

# Food and Gender



**ARCH0770 Food and Drink in Classical Antiquity**

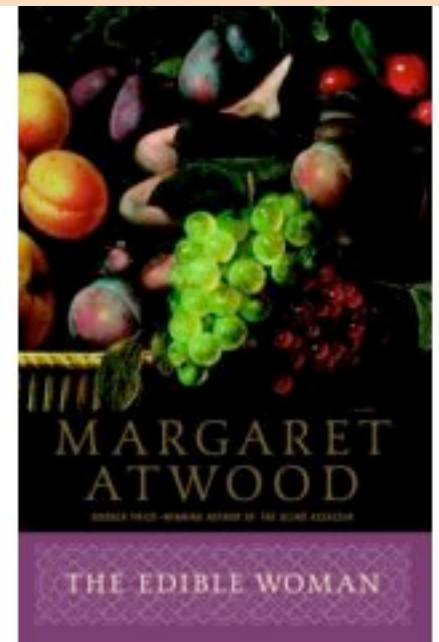
# Food and Gender



**Eating Disorders:**

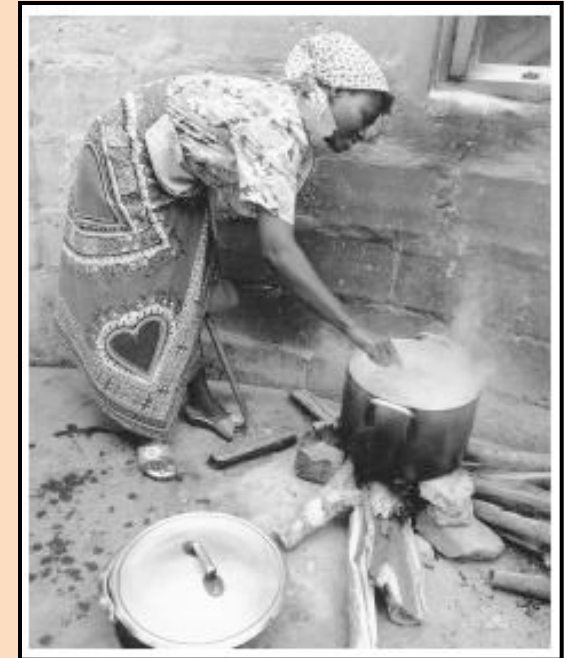
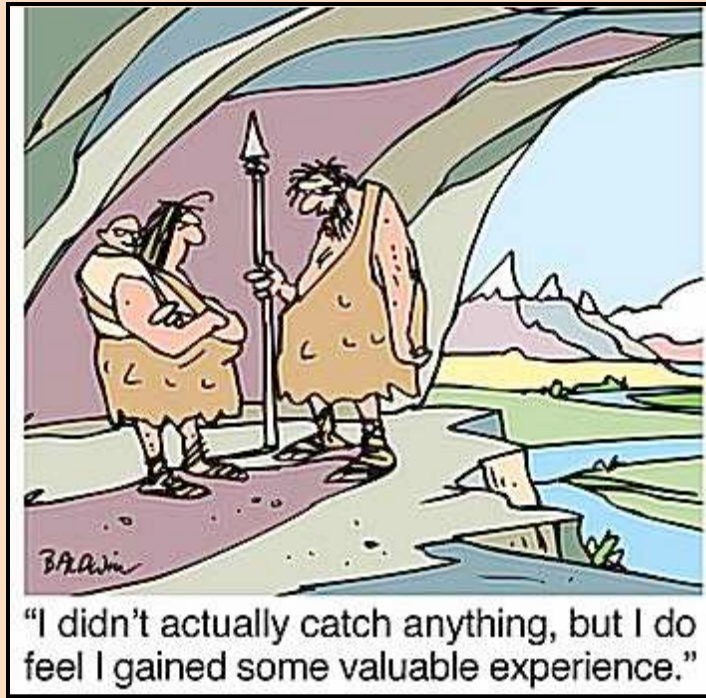
**anorexia;  
bulimia**

