



**THE METAMORPHOSES
OF**

FAT

A HISTORY OF OBESITY

GEORGES VIGARELLO

THE METAMORPHOSES OF FAT

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Georges Vigarello

Translated from the French by C. Jon Delogu



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INTRODUCTION

In one of her letters from the end of the seventeenth century, Elizabeth Charlotte, the Palatine Princess, gives the reader this image of herself: “my waist is monstrously wide, I am as square as a cube, my skin is red, speckled with yellow.”¹ This testimony is precious because physical self-description is rare in old regime France. It supposes a distance, an objectification of the self, a dominating judgment that only a slow process of cultural labor could make possible. The testimony is especially valuable because it confirms that a definitive change in thinking has occurred: big is now only bad. The princess insists on the disgrace, the heaviness, the irremediable descent from “feathery to fat” that “places her among the ugly.”² Then come anecdotes naming the symptoms of various troubles and ailments: “spleen pain,” “colic,” “vapors,” and a “loss of balance” worsened by bumpy carriages. Being big is a disadvantage, perhaps even a curse.

The big person, however, was not always so strongly denounced—a fact that justifies historical inquiry. Massive bodies can be praised in the Middle Ages, for example, as denoting power and ascendancy. Similarly, in times of hunger, admiring praise is accorded to lands of plenty [*pays de cocagne*] with all-you-can-eat banquets and visions of endlessly stuffing oneself. Force is associated with the large hearty meal. Accumulating pounds is seen as health insurance. And social “privilege” is signified through a display of one’s own size. These ideas are probably complicated as well, though, because even in the Middle Ages they are contested by the sermons of clerics and the reservations and beliefs of doctors and even by the delicately phrased demands of courtly codes. Nevertheless, they are impressive, immediately recognizable signs that lend the big person power and conviction.

A definitive break however takes place with the advent of modern Europe. The closely contemporary testimonies of Saint-Simon in France and Samuel Pepys in England denigrate a “lazy, fat priest,”³ deride a “fat child” called “Punch,” “a word of common use for all that is thick and short,”⁴ “big, fat creatures,”⁵ and “fat and lusty and ruddy” courtiers,⁶ while Madame de Sévigné fears above all becoming a “flattened fatty.”⁷ The big person [*le gros*] is now only a fat person [*le gras*—indolent and collapsed.⁸ Prestige and models change. The rough tables of olden times heaped with food are no longer classy, and accumulating pounds of flesh is no longer a sign of forceful reserves but rather of a certain loss of control and grossness.

The history of being big is the story of these reversals. The development of Western societies promotes a tendency toward slimmer bodies, a keener supervision of physical contours, and an increasingly alarmed refusal of heaviness. This of course brings changes in what counts as big and a barely imperceptible but steady privileging of lightness. This in turn strongly exacerbates contempt for big people, who find themselves increasingly discredited. Voluminous individuals fall further and further

below standards of refinement, while beauty is ever more associated with the thin and slender.

This same discredit takes on a different content over time and these changes further justify a history of bigness. The vision of the “fault” shifts, thus revealing how much the body’s appearance, with its real or supposed flaws, is linked to a history of cultures and sensibilities. Medieval criticisms, formulated by clerics and diffused with some success in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in advance of our modern era, insist on the capital or “deadly” sins. These criticisms assail the passions, single out the glutton, and denounce his lack of dignity. They condemn avarice, while modern criticisms insist on a lack of dexterity and efficiency. The big, now fat, person becomes a figure of the inapt, the unfit—flabby and inert. Their fault is a deficit of doing, an insufficiency of power and action. Annibal Carrache’s caricature “portraits” from the seventeenth century are the best illustrations: groups of men with oversized stomachs and short limbs stuck in poses of heaviness.⁹ The flaw of the fat person in modern times is lack of dynamism and a capacity for doing. The dominant idea becomes *fat = no power*. The fat person can also provoke collective denunciations, as when the full chests of the wealthy are pointed to as a sign either of their rapaciousness or their true inefficiency. With their round tummies and degraded bodies, aristocrats and abbots at the end of the eighteenth century are the classic examples—“profiteers” that revolutionary ideas will squeeze down, then out, thus exposing their uselessness.

