

Few organs have involved as many difficulties in relation to their designation and name than the bulbo-clitoral organ and its components. The first difficulties appeared when referring to the clitoris and then the bulbs, within the external female genitalia, that previous anatomists had named, without any hesitation, “shameful parts of the woman”. However, later on, equally significant difficulties arose when anatomists finally understood that it was necessary to integrate the female cavernous and spongy bodies into a single organ and that a name should be given to the organ in question.

3.1 The First Names

One of the first names was the **woman’s penis** (adopted by Latin scientists: *virga vel penis muliebris*). Then Hippocrates¹ provided his own names: **columella** (or small pillar) or the extremely imaged **uvula**.² Aristotle, for his part, called it “**coles feminarum**” (quotation from A. Portal). Aetius and Paul from Aigina, considering that “this small formation is hidden under the labia like young brides under their veils” called it the **nymph**.³ Avicenna gave it the name of **al bathara** (or **el bathr**), i.e. penis. Albucasis, closer to physiology, was to call it “**tentigo**” (which is placed under tension) but also “**softness of love**”, a term that Colombo was going to reuse and claim as his own a few centuries later. For the Romans, and if we are to believe Rufus of Ephesus (see Chap. 1), born in c.98, who wrote a treatise entitled “On the Names of the Parts of the Human Body”, the “woman’s shameful parts” chapter contains the definition and the various names still used during his era in relation to the clitoris: it actually is a “**muscular**

¹Hippocrates, Lib. II, de naturà muliebris (quoted by A. Portal).

²According to Galen, quoted by J. Riolan, the name employed by Hippocrates explains the role of the clitoris: “to protect the matrix against the cold: “The uvula is for the pharynx. It (the clitoris) plays the same role as for the matrix, as it covers the orifice of the matrix and closes, by the same means, the passage of cold things, which could affect it”.

³Aetius calls (which is very appropriate according to J. Riolan) the labia minora “the winged parts”.

wattle, which hangs in the middle of the opening of the cleft”. It is generally referred to by means of three terms, **numoé** (which means “the veiled component”), **murton** (i.e. the bilberry)⁴ or **hypodermis** (the organ which is under the skin).

However, all the terms, which we have just seen, slowly disappeared and only two names remained, one for the Latin world, **landica**, and the other for the Greek world, **clitoris**.

3.2 The Two Major Names

3.2.1 Landica

This term (*landica, ae*) seems to have appeared relatively late, towards the end of the second century, and to have initially been part of “good classical Latin” (E. W. Fay). However, very quickly, this term was regarded as obscene (for reasons which we are unaware of) and was rarely used in the current language.

It can thus be found on drawings representing the Priapea (78.5.), a collection of obscene poems dedicated to Priape, the phallic god of fertility. It was even engraved on a sling-shot projectile during the siege of Perugia (Perusia in Latin), as the attackers and besieged exchanged stones on which were engraved obscene insults (*fulmen peto landicam Fulviae/culum Octavia*)!⁵

More interesting still, the term “landica” was written by Cicéron. In a famous letter, this author refers to word games which can be made, voluntarily or not, by associating perfectly innocent syllables and, which when combined, are pronounced like an obscene word,⁶ in this case “landica”.

⁴For the Romans, the myrtle is related to Venus, such as laurels are related to Apollo, the oak to Jupiter and the olive tree to Minerva.

⁵Hallett J.P.: Fulvia, Mother of Iullus Antonius, new approaches to the sources on Julia’s adultery at Rome, *Helios*, 2006, 33, No. 2.

⁶Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 9.22 (ad Paetum amicum):

(Memini in senatu disertum consularem ita eloqui: “Hanc culpam maiorem an **illam dicam**?” Potuit obscenius? “Non”, inquis, “non enim ita sensit”).

The term “landica” is also found in the master work of Soranos from Ephesus concerning “the diseases of women”, the first actual treatise on gynaecology.

Landica gave rise to the adjective “landicosa”, which was also rarely used and meant “who has a large clitoris”.⁷

But where does the word landica come? Few answers concern this etymology. There is, however, one sentence, which seems interesting and which was provided by E.W. Fay: the origin of the term “landica” could in fact be the term “glandica”, derived from the glans referring to the distal end of the male penis. The “g” would have been progressively lost due to the pronunciation difficulty for Latin people (their tongue retains the g), which has led to the disappearance of this letter.

However, as it has not been greatly used, the “landica” of the Romans rapidly gave way to the Greek word “clitoris”, which successive authors had widely introduced to Rome, such as testified, according to J. Riolan, by the texts written by Rufus of Ephesus, Pollux and Suidas. On the other hand, the term “landica” was still used in languages of Roman origin, including the old French language (“old French”) or Romanian. Thus, in “old French”, landica became landie or landye. And quite naturally in the historical dictionary of the old French language, which is the glossary of the French language from its origin until the century of Louis XIV, a definition for landie is provided: natural parts of the woman (thus with an extension of the term, which now includes the entire external genitalia). On the other hand, there is no trace of the term “clitoris” in this dictionary, although this word had previously invaded the Latin language.