***The edible woman***  
(Margaret Atwood)





# Women as cooks/preparers

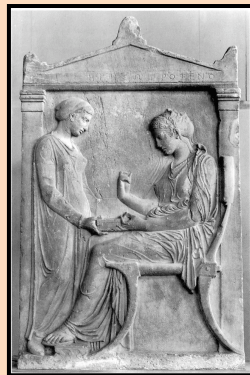


**Kinder, Küche, Kirche**  
"children, kitchen, church"



Antiquity?

androcentric





# Antiquity? androcentric

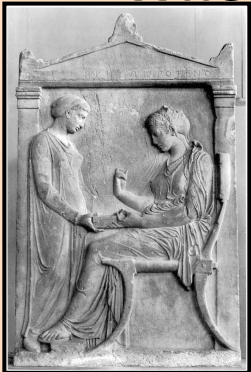
## Worries about reproduction

- Purity, no private matter
- Paternity: citizenship
- (two citizen parents at Athens)
- Honor of man/chastity of woman



Reproductive capacity of women:  
fruitful but dangerous

Where *do* babies come from?



# Structural oppositions

**Women = natural, wild, untamed**

**Men = cultural, civilizing**

**How linked to food?**

**reproductive power/  
menstruation**

**blood as power:  
sacrifice,  
wine, Dionysos**



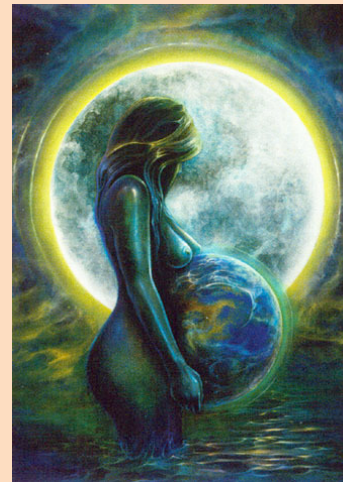


# Ancient (Greek, male ) representations of / attitudes towards women

## Metaphor #1:

women as **earth** (parthenogenesis; autonomous; autochthony)

‘all natural’ ; Mother Goddess



Page duBois, *Sowing the Body*

# Ancient (Greek, male ) representations of / attitudes towards women

## Metaphor #2:

Women as **ploughed earth**  
fertile, but passive  
(requires work/planting)





# Ancient (Greek, male ) representations of / attitudes towards women

## Metaphor #3:

### Women as **oven**

Culturally produced object

Object for ownership/exchange

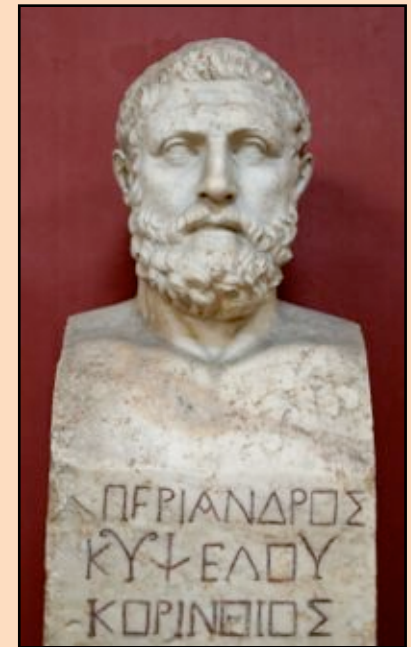
Uterus: place where things can be 'heated'

Passive: cold and empty without 'help'



