

**Merrill D. Smith, *Cultural Encyclopedia of the Breast* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), pp. xi + 288. ISBN 978-0-7591-2331-1 (hb); 978-0-7591-2332-8 (electronic).**

As a breastfeeding researcher, interested in cultural and social influences on women's breastfeeding decisions, I was curious to see what contribution this book might make. From the first pages, however, I was disappointed. When reading the book it is not clear what the editor intended in putting this collection together. On the whole it is an interesting read but is a book to dip into rather than read from cover to cover. The entries are mostly very short. An eclectic selection of alphabetical pieces are sometimes only tenuously connected to the subject matter. More obvious ones include 'Breast Cancer', 'Breast Reduction', 'Celebrity Breasts', 'Postpartum Breasts' and 'Wet T-Shirt Contests'. Other categories are confusing or very broad and it is not immediately clear what the breast connection is – 'Media', 'Movies' or 'Obesity', for example. Entries are authored by a range of contributors, some are academics, some not. These are drawn from a number of countries but the book has a US-centric approach overall.

I turned first to the entries related to breastfeeding, interested in seeing these contributions. Six consecutive pieces deal with breastfeeding related issues, included breastmilk expression and breastfeeding in public. I was frustrated by the lack of references – there are many statements which need referencing, including those such as 'Studies have found...' The material offered in these sections is broad and generalised, in some instances trying to cover

too much material in a short piece. 'Breastfeeding' for example, covers the health impacts of breastfeeding, cultural and social influences on breastfeeding choices, working and breastfeeding, media portrayals and public perceptions. There is some overlap with other entries in the encyclopedia and each entry is cross-referenced at the end to others with related content.

A range of historical breast-related issues are covered too and I learnt about the inventor of the modern brassiere, Mary Phelps Jacob, read a brief history of topless protests and learnt about the injuries inflicted on the breasts of female saints and martyrs. I read about the Amazons, Ancient Physicians and Anne of Austria (who died of well-documented breast cancer), Flappers, the Folies Bergère and The Rochester Top Free (seven feminists who bared their breasts at a picnic in Rochester, New York, in 1986). Psychanalysts Melanie Klein and Sigmund Freud have entries also. A 'Chronology of Selected Breast Events' early in the book takes us from c.33,000 BCE (a piece of sculpture carved from a mammoth tusk, depicting a female with enormous breasts) to 2013 (Angelina Jolie having a proactive double mastectomy). This range of issues made me wonder who the book is aimed at – social or cultural historians would find the pieces of only general interest; those interested in breastfeeding issues would find the sections discussed above held little new information.

As an academic reader it is a very frustrating read – after each entry there is 'Further Reading' and at the end of the book there is a 'Selected Bibliography' but the text is not referenced in any conventional way and I could not get beyond the introduction (which has some references

but only to a few points) without finding this very irritating. Very occasional references in the main entries were unhelpful as the texts cited were not listed either in the further reading or in the bibliography. Many valuable points are made but there are a lot of unsubstantiated assertions. This left me not only irritated but confused, not knowing what sort of book this is and who would be the intended audience. There are pieces written by authors from a range of disciplines but I do not think that the book would be of wide appeal.

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