaning we think and approach the world symbolically. One significant manifestation of this is that we have a plethora of symbolic and conceptual constructs related to how we understand biology, especially the biology of sexual difference between the two sexes — female and male. This particular construct is known as gender, defined here as ‘the beliefs held about individuals based on their sex’.<sup>1</sup> Gender can have some interesting implications on how humans view the world and their place in it, and this is especially so with reproduction.

If we were to take a purely biological approach to the creation and care of human infants, we would note that conception occurs when a male-supplied sperm enters a female-supplied ovum. The resulting zygote must then attach to the uterine lining in the female’s body, where it incubates for about nine months. The sexed roles are very clear at this

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<sup>1</sup> Budin 2023: 1.

point. After birth there is greater cultural variation. Only the female body can produce breast milk, but this need not be the only source of nourishment for the infant. Furthermore, it need not be exclusively the mother who feeds the child, especially if an alternative to her breastmilk might be found. All other aspects of childcare, such as changing diapers, are variable — technically anyone of either sex can do it. So, basically, the reproduction of humans is *extremely* sexed for the first nine months, somewhat sexed in a very limited capacity after that, and not at all beyond the role of feeding.

This is not the understanding we see in antiquity (or elsewhere, for that matter). This is where gender is manifested. First, what we see in the iconography and literature — those sources that reveal how humans *think* — is that the initial formation of life (i.e. fertility) is gendered masculine, whereby the new life is a product of male semen.<sup>2</sup> Second, generally, this new life will then be handed over to a female for incubation, but exceptions are possible. The resulting infant will then be born from a female body; but, again, exceptions are possible. Third, there follows a phase where a female does, with almost no exceptions, have complete charge of the infant, including but not limited to breastfeeding. Finally, in most patrilocal systems, the new human is considered to be part of the father's family, becoming in a way the property of the father.

It is that third step — care and breastfeeding — that will be of interest here. But before that, I want to go back for a moment to discuss the previous step(s), which really seem like they should also be feminine (like in the biology paradigm), but are not. Let us talk about pregnancy. Specifically, why did the ancients conceive of males as conceiving?

## **Fertility**

This is because fertility — the ability to generate new life — was gendered masculine in the ancient world. This makes sense. Semen has been visible since time immemorial, whereas the ovum was only discovered in the nineteenth century CE. As such, creation itself was a predominantly masculine endeavor in the cosmogonies of the ancient

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<sup>2</sup> Budin 2018: *passim*; Budin 2015: *passim*.

Mediterranean and Near East. Often, this involved semen. Thus in the Mesopotamian tale *Enki and the World Order* we read how Enki, god of fresh water (A in Sumerian, which also meant 'semen') (ll. 250–265):

After he had turned his gaze from there, after father Enki had lifted his eyes across the Euphrates, he stood up full of lust like a rampant bull, lifted his penis, ejaculated and filled the Euphrates with flowing water. ... The Tigris ... at his side like a rampant bull. By lifting his penis, he brought a bridal gift. The Tigris rejoiced in its heart like a great wild bull, when it was born.... It brought water, flowing water indeed: its wine will be sweet. It brought barley, mottled barley indeed: the people will eat it. It filled the E-kur, the house of Enlil, with all sorts of things.<sup>3</sup>

The 'water' from Enki's penis creates and fills the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which in turn give rise to the Mesopotamian economy and the basis of Mesopotamian religion. From Egypt, in British Museum papyrus 10.188, the *Tale of Creation*, we read how when:

The sky had not come into being, the Earth did not exist, and the children of the Earth and the creeping things had not been made at that time... I, Amun-Re, had union with my closed hand, and I embraced my shadow as a wife, and I poured seed into my own mouth, and I sent forth from myself issue in the form of the gods Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture).<sup>4</sup>

Shu and Tefnut themselves go on to engender Nut (sky) and Geb (earth), and thus the rest of reality. This creation of creation via the masturbation of a deity was long preserved in the art of ancient Egypt, as is evident in the iconography of the cognate deity Min, shown ithyphallic and often even masturbatory (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2

<sup>3</sup> Black *et al.* 2004: 220–221.