# Woman as oven

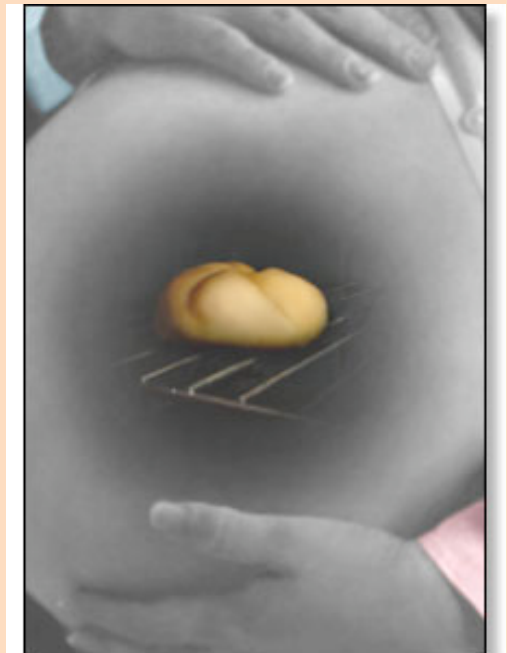
- Oven as metaphor for sex
  - sex as baking/cooking; ‘baking cookies’
  - ‘roasting the phallus’
  - necrophilia = putting ‘loaves in a cold oven’ (tyrant Periander)





# Woman as **oven**

- Oven as metaphor for reproduction, generation
  - ‘bun in the oven’
  - ‘**thermal prejudice**’ =
    - Women colder/moister, men hotter/drier
    - Women need heating  
(but not *too* much)

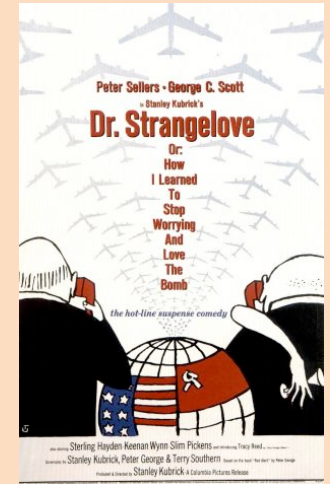


*precious bodily fluids...*

# Woman as oven

## The **thermal** prejudice

Menses vs. semen (cold/hot;  
less cooked/more cooked; weaker/stronger)