3.2.2 Clitoris

The etymology of the word “clitoris” is still prone to discussion. However, there are numerous other possibilities even if they remain uncertain. It should also be noted that the term has often been written in different ways: **kleitoris** for Rufus, **kletoris** (for Pollux, during the second century), **klitoris** for Hesychius (during the sixth century) and finally **clitoris** for Suidas (during the eleventh century).

The term “clitoris” only appeared in France during the seventeenth century. It appeared in the dictionary of R. Cotgrave in 1611 (p. 203)⁸ with the following definition: “A woman’s Priuities” (or a woman’s “priuities”). It was soon going to spread in all of Europe, especially via Italian and English anatomists, and as a result make the words derived from “landica” disappear forever.

⁷“Laxa et landicosa”: inscription written on the house of a prostitute from Pompei (undoubtedly written by a malevolent neighbour!).

⁸“Landie” and “landies” have also been included in Cotgrave’s dictionary (p.570).

Among the multiple origins which have been proposed for the etymology of the term “clitoris”, we will retain the following:

- Derived from the verb cleitorizein or kleitorizein, which means touch and tickle or titillate lasciviously
- Derived from Kleitor, a city founded by Clitor and which had a famous fountain whose water tasted like wine
- Derived from Kleo, verb meaning “to celebrate, praise” or from kleitos, adjective in the richest senses: glorious, prominent, famous and superb
- Derived from Kleitor or Klitora, city of Arcadia (mountainous region in the South of Greece) located on a hill and acting as a lock for several valleys
- Derived from Klitoris, a dark coloured stone, which can be found on the banks of the Indus (Plutarch also used this term to refer to a black stone, which can be found on Mount Lilée)
- Derived from Clitoris, a legendary daughter of Myrmidon
- Derived from Kleio, verb meaning “I close”, or from kleis, name meaning “what is used to close (key or lock)”
- Derived from Kleitus, which means side or slope of a mountain or hill, or even a small hill

Linguists seem to want to adopt the last two etymologies (especially the Kleio etymology, which appears in several dictionaries⁹). However, the discussion remains open, especially as certain eminent specialists, such as M. Cohen¹⁰ have found similarities between the term clitoris and word formulations belonging to the living language of modern Ethiopia.

The terminology induced from “clitoris” is also interesting. The following can be mentioned:

Clitoral	which refers to the clitoris
Clitorism	extended and painful erection (pathological) of the clitoris (it is identical to priapism in men)
Clitorise to	lasciviously touch the clitoris
Clitoridectomy	resection of part or all of the clitoris
Clitoroplasty	plastic surgery or repair surgery of the clitoris
Clitoromegaly	large-sized clitoris
Clitoresque ¹¹	which evokes the clitoris
Acomoclitism ¹²	fetishism related to hairless pubes

⁹e.g.: JB Morin and Anse de Villoison: etymological dictionary of French words derived from Greek (1809).

¹⁰M. Cohen: The mysterious origins of the word “clitoris” in *The classic clitoris; historic contributions to scientific sexuality*, Th. Power, Lowry. Publisher: Nelson hall nh, Chicago.

¹¹see: “Possible words and existing words, the case of derivatives in esque”, M. Plenet, ERSS, Univ. Toulouse Le Mirail.

¹²(a private+come, hair+clit, from clitoris) thus literally: “clitoris without hair”!