Criticisms also become more psychological as societies accentuate individualism and valorize autonomy and self-affirmation. The “losers” in these accounts are more intimate, emotional cases. Hence the “apathy”¹⁰ that weighty anatomies are reproached for in northern countries in the late eighteenth century, or the “egoism”¹¹ held against the “fat person” in the proto-sociological portraits of Romantic literature; for example, the young bullied kid, “fat and sad,” as described by Granville in his *Small Miseries of Human Life* (1843).¹² Size comes definitively to be thought of as correlating with individual attitudes and personality traits and even ways of thinking. At the end of the nineteenth century, Manuel Leven goes so far as to write up a long series of treatises associating neurosis and obesity.¹³ The criticism of the fat person thus participates in the immense shift within Western societies that deepens the space given over to psychologies—taking distance from older moral classifications and instead developing an infinite array of personal differentiations and types of behavior.

In other words, this stigmatization reflects above all an accentuation of norms that in Western societies dictated ever stricter rules and precise guidelines for physical appearance and the expression of self. It can also reflect differences that are upheld between male and female genders as well as between social groups. For example, public condemnation is more severe toward the female body, which has been traditionally expected to be supple and fluid. Inversely, judgments have been more tolerant toward the dominant sex whose ascendancy has traditionally allowed for a more imposing voluminous size. The court of the great king in the seventeenth century, for example, does not lack for princes of a certain rotund stature, just as in the nineteenth-century world of the bourgeois there is no shortage of figures whose prestige is marked by a certain hefty, not to say heavy, allure. Here, too, social and cultural polarities, the differences constructed between men and women, inevitably

traverse both positive and negative judgments.

Obviously the history of the big and the fat is also the history of the valuations of bodily forms and the work they're put to. For a long time these judgments remain imprecise because of a lack of measurable, statistical criteria. For a long time the intermediary stages or types between "normal" and "very big" are not clearly described. It takes a slow, gradual invention of a set of terms and diminutives between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to suggest a scale of chubbiness, posit types, and attempt to formalize them despite the inevitable persistence of imprecision.¹⁴ The increasing variety of terms testifies to the increasing discrimination of the eye, even though its judgment remained rather approximate and even disappointing by today's standards for quite a while. We may note the insistent affirmation in a *Dictionnaire de médecine* from 1827 that fatness "presents a multitude of degrees."¹⁵ A history of the body must give an account of both these evaluations of appearances and the history of their ever more explicit elaboration.

A sign of this growing exactitude is the statistical calculation and report of body weight that becomes customary by the end of the nineteenth century, just as an increasingly industrious vision of bodies and anatomies is also taking hold. It will take time before the bathroom scale and related personal tools arrive in private spaces in the twentieth century, marking a new requirement for self-maintenance that the evidence of periodic self-weighing fulfills. The presence of the scale has become part of everyday life, almost "natural," so spontaneous that it can make us forget how much our judgments of weight developed and refined themselves before the advent of numbers and tests. But it is this refinement and its diversification and individualization that are central to a history of "big" people.

Finally there are the fitness tactics and strategies for fighting fat as priority is gradually given over to slimming within Western societies. These practices also accelerate through the modern era, diversifying over time, revealing that the "fight" against weight is not a new invention but accompanies the gradual refinement of judgment about bodily curves and their modifications. For a long time this battle had as its first principle the constraint exerted on the skin itself: the corset, the girdle, and straps of all sorts. As though the body's forms had to obey the most material manipulations, as though they had to yield to the tightest strictures. At bottom this is nothing but the expression of an archaic belief that targets the body as a passive ensemble, a consummately malleable object, a material submissive to the simplest mechanical corrections.

This fight against fat has a new dimension that has not received much historical attention despite its impact, namely, that a project of getting thin can encounter limits and even impossibilities. Not that it is always deficient. Successes continue to multiply, linked to this or that scientific breakthrough. But the resistances also multiply—curves and weight go unchanged despite the accumulation of treatments. The obstruction can then become an obsession, a site of growing worry as knowledge develops to sophisticated levels, and alarms ring as diet procedures become an obligatory practice. The stigmatization thus shifts from a denigration of fat to a denigration of powerlessness, the inability to change. The reprobation becomes more psychological, more intimate; they are no longer accusations of awkwardness or gluttony, but of nonmastery, a lack of power over oneself as one keeps an "impassive"

and ugly body whereas “everything” says it ought to change. The history of obesity is also the history of these “inertias,” of a body ever more identified with a person in Western history, and yet that body escapes from certain attempts, apparently simple, to adapt and modify it. An entirely singular image of the obese person thus emerges—one that the growing norms for getting thin along with the ill-understood difficulty to respect them drives toward a singular hardship.¹⁶ The latest new feature is that this hardship can express itself most easily in a society that favors intimate confession and psychologizing.

