

Mini Review

The Art of Cutting Around

Adriana Zamudio Martínez¹, Gabriela Zamudio Martínez²

¹Hospital General de Occidente, Zapopan, Jalisco, México

²Hospital General Regional 46, Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México

*Correspondence to: Adriana Zamudio Martínez, Hospital General de Occidente. Av. Zoquipan 1050, Zapopan, Jalisco, México, Tel: 3334421372; E-mail: adriana.zama@hotmail.com

Received: May 1st, 2020; Accepted: Aug 1st, 2020; Published: Aug 8th, 2020

Citation: Zamudio A, Zamudio G. The art of cutting around. *Urology Open A Open J.* 2020; I(1): 10-11.

ABSTRACT

Brief history of circumcision, from the evolution of a purification practice among Egyptian priests to the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

Keywords: *Circumcision; History of Medicine; Penis; Foreskin.*

Since the beginning of time circumcision has been a surgical procedure largely performed, either as a sign of belonging, purification, humiliation, or what it is nowadays, prevention. The evolution of the artistic representation of this medical procedure has come from paintings inside caves to advanced abstract impressions in renowned museums. As a very common medical practice it is important to remember where it has stand in history.

Circumcision, from de Latin word *circumcidere* meaning to cut around is the oldest surgical procedure for which there is pictoric evidence, as we have paintings from the Paleolithic period showing circumcised penises¹ and a relief from a 2182 BC Egyptian Tomb showing the procedure being done before entering priesthood (Sarcophagus of Anhk-ma-Hor in Saqqara, Egypt).² In Egypt the practice of circumcision was not limited to those in religious affairs, as it was followed by elite, nobility and royalty as a purgation and sanitary practice, from this point in 400 BC it was taken up by Phoenicians and spread to other countries until the procedure was banned in Greece due to the idea that if the foreskin had to be removed it was a flaw in the human body, therefore only slaves and their descendants were part of this practice.³ If we recall the Greek and Roman sculptures, we can easily note that all have small and uncircumcised penises.

On the other hand, Jews and first Christians began with circumcision as a religious procedure after Abraham had to circumcise all his family, servants and himself as a sign of a covenant and a servant relationship with God. Since Jesus Christ was born a Jew, he had his foreskin removed at the eight day after his birth. After the circumcision of Jesus, the event has been pictured in numerous sculptures, paintings, frescos and other forms of art expression. A particularly interesting one is the artwork painted by Lorenzo Lotto in 1523 “*Mystical Marriage of Catherine of Siena*” where we can see a female figure, Catherine of Alexandria, holding the foreskin of baby Jesus (Figure 1). The foreskin of

Jesus Christ has been largely venerated by Catholics as “The Holy Foreskin” with more than 21 churches in Europe allegedly claiming to possess this holy relic.⁴

Figure 1. The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, 1523, Lorenzo Lotto. Oil on canvas.



Circumcision remained as a minority’s practice in the old continent, largely influenced by the prohibition in the early Greek and Roman Empires, until the eighteenth century when this practice got a new indication made by English Victorian doctors: the prevention of masturbation and acquisition of venereal diseases.⁵ From England this

practice was taken to North America where it became a largely performed surgical procedure, it was reported that in 1960 as much as 60% of total male population was circumcised as part of preventive medicine. A number that remains steady nowadays.⁶

In the twentieth century, especially during World War II and Korean War it was noted that circumcised soldiers had fewer fungal and bacterial infections and later that century, with the beginning of HIV epidemic, it was clear that uncircumcised men were more propense to infections in general, so the practice gained more and more acceptance amongst the American population.⁷ With this growing popularity since the beginning of the century the representation of circumcision in art progressed from the first drawings in caves to be part of abstract expressionism, with a representation by Jackson Pollock in 1946, “*Circumcision*”, currently exposed in the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Since the beginning of history, the artistic representation of the most performed surgical procedure in males in the United States has been influenced by the different ideas, conceptions and indications of it, which has ranged from the prohibition and humiliation of Roman slaves to the representation of divinity of the Egyptians and part of a divine covenant by the first Christians to this day where, besides aesthetic reasons, it remains a public health issue, related to the lower rate of HIV infection in high-risk populations. This decrease in risk has not been proven in non-high-risk populations, so the indication of circumcision as prevention remains controversial. Preferring measures such as the correct use of condoms and sexual education.⁸ Nevertheless, circumcision has been and always will be part of human history, either as a symbol of belonging, purification or prevention.

REFERENCES

1. Angulo JC, García-Díez M. Male Genital Representation in Paleolithic Art: Erection and Circumcision Before History. *Urology*. 2009; 74: 10-4. doi: [10.1016/j.urology.2009.01.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.urology.2009.01.010)
2. Aggleton Peter. “Just a Snip”? A Social History of Male Circumcision, *Reproductive Health Matters*. 2007; 15: 29; 15-21. doi: [10.1016/S0968-8080\(07\)29303-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(07)29303-6)
3. El-Gohary MA. Circumcision: History, Philosophy and Facts. *Open Journal of Urology*. 2015; 5: 114-117. doi: [10.4236/oju.2015.58018](https://doi.org/10.4236/oju.2015.58018)
4. Mattelaer Johan J, Schipper Robert A, Das Sakti. The Circumcision of Jesus Christ. *J Urol*. 2007;178:31-4. doi: [10.1016/j.juro.2007.03.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.juro.2007.03.016)
5. Pinheiro Bruno, Marcondes Marcelo, Fouto Jorge Eduardo. Phimosis and Circumcision: Concepts, History, and Evolution. *Int J Med Rev*. 2018; 5(1): 6-18. doi: [10.29252/IJMR-050103](https://doi.org/10.29252/IJMR-050103)
6. Robinson John D, Ortega Gezzer, Carrol Jarrod C. Circumcision in the United States: Where Are We? *J Natl Med Assoc*. 2012; 104 (9 -10): 455-458. doi: [10.1016/S0027-9684\(15\)30200-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0027-9684(15)30200-5)
7. Doyle D. Ritual Male Circumcision: A Brief History. *J R Coll Physicians Edinb*. 2005; 35: 279-285.
8. Bossio Jennifer, Pukall Caroline, Steele Stephen. A Review of the Current State of the Male Circumcision Literature. *J Sex Med*. 2014; 11: 2847-2864. doi: [10.1111/jsm.12703](https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12703)