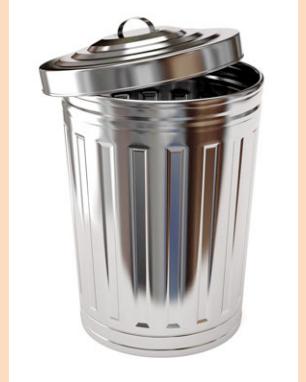


Men give form and efficient cause: women  
supply basic matter, place for growth





# Net result of woman as oven?



- Women as **passive** element, only a receptacle

- Women as **secondary**, lesser element in reproduction



- **Denial** of female contribution to babies, denial of identity, power

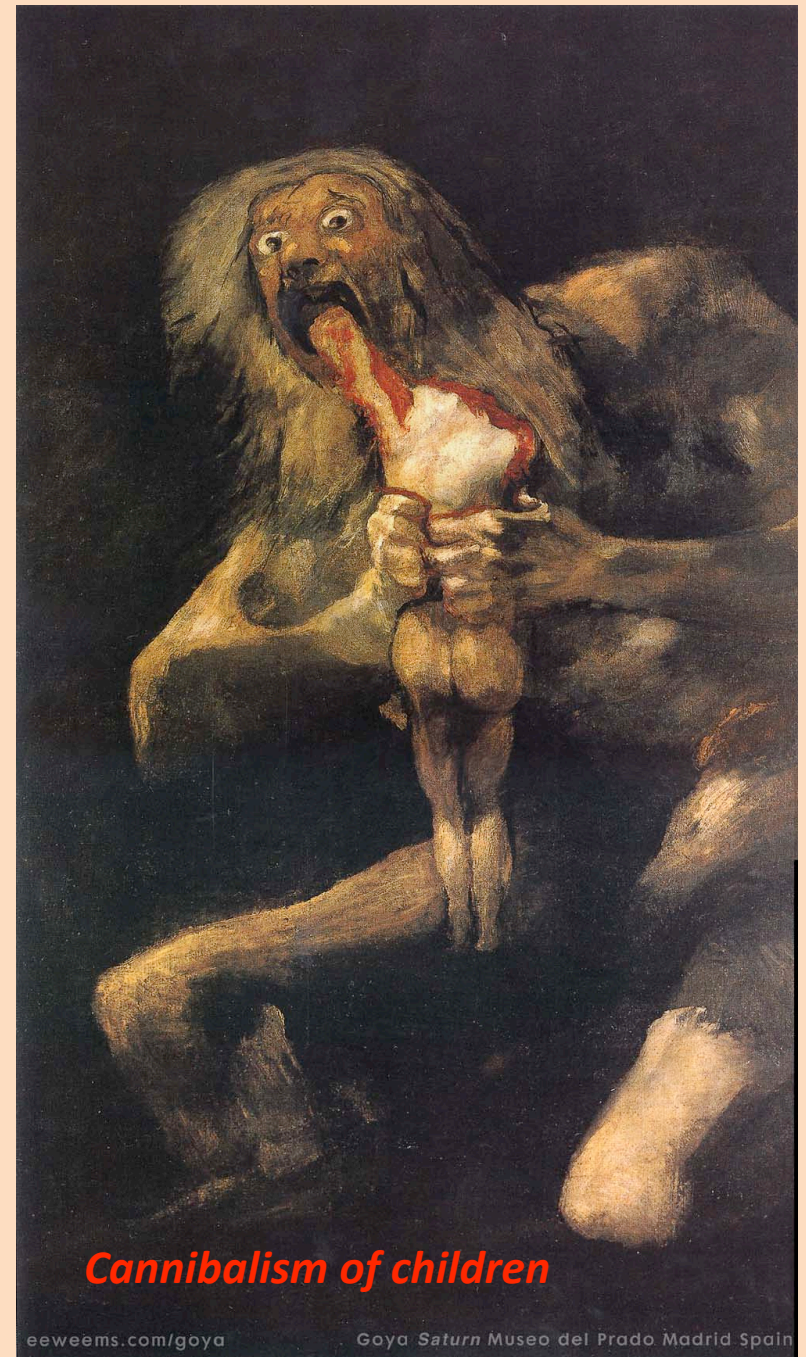
Production of food,  
production of baby,

Eating of food,

(eating of baby?)

Francesco Goya,  
*Saturn (Cronos) Devours His Children*  
(ca. 1815)

**Paternal eating**





## Paternal Feeding

Tantalus and his son, Pelops, of the  
House of Atreus  
hubris/nemesis (punishment)  
tantalizing...



*Cannibalism of children*

## ***Maternal feeding***

**Procne and Philomela  
(sisters)**

**Tereus (father)**

**Itys (son)**



**Son eaten**

**Adults turned into birds**

**Nightingale =**

**Luscinia Philomela**



**Head of  
Itys,  
rest eaten**

***Cannibalism of children***



***More than 100 million women are missing...***  
**(Amartya 'Famine' Sen)**

- men get more food
- better care (workers, status)
- no childbirth to survive

**Women:**

**Need fewer calories (15-35%) than men  
BUT need 3x as much iron as men  
(if moderately active)**

**AND pregnant/lactating women:  
Need at least twice as much calcium**



# Vitamin and mineral supply?

Cereals: wheat and barley  
*adequate* for calcium and  
iron intake  
(but not great, especially if  
poorly processed)