<sup>4</sup> Faulkner 2007: 1.73.

Less physically immanent deities created in less biologically obvious ways, such as in Genesis 1 and 2, where Elôhim organised (but did not technically create) the world through the power of his word instead of his penis.<sup>5</sup> In Greece, according to Hesiod's *Theogony* ll. 125–136 the first reproductive deity was Chaos who brought forth Erebus (Darkness) and Nyx (Night) without a partner; later the female deities Nyx and Ge (Earth) mainly gave rise to offspring after sexual congress with male gods. So, fertility and creation are gendered masculine, and there is some biological basis to that.

Even the creation of the earth (or, at least, Japan) in the Japanese mythology shows a strongly phallic bent. In the eighth-century CE text *Kojiki*, literally the 'Records of Ancient Affairs', that serves as the foundational text of Shinto,<sup>6</sup> the creator deities Izanagi-no-Mikoto (male) and Izanami-no-mikoto (female) created the first island by dipping and thrusting a spear into the waters below, the land forming through the wetness that dripped from the tip of the spear (*Kojiki*, Book One, Chapter 3, l. 3):

Thereupon, the two deities stood on the Heavenly Floating Bridge and, lowering the jeweled spear, stirred with it. They stirred the brine with a churning, churning sound; and when they lifted up [the spear] again, the brine dripping down from the tip of the spear piled up and became an island. This was the island of Onögorö.<sup>7</sup>

## Birth

This is where the model gets complicated from a biological perspective. There is nothing in reality that gives a model for male parturition. This is probably why there is greater variation in the presentation of male pregnancy in our sources, and most of them are problematic at best. In Mesopotamia, our previously introduced lusty Enki appears in the tale *Enki and Ninhursağa* where he has sex with his own daughter, then granddaughter, then great-granddaughter, until finally the mother goddess Ninhursağa tricks and

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<sup>5</sup> Smith 2010: 49–58.

<sup>6</sup> In as far as Shinto even has a foundational text, that is.

<sup>7</sup> Philippi 1969: 49.

impregnates him with his own semen. But in the end the god needed the goddess to give birth for him:

Ninhursağa laid Enki in her vulva,  
'My brother, what part of you hurts you?'  
'My brainpan hurts me!'  
She gave birth to Abu out of it.  
'My brother, what part of you hurts you?'  
'The top of my hair hurts me!'  
She gave birth to Ninsikila out of it...<sup>8</sup>

In the Hurrian *Song of Kumarbi*, the deity Kumarbi becomes pregnant after biting off the loins of the sky-king deity Anu, whom he is attempting to overthrow.

Kumarbi bit Anu's loins, and his 'manhood' united with Kumarbi's insides like bronze. When Kumarbi had swallowed the 'manhood' of Anu, he rejoiced and laughed out loud. Anu turned around and spoke to Kumarbi: 'Are you rejoicing within yourself because you have swallowed my manhood?'  
'Stop rejoicing within yourself! I have placed inside you a burden. First, I have impregnated you with the noble Storm God. Second, I have impregnated you with the irresistible Aranzah River. Third, I have impregnated you with the noble Tasmisu. And two additional terrible gods I have placed inside you as burdens. In the future you will end up striking the boulders of Mount Tassa with your head!'<sup>9</sup>

It turns out there was no good way to get those deities out of Kumarbi's body.

The scenario is different in Greece. In Hesiod's *Theogony* l. 924, upon swallowing his pregnant first wife Metis, Zeus incubates his future daughter Athena in his head (which some later Greek writers believed was the source of semen; e.g. Plato, *Timaios* 91). Zeus only manages to give birth to her by having the smith god Hephaistos split his cranium open with an axe. Alternatively, according to Euripides' *Bakkhai* ll. 95–96, Zeus seized the immortal foetus Dionysos from the burning remains of his mother Semele and sewed

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<sup>8</sup> Jacobsen 1987: 202–203, with several more lines of aches, pains, and births. This somewhat resembles the Egyptian tale 'The Contendings of Horus and Seth' where the god Seth is tricked into eating the semen of Horus, becomes pregnant, and gives birth out of his head to the solar disk.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffner 1998: 42–43.

him into his thigh until he was ready for birth. Basically a womb was not deemed necessary for incubation or parturition (although external help could be required).