The history of fat people is first the history of a condemnation and its transformations across differing cultural contexts and socially targeted rejects. It is also the history of the particular difficulties experienced by the obese person: a hardship that has probably been accentuated by the refinement of norms and the growing attention to psychological suffering. Finally it is the history of a body that undergoes modifications that society rejects and that the will is not always able to modify.

PART 1

THE MEDIEVAL GLUTTON

“Bigness” is imposing right away in ancient intuitions.¹ It impresses. It seduces. It is also suggestive as it incarnates abundance, denotes wealth, and symbolizes health. Decisive signs in a universe marked by constant hunger and precariousness. This is demonstrated in the earliest fables: “gluttonous throats,” repasts of “great size,” “overflowing” feasts, the pleasure of “stuffing one’s stomach,” “all you can eat and drink” meals.² The body is unthinkable without filled up flesh. Health care itself and the first response to sickness cannot be thought except in terms of abundant food. The wounded fox in the *Roman de Renart*, for example, recovers his force by ingurgitating many foods and drinks.³ The generous silhouette protects, convinces, and dominates forcefully in a confusion of fat and flesh.

This contour, however, can also provoke worry or even disgust, especially if its dimensions grow. Its materials are already composite, suggesting both softness and firmness. These states can also provoke subtler responses including the condemnation of clerics and doctors as well as that of the court elite who are quite sensitive to the odd word here or there about dimensions and reserve. During the Middle Ages a doubt takes hold as to the virtue of bigness, a contest between conflicting images. It is not that the prestige of the big, the massive, or the plump suddenly disappears. A moralistic universe, however, does spend more time contemplating the dangers of “excess.” An already old, strongly edifying criticism focuses on the glutton and the overeater who get carried away. It is a criticism of behavior more than one of aesthetics or morbidity.

1. The Prestige of the Big Person

The prestige of the big person derives first of all from a certain context. The world in 1300 is one of hunger, severe restrictions, and food shortages that recur at less than five-year intervals. For several centuries during the Middle Ages, poor degraded soils, inadequate storage, slow and difficult transportation networks, and vulnerability to inclement weather all contribute to raising the accumulation of calories into an ideal. During these times, lands of plenty, the so-called *pays de cocagne*, also become marvelous symbols.¹ These fictional worlds are described as earthly paradises filled with spices, fatty meats, and white bread; dizzying landscapes where beer and wine flow like rivers, stews and roasts seem to pop up out of the soil, and hillsides are perfumed with fabulous nectars. Eating this “world” is a softening dream next to the hard reality of “bad harvests, exorbitant prices, and mortality.”² The collective imagination dreams of accumulation. Health means a full stomach. Vigor is represented in the compact heft of flesh. These early truths have to be kept in mind to fully understand the future criticisms of “the fat.”³ But one must first take stock of the prestige of volume and big sizes.

Spontaneous Vigor

The words used to describe “beautiful” women in the oldest medieval tales are entirely clear on the matter. Each one is “fat, white, and tender” or “fat, tender, and beautiful,”⁴ and the “gentle, beautiful maiden” in the *Romance of the Rose* is “rather big.”⁵ The words are the same for describing resplendent health. The heroines in the tale *The Heart Eaten*, freed after torments and misfortunes, are alive to the point of drunkenness and, feeding on “blood and flesh,” become “big and fat” and thus more attractive than ever in this new appearance.⁶ There are also the comparisons between horses and young women in the *Parisian’s Household Manual* from the fourteenth century that calls for both to have “beautiful loins and big bottoms.”⁷ These pronouncements about female “fat” must be read carefully as denoting a lack of leanness more than a big overall size. “Fat” can imply “full” without necessarily meaning “big,” which contributes to the ambiguity of the terms and the judgments and perceptions that go along with them.