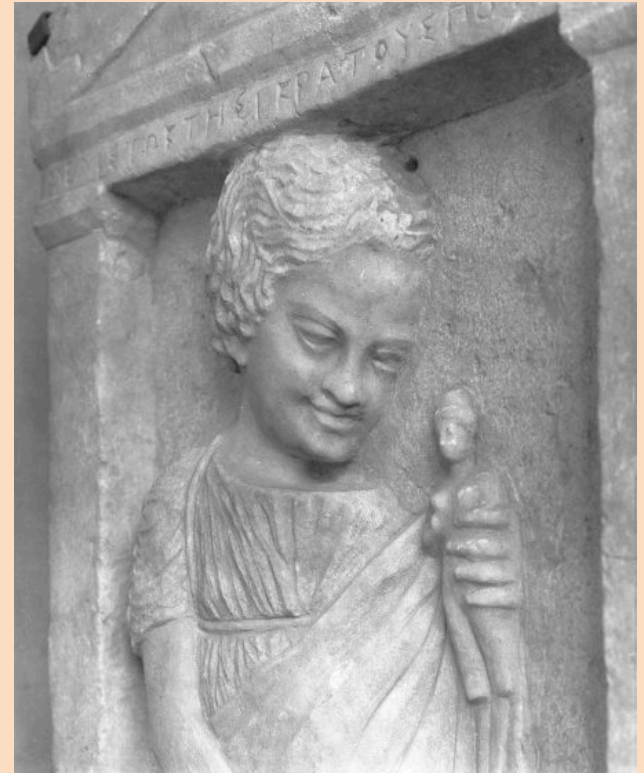
What about *opsa*?  
(helps if you have it...)





**And if allowed to eat it...**

**control of  
women's diets,  
women's appetites**

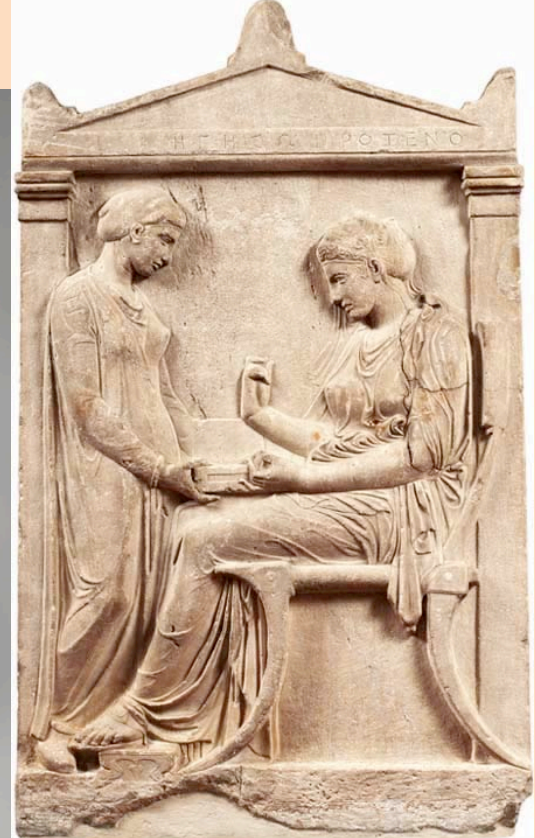


**When they are older and growth has all but stopped,  
and when young girls out of modesty no longer  
want to play childish games to the full, then one  
must give them more continuous attention to their  
regimen, regulate and moderate their intake of  
food, and not let them touch meat at all, or other  
foods that are very nourishing... (Oribasius)**



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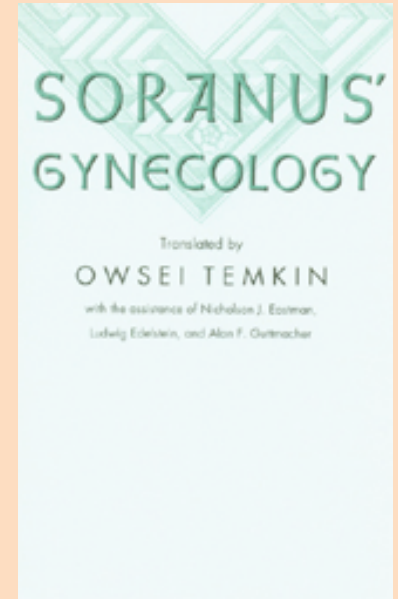




# Pregnancy

Soranus, *Gynaecology*

(2nd century AD, Roman doctor)