3.3 The Word “Clitoris”: Evolution of Its Definition Through the Centuries

- The first dictionary citing the word “clitoris” was that of R. Cotgrave,¹³ *A Dictionnaire of the French and English tongues* (1611) which defined so “A woman’s Priuities”. That definition was included in the Godefroy’s dictionary, “*Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^eme au XV^eme siècle*” (1881–1902),¹⁴ but with a little modification: “A woman’s Priuities” becoming “A womans privities”, more comprehensible! Godefroy gives also his own definition: “Petit organe charnu à l’entrée de la vulve” (small fleshy organ at the entrance of the vulva).
- In the dictionary of P. Richelet, “*Dictionnaire françois*” (1680),¹⁵ the definition is intended anatomical: “clitoris, Terme d’Anatomie: chair qui est en haut et entre les lèvres de la matrice” (anatomic word: flesh that is above and between the lips of the matrix).
- It is the same for the “*Dictionnaire Universel*” (Universal Dictionary) of A. Furetière (1690),¹⁶ the author based on findings of G. Fallope (see Chap. 1): “Clitoris, Terme d’Anatomie: C’est un nom que Fallope a donné à une petite caroncule qui est au devant de la vulve. Elle a 2 ligaments et quatre petits muscles et une glande couverte d’une peau déliée, comme d’un prépuce. Quelques-uns l’appellent verge féminine. On la retranche quelquefois par opération de Chirurgie quand elle sort trop en dehors”. (Clitoris : Anatomical term. It is a name that Fallope gave to a small wattle in front of the vulva. She as two ligaments and four small muscles and a gland covered by an untied skin like a foreskin. Some call it, female penis. It is sometimes subtracted by operation surgery when she goes outside too”).
- In “*Le Dictionnaire des Arts et des Sciences*” of Th. Corneille (1694)¹⁷ (The Dictionary of Arts and Sciences), copy of the two previous definitions is clear: “Clitoris, Terme d’Anatomie. Petite caroncule qui est au haut et entre les lèvres de la matrice. Elle a 2 ligaments, quatre petits muscles, et une glande couverte d’une peau fort déliée. Ce mot vient du grec kintoron qui signifie en latin pudenda mulieris” (Clitoris, Anatomical term. Small wattle that is above and between the lips of the matrix. She as two ligaments, four small muscles and a gland covered by

a very untied skin. This word originates from Greek “kintoron” which means “Pudenda mulieris”). Note that “kintoron” does not appear in Greek language! As against the position of the clitoris is much more accurate than that given by the definition of Furetière.

- The first edition of the French Academia¹⁸ (founded by cardinal Richelieu) appears the same year (1694) followed by numerous following editions.
 - So, in 1762 (4th edition) the clitoris is defined: “terme d’Anatomie. Petite partie de chair ronde qui est dans l’endroit le plus élevé des parties naturelles de la femme” (Anatomical term. Small part of round flesh which is in the highest place of the natural parts of woman).
 - In 1798 (5th edition), same definition.
 - In 1835 (6th edition), “Le clitoris: terme d’Anatomie. Petit organe charnu, de forme ronde et allongée, qui est placé à l’endroit le plus élevé des parties naturelles de la femme et de toutes les femelles d’animaux quadrupèdes” (The clitoris: Anatomical term. Round and elongated shaped fleshy small organ, which is placed at the highest point of natural parts of women and all female animals quadrupeds). Note the reappearance of the word “organ” already used by Godefroy and the reference to the animals.
 - In 1879 (7th edition), same definition for the word clitoris than in the previous edition.
 - In 1932–1935¹⁹ (8th edition), “Le clitoris: terme d’Anatomie. Petit organe charnu, de forme ronde et allongée qui chez la femme, est placé à l’entrée de la vulve” (The clitoris: Anatomical term. Round and elongated shaped fleshy small organ, which, in the women, is placed at the entrance of the vulva). Unfortunately, it is clear that this definition is a return to imprecision! For completeness, we also include the Universal Dictionary (*Dictionnaire Universel*) published in 1854.²⁰ The author, M. La Châtre, contemporary of G.L. Kobelt, indeed gives a long definition of the clitoris, containing some anatomic considerations: “Petit corps rond et long, situé dans l’endroit le plus élevé des parties naturelles de la femme et des femelles de mammifères. Il est semblable au membre viril par sa structure et se termine

¹³R. Cotgrave: *A dictionnaire of the French and English tongues*. London, Adam Islip, ed. (1611).

¹⁴Godefroy Fr., *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e e au XV^e siècle*, Paris, Vieweg F. Bouillon E., 10 tomes, 1881–1902.

¹⁵Richelet P., *Dictionnaire françois*, J-H. Widerhold, Genève, 1680.

¹⁶Furetière A., *Dictionnaire Universel*, A et R. Leers, La Haye et rotterdam, 3 Tomes, 1690.

¹⁷Corneille Th., *Le Dictionnaire des Arts et des Sciences*, Veuve J.B. Coignard, Paris, 1694.

¹⁸*Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française*, 1^{ère} ed, 1694.

Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française, 4^{ème} ed., Veuve de B. Brunet, Paris, 1762.

Dictionnaire de l’Académie française, 5^{ème} ed, J.J. Smith et Ce, Paris, 1798.

Dictionnaire de l’Académie française, 6^{ème} ed, Firmin Didot frères, Paris, 1835.

Dictionnaire de l’Académie française, 7^{ème} ed, Firmin Didot et Cie, Paris, 1879.

¹⁹ *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 8^{ème} ed, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1932–1935.

²⁰*Le Dictionnaire Universel*, M. La Châtre, Administration de Librairie, Paris, 1854.

de même par un petit gland qui diffère de celui de la verge en ce qu'il n'est pas percé. Il en diffère aussi par son volume qui est de beaucoup moindre" (Small round and long body located in the highest place of the natural parts of the woman or female mammal. It is similar to the male member in structure and ends even by a small glans that differs from that of the penis in that it is not pierced. It also differs in its volume which is much less.).

