
On the anatomy of the breast, by Sir Astley
Paston Cooper, 1840

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On the anatomy of the breast - Of the mammary gland in the male

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OF THE
MAMMARY GLAND IN THE MALE.

THE male possesses a mammary gland like that of the female, but it is a miniature picture only of that of women.

It varies in size, and I think that I have observed that it is largest in those men who have rather an effeminate appearance, who have light complexions, and whose breasts are little covered with hair. The largest male glands which I have seen, were found in a man whose testes were remarkably small. I have given a delineation of the testis and mammary gland in *Plate 2*, to show the exact size of each of these parts; and it will be seen that the testis was so small, and the mammary gland so large, that it seemed as if nature had hesitated whether she should produce a male or a female.

Every person who has studied the profession, must have asked himself for what purpose the nipple and mammary gland are formed in man; and it has been thought that they were designed for the purpose of nourishing the offspring in the event of the mother's death, during the period of lactation.

It has been even asserted, that this has really happened, and I might quote the instances ; but such examples are too few and imperfect to constitute a general law, and I do not believe that the male breast is destined for such a purpose, or that it was intended to perform the function of suckling. It is true that from the mammary gland a very small quantity of fluid may be sometimes expressed through the nipple, and the continued application of an infant's lips might slightly increase the quantity of the secretion, and the child might be gratified by sucking the nipple, as it is by sucking its finger, but the quantity of secretion is too small for the purpose of affording nutrition to the infant.

It appears to me that its use is to form an organ of sympathy with the other parts of the sexual system, which are influenced and excited by mental impressions, and by the direct irritation of the nipple. For this purpose, the organ possesses an erectile tissue of arteries and veins, and a high sensibility from several nerves which are devoted to the supply of the nipple and of the gland.

Upon a superficial examination of the breasts in the male, they present in some men much more resemblance to the breasts of women than others ; but dissection proves that this results much more from an abundant formation of fat, than from an unnatural growth of the mammary gland.

The breasts of the male do, however, vary considerably, both in the adult and in age; and I have seen the gland very large in proportion in a man of seventy-three years*.

I injected these glands, and have given a view of them. (*See Plate 2 of the Male.*)

In a negro, I once saw the male breast of a very considerable size: but I have not had sufficient opportunity of comparing the character of the African, in this respect, with the inhabitants of Europe, to say at present any more upon the subject.

In some men, there is scarcely any appearance of a *gland* to be traced; for as the nourishment of the offspring is almost exclusively confided in the mother, it is in general in her only that the organs destined for the secretion of milk are largely developed, although the nipple and areola are generally considerably evolved in the male.

In the males of other animals, there is often a mammary gland at the base of the nipple.

* This circumstance, if it were general, would serve to show that as the virile power had declined, the gland had increased, and become largely developed.