

*This article contains some new thoughts and discoveries not discussed in any lectures you may have attended at the APP conference. Discussion of Female Infibulation cannot be relegated to the past. Unlike other piercing traditions I have discussed, female infibulation, in various forms is still widely practiced today. Female infibulation has been described and recorded in three distinct practices: abrasion with suturing (sometimes with excision), chastity belts, and piercing. This article will address only the piercing aspect.*

Female Infibulation, as defined by this article, involves multiple piercing of the outer labia. It does not include excision of the clitoris, clitoral hood and/or labia minora. Most western women today wear the outer labia piercings, by choice, to increase both aesthetic and physical pleasure. In Western fetish communities, when outer labia piercings are performed for chastity play the process is mutually consensual. Many Piercers today find outer labia piercings heal more quickly and with fewer problems by using barbells, curved or straight, instead of rings.

Historically, the piercing was often performed with a needle followed by thread until healing was complete. Sometimes the rings would be inserted directly afterwards or as part of the piercing process. A single ring or suture would pass through both outer labia, pulling them together and obstructing access to the vagina.

Roman reference in the 5th century BCE Herodotus says, "Ethiopians performed infibulation freely on wives." Rhodius and Fabricius d' Aquapendente refer to the use of infibulation for preservation of chastity. Celsus states, "Among

Romans occasionally posterior piercing was performed to prevent access from the rear as well."<sup>1</sup>

In 1737, Leicester, England, George Baggerley was fined twenty schillings for sewing his wife's outer labia together with needle and thread.<sup>2</sup>

"In some other tribes in Asia and Africa, they run a ring through the tips of the opposite nymph; and this ring is so enchased in girls, that it can be removed only by filing it, or forcibly cutting it with scissors. We can imagine those shackles can be welded only by soldering, so as to unite the branches of the buckle after it has been sunk into the flesh; and this soldering can be performed only with a red-hot iron, which is laid on the buckle itself, in order to melt in the ore lead. As to the women they wear there an iron circle provided with a lock, the key of which the husband holds; for this tool supplies the place of seraglio and eunuchs, who require such expense and who cost so dear in Asia, that absolutely nobody but seigniors and princes have slaves trained for guarding other slaves; villains from among the population use those rings we have just spoken about."<sup>3</sup> Some writings, such as this suggest that the rings were sometimes soldered shut, though an eyewitness account of this supposed process has remained elusive.

Fakir Musafar provides an Indian reference. "Tamil suitors used to demand the sewing up of the outer labia until marriage with the use of gold wire."<sup>4</sup>

"It is not possible to conclude whether there was a single origin or several independent origins. [Some] feel that there is sufficient evidence to assume that infibulation was

practiced in ancient Egypt, and that perhaps it is there the custom originated. Or it could have been an old African puberty rite that came to Egypt by diffusion, (infibulation is known in the Sudan as "Pharaonic circumcision" and in Egypt it is referred to as "Sudanese circumcision").<sup>5</sup>

This author is opposed to any form of non-consensual genital mutilation, whether on infant boys in the U.S. or on women and young girls in some traditional African societies and extremist Muslim groups throughout the world. The practices of foreskin and clitoral hood circumcision, clitoridectomy, excision and abrasion of the vulva area followed by suturing together of both outer labia until the vaginal opening heals shut, are forced on hundreds of thousands of children today. For more information on these practices or to learn how you can help fight these human rights abuses please contact Minority Rights Group, UNESCO, and World Health Organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Chastity Safeguards, 1947, Haldeman-Julius, pub. Girard, Kansas

<sup>2</sup> Male Infibulation, Eric John Dingwall, pg. 59 (account from "The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle, 1737, vol. VII pp 250)

<sup>3</sup> Recherches philosophiques sur les Americains, tome II p. 140 (Berlin 1779) author De Pauw, from Padlocks and Girdles of Chastity, 1928

<sup>4</sup> Piercing Fans International Quarterly, Issue 11, Fakir Musafar

<sup>5</sup> Female Circumcision, Excision and Infibulation, History, Minority Rights Groups, Marie Assaad, 1980

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*My usual disclaimer: I am not an anthropologist. From time to time, there will be errors. Please be understanding and forth coming if you have information you would like to share.*

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