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THE OBSTETRIC MUSEUM IN MODENA: AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ANATOMICAL CABINET FOR OBSTETRICS

by **elena corradini** > Professor Antonio Scarpa started his obstetrics classes in Modena in December 1775 in the Anatomical Theatre, which was built between 1774 and 1775 within the Grande Ospedale per gli Infermi (Great Hospital for Invalids). He moved to Modena from Padua to teach anatomy in the University on orders of Duke Francesco III d'Este.

Scarpa wanted to support his teaching with models of natural and non-natural childbirth. The following year, in 1776, he got permission from Marquis Gherardo Rangoni, who was Magistrate for Studies, to make an Obstetric Museum. The Obstetric Museum was in what is now a large room just to the left of the entrance of the Anatomical Theatre. We know this from a description found in an inventory of 1788.

A considerable number of wax and terracotta models were created for the Obstetric Museum. Some of the models were made by the Bolognese sculptor Giovanni Battista Manfredini (1742-1789). He specialized in creating anatomical pieces at the Bolognese school of sculptors Giovanni Manzolini and Anna Morandi Manzolini. Four female pelvises, which are still preserved in the Museum of Modena, are attributed to Manfredini.

According to Antonio Scarpa, an Obstetric Museum was fundamental to future doctors and midwives understanding the evolution of a pregnant womb, the positions of the foetus in the mother's womb, the different manners in which the foetus presents itself at the childbirth, and anomalies and unnatural positions. One of the female pelvises in the Modena museum, attributed to Manfredini, represents the organs of the genital system and a section of a womb that shows a pregnancy.

Manfredini also created a series of fifty-two obstetric terracotta representing pregnant women in several different stages, and sections of female pelvis or wombs with terminal foetus. These sculptures were commissioned to Manfredini by doctor Francesco Febbrari under the direction of the Bolognese anatomist Carlo Mondini. Some of the female figures were published in the first issue of the journal dedicated to obstetrics, *Dell'Arte Ostetricia*, printed in Bologna in 1788.

The transfer of Antonio Scarpa to the University of Pavia and the departure of the Este Dukes from Modena, as a consequence of the French occupation of Modena in 1796, delayed the arrival of the obstetric sculptures in Modena. All the sculptures stayed in Bologna in Mondini's house until 1801, when because of Mondini's serious health problems, they were moved to Modena.

It was not until 1815, after restoration and the return of archduke Francesco IV d'Austria Este to the Estense Dukedom, that the Estense government bought the anatomical models by Manfredini for the Obstetric Museum. Fifty-two coloured obstetric clay preparations, and eleven wax preparation of which eight life size terracotta sculptures of pregnant women, thirty sections of female pelvis or wombs, and four female wax pelvis with internal systems are still preserved in the Museum of Modena.



Dr Scarpa's anatomical theater



Manfredi's model showing the organs of the genital system and a section of a womb showing a pregnancy