An extreme form of this model is provided in the *Kojiki*. Initially, after the formation of the primordial island, reproduction took place via conjugal coitus (Book One, Chapter 4, ll. 4–6):

Then Izanagi-no-mikoto said, ‘My body formed though it be formed, has one place which is formed to excess. Therefore, I would like to take that place in my body which is formed to excess and insert it into that place in your body which is formed insufficiently, and [thus] give birth to the land. How would this be?’ Izanami-no-mikoto replied saying, ‘That will be good.’ Then Izanagi said, ‘Then let us, you and me, walk in a circle around this heavenly pillar and meet and have conjugal intercourse.’<sup>10</sup>

Izanami-no-mikoto gave birth vaginally to several deities, but finally died giving birth to the Fire *kami* (Book One, Chapter 7, ll. 17–18). After seeking her out — Orpheus-and-Euridike-style — in the underworld, Izanagi-no-mikoto underwent a purifying *misogi* ritual, from whose waters: (Book One, Chapter 11, ll. 22–24):

Then when he washed his left eye, there came into existence a deity named Ama-Terasu-Opo-Mi-Kami [sun].  
Next, when he washed his right eye, there came into existence a deity named Tuku-Yömi-Nö-Mikötö [moon].  
Next, when he washed his nose, there came into existence a deity named Take-Paya-Susa-Nö-Wo-Nö-Mikötö [chaos].<sup>11</sup>

These are the chief deities of the Shinto pantheon. Whereas birth from a female was bloody, dangerous, and impure, birth from a male was a mark of purification. Male birth was superior to female birth.

## Child-care

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<sup>10</sup> Philippi 1969: 50.

<sup>11</sup> Philippi 1969: 70.

This is the point where reproduction becomes exclusively feminine. This is well illustrated in the iconography in the form of the *kourotrophos* — an adult (almost exclusively female) who holds and possibly feeds a child (figures 3, 4, 5, and 6, from Predynastic Egypt, Early Bronze Age Anatolia, Iron Age Iran, and Mycenaean Greece respectively). Almost all child-holders are female (with the exception of Eighteenth Dynasty Senenmut, who holds Nofret, daughter of King Hatshepsut<sup>12</sup>).



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

All child-feeders are female. The question is: why?

It is not (entirely) biology. Rather, breastfeeding combines two concepts that are both gendered feminine in the ancient world (and Japan): Nourishment and Connectivity.

### *Nourishment*

Food and feeding are gendered feminine. There is some biological component to this, as part of the reason for this is, no doubt, that females nurse (and feed foetuses *in utero*). However, additional data seem to account for this association. First, females are consistently associated with food preparation in the societies under consideration. Activities such as grain-grinding, beer production, and cooking in a domestic context, along with textile manufacture, are traditionally 'women's work'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Budin 2011: 107–109.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Webb 2016: 379–380, Ebeling 2016: 468–469, Meyers 2016: 489–492, Baadsgaard 2008, Ebeling and Homan 2008, Dalley 2002: 109.



Perhaps more oddly, females are more closely associated with death, and food is, without exception, something once alive that now is dead.<sup>14</sup> On how the female is more closely linked with death, note simply how several of the societies under consideration have a death goddess (Mesopotamian Ereškigal, Greek Persephone, Etruscan Vanth, Japanese Izanami, even Nordic Hel) or a goddess who mediates between life and death (Egyptian Nut or Hathor).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, females are also regarded as less pure than males,<sup>16</sup> especially as regards blood (menstruation and parturition —this is especially so for Israel<sup>17</sup> and Japan).<sup>18</sup> This ‘impure’ status more closely associates females with the impure/dead nature of food.