**Pica: condition of pregnant women**

**nausea, want of appetite, 'yens'**

**'eat neutral foods', avoid the pungent – ok, helpful**

**but *not* designed to boost**

**calcium/iron intake**

**Food and gender =**

**food and status =**

**food and power**

childbirth



# **Food and gender: women and children, last**





# Children



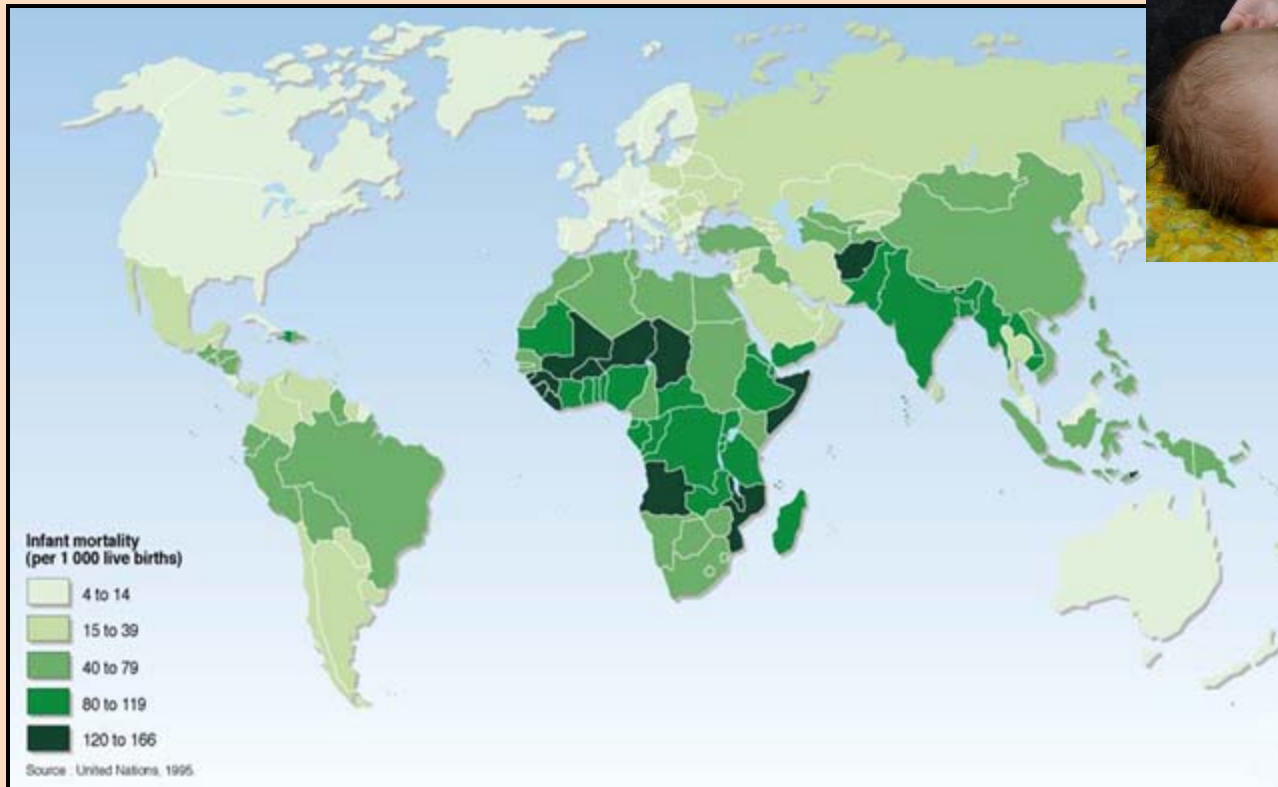
Baby sitting on an ancient potty.  
From the Athenian market-place or *agora*.  
6th century BC.