Similar words crop up in descriptions of men, though perhaps with less nuance and more affirmation. Note what is seductive about the clerics for the bourgeoisie woman of Orléans in the thirteenth century:

The clerics were very big and fat

Because they probably ate a lot
They were highly esteemed in the city.⁸

Note the gentleman's lamentation in *The King of Navarre* from the thirteenth century who says he regains his fat by regaining possession of his loves,⁹ or the whining about hunger in the Fastoul d'Arras that will produce "bitterness" and prevent "fattening up."¹⁰ Even more striking are the mid-thirteenth-century Southern peasants who find no better term of praise than "ox of Sicily" to describe the beauty of Saint Thomas Aquinas as they abandon their labors to better admire him,¹¹ "pushed toward him" by his "imposing stature" more than by "his saintliness."¹²

Medieval myths say the same thing. Their giants are of immense size, constantly devouring and unsurpassed in power. Gergunt, for example, the "son of Belen," whose terrifying force is described by Giraud de Cambrie in the twelfth century, dominates Great Britain before Caesar.¹³ The patronymics associated with him are themselves symbols that all point to the etymology of "Gargantua": *Gurguntius*, *Gurgant*, *Gremagoth*. These names all contain the phoneme [grg] present in all Indo-European languages "to express the idea of ingurgitation."¹⁴ The sound reinforces the idea of vigor, for the source of the gigantic forms is nothing else but constant swallowing. This example mixes together more subtly and confusingly two distinct categories: the volume of muscle tissue and that of fat.

Medieval travelers show this in writings that identify improbable faraway inhabitants whose prodigious force derives from their immense size and unchecked appetites. For example, the men of Zanzibar described by Marco Polo in the thirteenth century are "tall and big" and "more wide than tall,"¹⁵ and each places in his enormous mouth a volume of food that exceeds the total quantity of what several normal men would eat. Whence derives the "immeasurable" force that is attributed to them, their resistance in battle, and the capacity of each one to defeat single-handed "the attack of four other men."¹⁶

Noble references extend this promotion of bigness further still. The knight in the romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries ostentatiously indulges in massive quantities of food. Moniage Renoart "puts away five pâtés and five capons along with two gallons of wine."¹⁷ In an instant Ogier the Dane eats up an enormous side of beef that could have fed "three lowly cart-pullers."¹⁸ Quantity means both ascendancy and power. Medieval romances linger over the interminable meals of noblemen where one dish after another reinforces the idea of power. There is a succession of fifteen courses at the feast of Perceval beginning with "stag served with spicy pepper";¹⁹ an accumulation of "venison, pork, and wild boar" in *Amis et Amiles*;²⁰ an extensive diversity of meats in the *Gerbers de Metz*; "venison, deer testicles, cranes and other river birds, stuffed bear and many spices."²¹ Here force calls forth the accumulation of foods. The manners of the glutton take precedence over those of the gourmet.

The image of the endless meal is the product of dream, but is also symbolic. "In a society ruled by warriors who raise physical force to mythic status, the powerful eat to their full.... The one who eats a lot rules over everyone else."²² Whence the privilege given to quantity as well as to the precise type of food: flesh is preferred over vegetables, for example, and blood over muscle fiber. In the thirteenth century, Helmbrecht, the old peasant of Wermer, expressly acknowledges confining himself to

a diet of grains. He says to his son that he leaves meat and fish for the diet of the local lord.²³ Whereas Aldebrandin of Sienna, a thirteenth-century doctor, praises bloody foods because they are “more nourishing,” “fattening,” and “give force.”²⁴ They make one big and fleshy. Thus there is a great diversity of animals consumed (chickens of all sorts, geese, pigs, sheep, lambs) during the brief stay of Queen Petronila of Catalonia and Aragon in the bishop’s palace in Barcelona between 1157 and 1158.²⁵ The persuasiveness comes from the profusion as well as from the type of foods listed. The cumulative effect and the blood ingested makes for vigor, even if the reality does not always correspond to the idea; for example, the garbage heaps of the powerful of the time do not reveal large quantities of animal bones (only five percent, for example, of deer bones).²⁶

The prestige of the bear crowns this honoring of bigness. A royal reference in Arthurian legend, the bear is the emblem of grandeur in ancient tales. He is big and forceful, heavy but also agile. Michel Pastoureau has underscored the importance of twelfth-century texts that magnify these images showing the bear’s manifest weight to be accompanied by agility, quickness, and a talent for scampering between obstacles.²⁷ An omnivorous animal, like man, and capable of standing up as well, the bear is praised for being both adroit and powerful, rapid and massive. Royal weight means weight as model. The legend of “bear-like royalty,” in fact, constructs a hybrid figure: a child of noble blood that a chain of obscure circumstances leads to be nursed on bear’s milk before ascending to the throne becomes “furry and strong like the animal.”²⁸

Note this simple and revealing gesture: when the count of Foix falls into apoplexy one day in 1391, servants attempt to return him to his normal self by placing in his mouth “bread, water, spices, and all manner of comforting foods.”²⁹ Only a large quantity is considered capable of restoring force and movement. The lifestyle of the count and his alimentary splendor provides further illustrations with his tables “dressed with abundance,”³⁰ extensive hours for meals, an overwhelming amount of food and drink, and a wish for “grand enjoyment.”³¹ Froissart directly links quantity and grandeur. He admires it and affirms it.