All of these notions come together when considering in the Japanese food goddess Ogetsuhime. As we read in the *Kojiki*, Book 1, Chapter 18, ll. 1–4:

Again, Susano-wo asked food of Ogetsuhime-no-Kami.

Then Ogetsuhime took various viands out of her nose, her mouth, and her rectum, prepared them in various ways, and presented them to him.

Then Susano-wo, who had been watching her actions, thought that she was polluting the food before offering it to him and he killed Ogetsuhime.

In the corpse of the slain deity there grew [various] things: In her head there grew silkworms; in her eyes there grew rice seeds;

In her ears there grew millet; in her nose there grew adzuki beans; in her genitals there grew wheat; and in her rectum there grew soy beans.<sup>19</sup>

The goddess pulls foods from parts of the body that produce effluvia (such as nasal mucus) and excrement (the anus), conceptually related to the moisture and fertilizers necessary to produce agricultural bounty. She continues to generate harvests when in the most impure of all states — death — when her corpse forms the basis for the Japanese agricultural economy.

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<sup>14</sup> Ashkenazi 2003: 147; Vernant 1992: 34–35.

<sup>15</sup> See additionally Vernant 1992: 95–110.

<sup>16</sup> Carson 1990: 158–160.

<sup>17</sup> Ackerman 2022: 137–147.

<sup>18</sup> Tan 2020: 27–31.

<sup>19</sup> Philippi 1969: 87.

Even without direct death or impurity associations, food deities are quite consistently female.<sup>20</sup> Thus for Greece in the *Orphic Hymn to Eleusinian Demeter* 40 we read:

Deo, divine mother of all, goddess of many names, august Demeter,  
Nurturer of youths, and giver of prosperity and wealth.  
You nourish the ears of corn, O giver of all, and you delight in peace and in toilsome labor.  
Present at sowing, reaping and threshing, O spirit of unripe fruit,  
You dwell in the sacred valley of Eleusis.  
Charming and lovely, you give sustenance to all mortals,  
And you were the first to yoke the plowing ox and to send up from below,  
A rich and lovely harvest for mortals.  
Through you there is growth and blooming, O illustrious companion of Bromios<sup>21</sup>,  
And, torch-bearing and pure one, you delight in the summer's yield.<sup>22</sup>

In Mesopotamia, grain is associated with the goddess Nisaba. In her hymn of praise we read (ll. 14–26):

In order to make barley and flax grow in the furrows, so that excellent corn can be admired; to provide for the seven great throne-daises by making flax shoot forth and making barley shoot forth at the harvest, the great festival of Enlil — in her great princely role she has cleansed her body and has put the holy priestly garment onto her torso. In order to establish bread offerings where none existed, and to pour forth great libations of alcohol, so as to appease the god of grandeur, Enlil, and to appease merciful Kusu and Ezina, she will appoint a great EN priest, and will appoint a festival; she will appoint a great EN priest of the Land.<sup>23</sup>

The connection between females and liquid bounty especially is strong in numerous sources. In the Old Kingdom Pyramid texts we read in Utterance 406, §707:

Bring me the milk of Isis, the flood of Nephthys, the overspill of the lake, the surge of the sea, life, prosperity, health, happiness, bread, beer, clothing, and food that I might live thereby.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In the Greco-Roman tradition Dionysos is, of course, the god of wine. However, it should be noted that A) wine crosses the border between food/drink and intoxicant, and thus is something 'more' than food; and B) Dionysos himself is a gender-ambiguous character, presented as effeminate in Greek literature (e.g. Aristophanes' *Frogs* and Euripides' *Bakkhai*).

<sup>21</sup> Epithet of Dionysos.

<sup>22</sup> Translation by A. N. Athanassakis, nd., np.

<sup>23</sup> <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.16.1&charenc=j#>

<sup>24</sup> Faulkner 2007.