Consulting the recent French dictionaries shows that the current definition of the word clitoris has not really progressed. So in the Larousse dictionaries 2013²¹ (Petit Larousse, Larousse de la Langue Française), "Le clitoris: Petit organe érectile situé à la partie supérieure de la vulve" (The clitoris: small erectile organ located in the upper part beyond vulva). However, the erectile nature of the clitoris is henceforth mentioned.

In the Hachette dictionary 2013,²² same definition as in Larousse dictionary.

It is not the same with the English recent dictionaries in which finally appears the clitoral function. So in the English dictionary 2013 of the Cambridge University,²³ the definition is as follows: "Clitoris, a small organ above the vagina that can give a woman sexual pleasure when is touched". Unfortunately, the location is inaccurate and erectile character is not mentioned. By cons, to our great satisfaction, the definition of the clitoris in the dictionary of the Oxford University²⁴ "a small, sensitive, erectile part of the female genitals, at the anterior end of the vulva" is by finally, almost perfect (it lacks only the word "organ"). In the dictionary of contemporary English,²⁵ there is also a good definition: **small organ at the front of the vulva, that is a centre of sexual sensation in women** (it lacks only the "erectile" function). The ideal would be to combine the two previous definitions. Note that more than four centuries have been necessary to achieve a complete and accurate definition of the clitoris!

3.4 Names for the Bulbs

R. de Graaf and Swammerdam were the first to mention the bulbs in their respective work, published the same year (1672) (see Chap. 1). Each of the two authors wanted to claim the anteriority of the discovery. However, if we follow the remarkable demonstration of L. Kobelt in his chapter on the "reservoir for venous blood and its muscle", it is de Graaf, who was the first, as he had already shown his friends, 18 months earlier, images in which these plexuses already

appeared. Furthermore, still according to Kobelt,²⁶ it is de Graaf who "was the first to describe and represent this part exactly" as the **retiform plexus** or **reticular plexus**. As for Swammerdam, he did not find any other name for "his" discovery than that of **crus clitoridis interna**, thus creating certain confusion. This was also the case for Taberranus, who, in his "observationes anatomicae", published in Lucques in 1753, called them **plexus cavernosus** or even for Santorini, who named them **corpus cavernosum**. It is only later that the term of **bulbs of the vagina** was going to appear in French books. This term was then modified by Taylor to become **semi-bulbs** and then by Kobelt himself: to become **bulbs of the vestibule**. The exact name of the bulbs is still subject to discussion and we will address this issue in the "Relationships" chapter (refer to this chapter).

The other current topic of discussion concerns the entire unit, which forms the cavernous and spongy parts.

3.5 A Holistic Name for the United Cavernous and Spongy Parts

At present, the aim is no longer to separate the spongy and cavernous parts and in particular the clitoris and the bulbs. Such as demonstrated by Kobelt and repeated by H.E. O'Connell et al., anatomists have to deal with, in women (as in men), a "unified structure", which must be provided with a name, such as has been the case for men.

But which name is to be chosen? Kobelt had already thought about this, especially insofar as he wanted to treat the structures of the external genitalia of man and those of woman in the same manner. Finally, it is their physiology which inspired him and he thus described them as "**the apparatus of the genital sense**" of man and woman.

Since then, the terminology has not changed too much and the words corresponding to this beautiful physiological entity are missing. H.E. O'Connell concluded: "There is appeal in using a simple term, the clitoris, to describe the cluster off erectile tissues responsible for female orgasm". For our part, we believe that "clitoris" or even "clitoral complex" (also proposed by H.E. O'Connell) would be too restrictive and rapidly lead to forgetting the bulbs again. Moreover, we still have to name a true organ, with its own vessels and nerves and its specific functions. It is therefore a "cavernous-spongy organ" which must be named. So let us take that step and propose **bulbo-clitoral organ**, with verbal terms and groups which are easy to pronounce in Latin as well as English.

²¹Larousse 2013:

- Petit Larousse
- Dictionnaire de la Langue Française.

²²Dictionnaire encyclopédique Hachette 2013.

²³Cambridge English dictionary.

²⁴Oxford English dictionary.

²⁵Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. Longman Group UK Limited.

²⁶Kobelt reports that "Verheyen was reproached by Morgagni for omitting the retiform plexus in his edition of 1699". This author also reported that "in Germany, the bulb was forgotten due to the fact that the retiform plexus was considered as a simple venous network". Similarly for Tiedemann, "in his report on Duverney's gland, the retiform plexus is a simple venous plexus, a vascular network which enfolds the vagina (confusion with the vaginal venous plexus)".