

Imagine All the Species

Roger Pierson, MS, PhD, FEAS, FCAHS, Ed Hughes, MBChB, MSc, FRCSC

This wonderful little image is a woodcut illustrating the uterus and fetus. It was created by Jakob Rueff as an illustration in the 1554 publication *De Conceptu et Generatione Hominis, et iis quae circa haec potissimum consyderantur libri sex*, published by Christophorus Froschoverus Tiguri. It is artistically and scientifically fascinating for several reasons. First, you will notice that the shape of the structure containing the fetus is almost a perfect ovoid, much like an avian egg. The fetus is oddly conformed, with no visible neck and out-of-proportion trunk and extremities. The placentation is even more interesting. The band around the fetus is quite reminiscent of the zonary placental type seen in canids, and the seemingly pillowy bed upon which the fetus is positioned is reminiscent of the cotyledonary

placentation that we see in the bovine, caprine, and ovine species of domestic livestock. How these trans-species anatomic features came to be represented in association with a human fetus remains a mystery. We can only ponder how and from where the artist may have gathered his anatomic information. It would appear that direct observation of a human fetus in its amnion was not the primary source.

Image courtesy of the Wellcome Image Collection, UK

J Obstet Gynaecol Can 2013;35(11):1056

