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978-1-107-00491-7 - The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History

Patricia Simons

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The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe

How were male bodies viewed before the Enlightenment? And what does this reveal about attitudes towards sex and gender in premodern Europe? This richly textured cultural history investigates the characterization of the sex of adult male bodies from ancient Greece to the seventeenth century. Before the modern focus on the phallic, penetrative qualities of male anatomy, Patricia Simons finds that men's bodies were considered in terms of their active physiological characteristics, in relation to semen, testicles and what was considered innately masculine heat. Reorienting attention from an anatomical to a physiological focus, and from fertility to pleasure, Simons argues that women's sexual agency was perceived in terms of active reception of the valuable male seed. This provocative, compelling study draws on visual, material and textual evidence to elucidate a broad range of material, from medical learning, high art and literary metaphors to obscene badges, codpieces and pictorial or oral jokes.

PATRICIA SIMONS is Professor, History of Art, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She has curated several exhibitions including *Seeing is Healing? The visual arts of medicine* (2000), and her previous publications include *Patronage, art and society in Renaissance Italy* (co-editor, 1987).

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To the Gang of Four

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