

# Illustrating the Unseen: Analogy and Metaphor in an Ancient Gynecological Text

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## Abstract

Analogy and metaphor are powerful aids in communicating complex ideas simply. Soranus' Gynecology, a Greek text of the first-century CE, was written as a handbook for choosing and training midwives, and it employs analogy and metaphor as a means to increase the accessibility of its subject. For example, Soranus describes the shape of the placenta with the word *κιβώριον* (ki-bo-ri-on), which is often translated as "bean"; however, there is a range of possible translations, including: seed-pod, bean, or lotus pod. Consequently, a variety of images are presented to the ancient reader. It is the aggregate image created through the many meanings delivers a complete image of the placenta.

With the assistance of artistic rendering, I will examine the analogies presented within Soranus with the following objectives: to determine the sources from which Soranus selects his imagery, and provide insight into the complex nature of those choices. This text must be read within its historical context in order to fully understand Soranus' audience and communication strategy. Many of the metaphors used by Soranus still persist in modern medical terminology; by analyzing Soranus' usage of language for specific and metaphoric meaning we can gain a better understanding of how and why medical language is created.