And in Mesopotamia Neo-Assyrian prophecies express a kourotrophic relationship between Ištar and the royal family. In an address to King Aššurbanipal:

You were a little one, Aššurbanipal, when I left you to the Queen of Nineveh, you were an infant, Aššurbanipal, when you sat on the knee of the Queen of Nineveh. Her four teats are placed in your mouth, two you suck, two you milk to your face.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise:

The goddess Ištar of Arbela speaks as follows: 'I am your great midwife, I am your good wet-nurse.'<sup>26</sup>

Ištar, the goddess free from maternity and child-care, is nevertheless portrayed as symbolic nurse maid. In such a way, breastfeeding is simply a natural extension of the feminine nature (as understood) of food and nourishment.

### *Connectivity*

Females pass on more than just nourishment with their breast milk: They pass along connections between different levels or states of being. For example, our earliest portrayal of the divine wet-nurse in Egypt shows the vulture goddess Nekhbet suckling the Fifth Dynasty king Sahure (Figure 7).<sup>27</sup> She does not merely feed the (non-infant) king, but grants him life, well-being, and divinity.

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<sup>25</sup> Stol 2000: 191–192.

<sup>26</sup> Stol 2000: 191–192.

<sup>27</sup> Budin 2011: 42–44.



Figure 7

Turning to Greece, the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* reveals how the goddess of food herself attempted to make the Eleusinian prince Demophoön immortal in part by ‘holding him to her bosom’ (ll. 229–239, my translation):

Having thus spoken she received him to her holy bosom  
with her immortal hands; his mother rejoiced in her mind.  
So she cared for the shining son of wise Keleus—  
Demophoön—whom well-belted Metaneira bore  
in the halls. And he grew like a divinity,  
neither eating grain nor suckling his mother’s milk,  
for by day fair-crowned Demeter  
anointed him with ambrosia as if he were born of a deity,  
and breathing on him sweetly she held him at her bosom.

Farther West, the Etruscans commemorated how the Queen of the Gods Uni (Hera, Juno) inducted her nemesis Hercules into the Olympian family and made him immortal through feeding him at her breast (Figure 8).



Figure 8

Much farther East, even the savage *oni* Yamauba can provide heroic status to the foundlings who find their way into her care in the mountains of Japan, most notably the boy-hero Kintarō.<sup>28</sup> The man-eater becomes the boy-feeder and creator of heroes through the power of her breast milk (Figure 9).



Figure 9

On the purely mortal level, the connections forged through breast-feeding affect (positively) the status of lower-class women linked to higher-class families, even the royal family. For example, in the Hurrian city of Urkeš (modern Tell Mozan), the royal wet-nurse Zamena received high status by being depicted with her royal charge, the crown prince, on her official seal (Figure 10).<sup>29</sup> While Zamena as here depicted does not have direct physical contact with the Queen Consort Uqnitum, on whose lap the young crown prince

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<sup>28</sup> Reider 2010: 64–84.

<sup>29</sup> Budin 2011: 187–188; Kelly-Bucellati 2016: 56–58.

sits, there is a line of connection between the queen and wet-nurse as Zamena holds the wrist and touches the knee of the future king upon Uqnitum's lap.

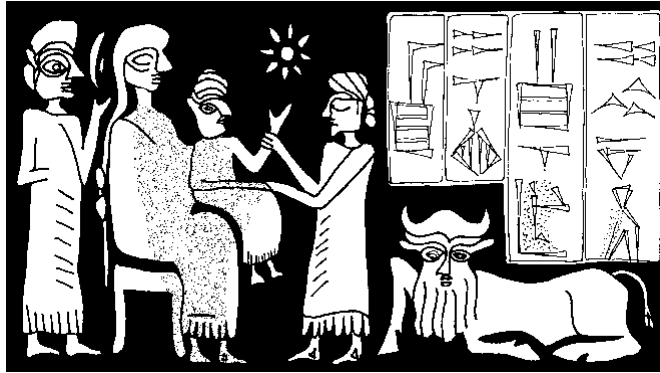


Figure 10

To suckle a child creates connections,<sup>30</sup> be it mortals to deities, or commoners to royalty.