Agora Museum, Athens

# Infant mortality in antiquity

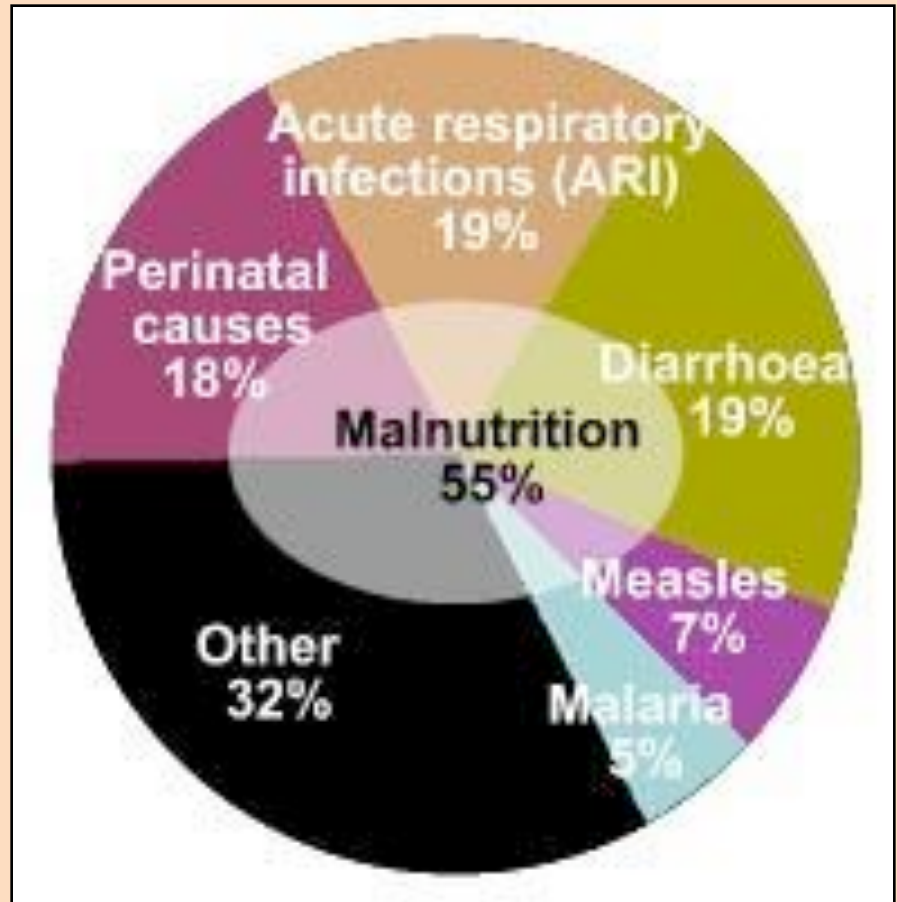
Of children born alive, calculated 28% died in first year

Of those survivors, ca. 50% would be dead before the age of 10



**1995  
UN data**





**‘Greeks and Romans, by the way they fed their babies and infants, were preparing large numbers of them for early death, stunted development, or selective malnutrition’ (the ever-cheerful Peter Garnsey)**

