

GRADVOHL, EDINA: THE GYNAECOLOGY OF SORANUS

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The dissertation consists of two parts. The first part is a translation and commentary of Book I of *Peri Gynaikéion pathón* by Soranus. In the commentary questions of text tradition and interpretation are discussed. In this part I mainly relied on the editions, translations and commentaries of Burgière-Gourevitch-Malinas and Owsei Temkin as well as the latest results of scholarly literature. In the second part five areas are discussed, a detailed treatment of which would have exceeded the framework of the commentary.

In the chapter entitled *Soranus's life and works* the origin of his name is discussed. He was of Greek origin, yet his name is of Latin origin (its meaning: the inhabitant of Sora colony), which, according to Ann Ellis Hanson, can be explained by the fact that Q. Marcius Barea Soranus, the proconsul of Asia was the benefactor of Ephesus in 61-63 and Soranus's parents might have named their son after him. Soranus's name, however, is probably rather linked to a healing god, Pater Soranus, whose cult evolved on mount Soracte near Falerii, and who was identified with Apollo already in the 5th century B.C. Apollo Soranus was clearly considered to be a healing god. It is possible, that the Greek doctor working in Rome took the name of the healing god out of respect for him. The main aim of Soranus's book was the education of midwives. In the chapter entitled *Doctors, midwives, woman doctors* an attempt is made to separate the range of tasks midwives (*maia*), doctors (*iatros*) and woman doctors (*iatreiné*) had. In this process the data of all the woman doctors known from Graeco-Roman antiquity from the 4th century B.C. to the age of Soranus were studied. In the chapter entitled *The foetus's right to life and abortion* three theories are reviewed concerning the beginning of foetal life elaborated by ancient doctors. According to the first one the life of the embryo begins at conception. According to the second one it starts in the moment of birth, with the first breath. According to the third one it begins somewhere between the previous two, at a time difficult to determine, when the foetus starts to move. Then the methods used for abortion are listed and the plant ingredients of the medicines given *per os* receive special treatment. Identifying the individual plants is sometimes very difficult, but with the joint application of methods from pharmacobotanics, medicine and philology all the plants could be identified convincingly. About 70 % of plant alkaloids can be considered to be effective. Interestingly the same proportion can be observed in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* as well, though the plants used by Soranus are identical only in part with the hippocratic

material. In the chapter *The wandering womb* an ancient theory is discussed according to which the reason of hysterical dyspnoea is that the womb (*hystera*), as an autonomous animal is wandering in the woman's body and it attacks her various organs. The 'treatment' methods which served to force the womb back to its original place are also described. Soranus rejects this theory. According to him the womb is anatomically incapable of leaving its place, therefore such a wandering cannot be the cause for a hysterical fit. In the chapter entitled *The origins of the calendar method* it is demonstrated that ancient medicine recognised the menstrual cycle of women from the 5th century B.C. and also that they knew that some periods in the cycle were fertile and some were not. Strangely they thought that the days immediately preceding bleeding and the days following it were the most fertile, thus they considered the middle of the cycle to be infertile. Soranus also shared this view. It is supposed in the dissertation that menstruation was compared to bitches being on heat, which is indeed the fertile period for dogs. This idea could play a part in the ancient custom that women were often compared to dogs mainly on moral grounds and always with a negative edge.