This concept of connectivity is, like nourishment, gendered feminine in antiquity. On a very practical level, this is because it is women who bind a society together, horizontally through the exchange of women among families in societies that practice patrilocal marriage (which includes all societies considered here) and the inter-familial, group nature of those women's labor; and vertically through the generation of offspring (that is: the use of female bodies to make babies).<sup>31</sup>

The existence of inter-familial female networks that bind societies together is evident both in anthropology and archaeology. As noted by Kathryn March and Rachele Taquq in their 1986- study of 'Women's Informal Associations: catalysts for change?':

Many observers of the Middle East have also argued for a conceptualization of women's social and political base as a broad one, uniting domestic group to domestic group and thus actually creates the larger political fabric of society. [...] Women's dual allegiance to marital and natal homes makes them vitally and personally interested in the maintenance of effective political relations between localized male groups. Although women's ties stem from what we would identify as the private domestic spheres of natal and marital families, they become publically political as the unite one private domicile to another. In all these cases,

<sup>30</sup> See especially Chapman 2012 on this.

<sup>31</sup> Budin 2023: 76–96.

then, women's associations reflect the collective interests and wills of groups of varying size and basis.<sup>32</sup>

For the ancient world, such networks might be seen in archaeological evidence for women's food-based (!) collective labor. To give just one example, Aubrey Baadsgaard in an extensive study of the placement of cooking ovens at eighteen Iron Age sites in Israel revealed that close to half of these were located *outside* of houses. While 55% percent were purely domestic, 21% were in open courtyards, 10% were in open areas, 5% were in public buildings, and 2.5% were located in streets. Furthermore, the more public the oven, the larger its size. Domestic ovens were on average 55 cm. in diameter, those in public buildings were 60 cm., those in streets or open spaces 61cm., and those in courtyards some 63 cm. in diameter.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the more open the location, the more women making use of the resource. In her final analysis Baadsgaard concluded:

[T]he evidence clearly indicated that ovens were not located in defined or secluded women's spaces, but rather in highly accessible areas near entryways and courtyards that would facilitate visitation and cooperation among women as part of completing domestic tasks. Variation in oven location suggests that women could arrange the spaces used for domestic activities to accommodate such cooperative networks...<sup>34</sup>

Similar networks appear in the art historical data from Cyprus, where we see Bronze and Iron Age depictions of women gathered together in tasks such as washing and grain grinding (e.g. Figure 11). For example, in this Early Cypriot scenic composition we see what appear to be several women working around a trough. One woman, however, holds a child and is not otherwise engaged with her hands. Nevertheless, she seems to be socializing/interacting with the working women, indicating that social networking and camaraderie are involved in addition to group labor.

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<sup>32</sup> March and Taqqu 1986: 14–15, excerpted.

<sup>33</sup> Baadsgaard 2008: 29, with additional, much smaller percentages to equal 100%.

<sup>34</sup> Baadsgaard 2008: 42.