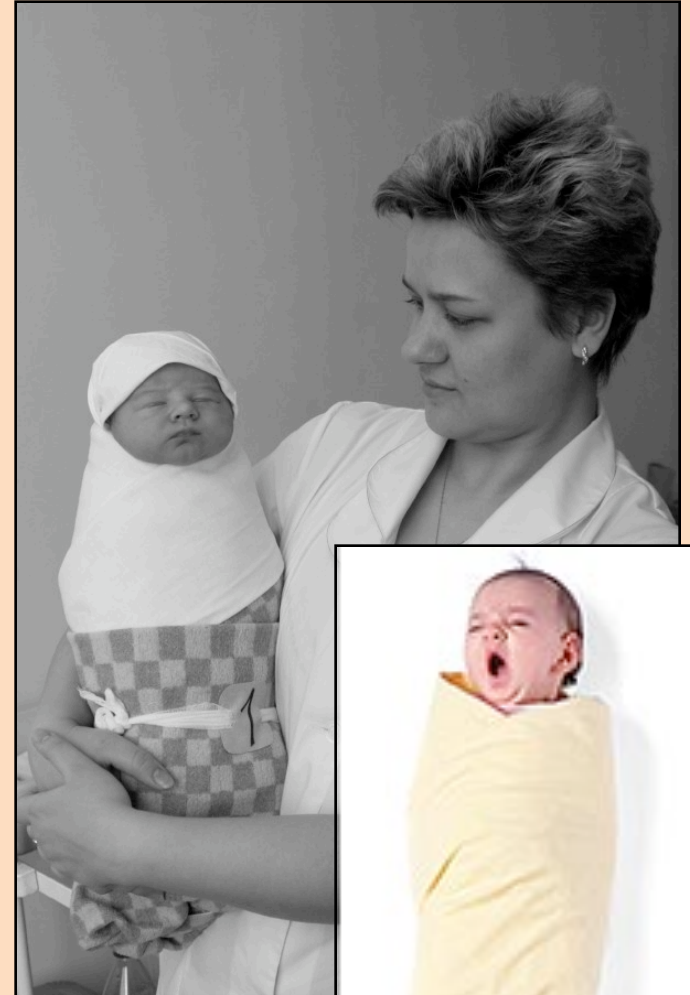
**‘Now after putting the newborn to bed subsequent to the swaddling, one must let it rest and, in most cases, abstain from all food up to as long as two days... After the interval one must give as food to lick... honey moderately boiled...One must gently anoint the mouth of the newborn with the finger, and must then drop lukewarm hydromel into it... From the second day on after the treatment one should feed with milk from somebody well able to serve as a wet nurse, as for twenty days the maternal milk is in most cases unwholesome, being thick, too gaseous, and therefore hard to digest, raw and not prepared to perfection. Furthermore, it is produced by bodies which are in a bad state, agitated and changed to the extent that we see the body altered after delivery when, from having suffered a great discharge of blood, it is dried up, toneless, discolored, and in the majority of cases feverish as well. For all these reasons, it is absurd to prescribe the maternal milk until the body enjoys stable health... If, however, a woman well able to provide milk is not at hand, during the first three days one must use the honey alone, or mix goat’s milk with it. Then one must supply the mother’s milk, the first portion having been sucked out beforehand by some stripling (for it is heavy) or squeezed out gently with the hand, since the thick part is hard to suck out and also apt to clog up in newborn children on account of the softness of their gums’ (Soranus, *Gynaecology* 2.17-18).**

**treatment of a neonate...**



# Treatment of a neonate

- Not fed for two days
- Swaddling
- Deprivation of colostrum  
(early 'maternal milk' )  
protein rich  
boost to immune system



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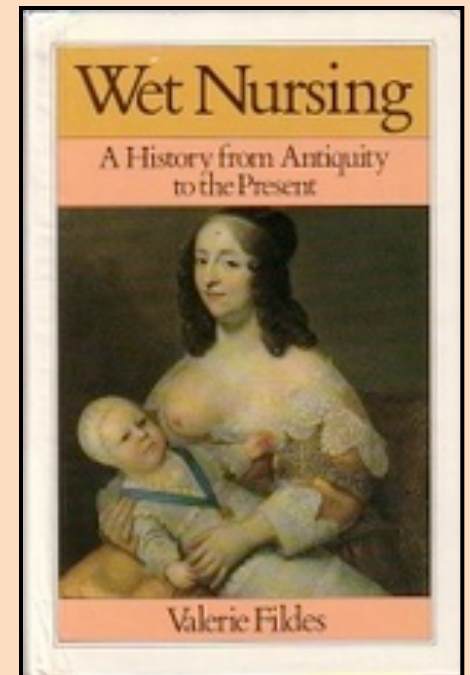
# **Wet nursing: why? Who?**

**Emotional reasons: distance**

**Lactation (milk production) inhibits pregnancy  
form of contraception**

**Misunderstanding/  
mistrust of colostrum**

**Who better off, rich or poor?**



# Breastfeeding and babies

‘they require a completely moist regime, since their constitution is more moist than that of other ages...’

Galen (2nd century AD doctor)



# Weaning

**When? Variable suggestions  
(Soranus and Galen: seventh month)**

**What?**

**Bread in milk, wine, porridge (Soranus)**

**Bread, vegetables, meat (Galen)**

**Early weaning: risky –  
failure to grow, develop immune system,  
result: ill health, death**

**You are what you eat... from Day 1**