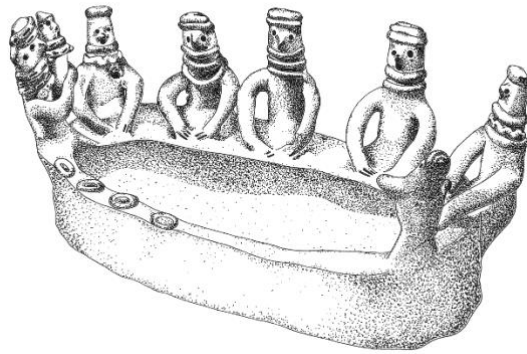


Figure 11

Vertically, the importance of royal women as a dynastic ‘binding element’ is especially apparent in Nubia in the Iron Age Napatan period (c. 800-300 BCE). The Kushite Dynasty practiced at least to some degree avuncular succession, whereby legitimate heirs to the throne were not the sons of the reigning king, but rather the son(s) of the king’s sister(s).<sup>35</sup> The evidence for this appears in the importance of women designated *šnt njšwt* — ‘Sister of the God (=King)’. This title shows up in dynastic lineages wherein new kings display their legitimacy for the throne and where, significantly, these women might also be identified as *mwt* — ‘mother’ of the (previous) king. A good example of this is the inscription on the ‘Election Stele’ of King Aspelta (c. 600–580), who traced his lineage (and thus legitimacy) back to the originator of the Napatan Dynasty King Alara. Here the god Amun-Re extolls the new king claiming (FHN I: 240–241, ll. 19–21):

His father was my son, the Son-of-Rê, [...], justified;  
 and his mother is king’s sister, king’s mother, mistress of Kush,  
 the Daughter of Rê, [...], may she live forever,  
 whose mother (again) was king’s sister,  
 divine adoratrix of Amun-Rê, king of the gods of Dominion (Thebes), [...], justified;  
 whose mother (again) was king’s sister [...], justified;  
 whose mother (again) was king’s sister [...], justified;  
 whose mother (again) was king’s sister [...], justified;  
 whose mother (again) was king’s sister [...], justified;  
 whose mother (again) was king’s sister, mistress of Kush, [...], justified;  
 It is he that is your lord.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Lohwasser 2001 and 2021; Phillips 2016: 290.

<sup>36</sup> FHN I: 240–241.



As discussed by Angelika Lohwasser on the importance of specifically female lineage in the Nubian dynastic line:

Aspelta's genealogy documents his "pure" lineage by noting that seven generations of his female ancestors were *snt njswt*, they all belonged to that group of women who bequeath the right to the throne, substantiating the legitimacy of his selection.<sup>37</sup>

As with nourishment, the realia of women's lived experience caused the concept of connectivity to be gendered feminine in antiquity. Such connectivity included the understanding of how breastfeeding brought infants (and their feeders) into new categories, from mortal to divine to commoner to royal, or even simply a stranger (the infant) into the family. Breastfeeding was but one more way that females created bonds.

## **Conclusion**

So, why do only women breastfeed? If we can envision a male without a vagina giving birth, why can we not envision a male with actual nipples feeding an infant? Are men just trying to get out of child care? Of course! But it is more than that. Breastfeeding lies at the intersection of two strongly engendered concepts in antiquity and beyond: Nourishment and Connectivity. Both of these concepts are gendered *feminine* in the societies under consideration as is evident in their arts and myths and archaeology. It is not biology, it is gender.

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<sup>37</sup> Lohwasser 2001: 65–66.

## Captions

Figure 1: Statue of the god Min, Ashmolean Museum AN 1894.105e. Drawing by Paul C. Butler.

Figure 2: Stela of Qeh, British Museum EA191, detail. Drawing by Paul C. Butler.

Figure 3: Predynastic limestone sherd. British Museum 15973. Drawing by Paul C. Butler.

Figure 4: Bronze Kourotrophic figurine from Horoztepe. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. Drawing by Paul C. Butler.

Figure 5: Iranian kourotrophic terracotta plaque. Louvre Museum Sb 7722. Drawing by Paul C. Butler.

Figure 6: Kourotrophic terracotta from Aidonia, Greece, LHIIB, Nemea Museum 489. Drawing by Paul C. Butler.

Figure 7: Sahure and Nekhbet. Drawing from Borchardt 1913: Blatt 13.

Figure 8: Etruscan Bronze Mirror from Volterra, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence. WikiCommons

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bronzespiegel\\_von\\_Volterra.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bronzespiegel_von_Volterra.jpg)

Figure 9: Yamauba no chichi o suh kintaro, print by Kitagawa Utamaro. Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/resource/jpd.00481/>

Figure 10: Zamena Seal. Drawing from Kelly-Bucellati 2016: 57.

Figure 11: Cypriot Scenic Composition, Louvre AM 816. Drawing by Giulia Albertazzi.

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