What Insults?

The largely “positive” force of a massive physical appearance and powerful eating has a particular effect: the big person is rarely the object of insult in the middle centuries of the medieval period. His image is rarely attacked, as it will be later, with an arsenal of insults and offenses. There is, however, the madness of the mouth, the animality of the glutton, the *gula*, which take on negative values. But even here, the words point more to excess desire than to the physical profile, to a kind of fever more than to the weight itself.

The terms *lecheor*, *lechiere*, and *lechieresse*—all having to do with licking—strikingly recur as signs of gluttony; in other words, behavior is more the focus than being heavy per se. It is as though the big person is incapable of being disgraced. All the words focus on the overall appetite, the attraction, the erotic quality even, more

than on body lines. All focus on morals. In the prose version of Lancelot, the expression *lecheor* is used about a man living with a married woman; it is also addressed to Gauvain in the book of Artus to denounce his abuse of amorous liaisons and pleasures.³² What counts is the transgression of a norm, of a proper attitude toward things and people, more than the physical characteristics, which are not taken seriously into account here.

We may also note the terms *cras* and *crais* and their probable distant relation to the big or the fat.³³ But the disgust for the abject dominates more than the rejection of the heavy. Here again there is a moral allusion rather than a physical denunciation, says Nicole Gonthier in her long inventory of medieval insults.³⁴ The *cras* quickly becomes the *croy*, in fact, and thus provides a nuance to the immorality, designating as *croy chosa* the intolerable sex pot, the contemptible woman who overrides all rules with her own errant strangeness.

It is important to insist on this ascendancy of the moral. Big people are not yet attracting that sort of attention. The moral ascendancy corresponds to a very specific, almost intuitive way of viewing the body; one where behavioral values remain dominant and mostly take priority over all indications of form or weight. It is not the weight of man but the ways of man that mostly come in for insults—the bawdy, the bastards and the idiots, heretics, prostitutes, and sodomites.

From Big to Very Big

The prestige of the big can yield, however, before the excess of the “very big”—when the enormous becomes the deformed, the ultimate physical disgrace. There is no precise measure of this threshold, no definition, just the allusion hardly ever discussed in twelfth-century Latin chronicles that distinguish *pinguis* (“big”) and *praepinguis* (“very big”). There is a penalty, though, when it comes to certain gestures, places, and situations—the impossibility of mounting a horse, difficulty moving, powerlessness to do or accomplish something, and “inaptitude at war” when it comes to Philip the First as noted by Orderic Vital at the end of the eleventh century.³⁵ The pathology is undeniable. This deformity has always existed, just as it has always been pointed out. The criticisms of the very big concentrate solely on the idea of excess—true bigness is that which hampers mobility to the point of prohibiting it. Only the physical impediment, the difficulty moving become primary traits. A gray area persists, yet the big person can be praised, whereas the very big person may be condemned.

The oldest chronicles evoke the stigma of the extreme when their effects touch the lives of the powerful. William the Conqueror was so enormously fat in 1087 that the French king was led to say that the Englishman must be about to give birth.³⁶ Louis the Fat was so intensely heavy in 1132 that he contracted an illness that left him “absolutely stiff in his bed.”³⁷ Queen Berthe of France’s “extreme fatness” provoked her giving up the crown in 1092.³⁸ Chronicles also tell of accidents and deaths that allegedly followed from such extreme states including the death of William the Conqueror in 1087 and that of Louis the Fat in 1135. They are allusive, imprecise descriptions, however, that suggest an image-filled world and an obscure logic within

which this “too much” finds a meaning.

The explanation given for the death of William the Conqueror is in this way representative, even if the chroniclers hesitate about the precise circumstances—a fall from a horse, a brusque hit against the horn of the saddle during the fury of combat near Nantes in July 1087, or a collapse due to summer heat. The reports are inconclusive.³⁹ In both cases, however, the accumulated fat would have melted inside the body. The bodily envelope would have let its matter dissolve like butter, creams, or gels. The Conqueror would supposedly have been submerged from the inside, overtaken by a breakdown of substances. The description of the death of Louis the Fat in 1135 is almost identical. The king is no longer able to mount a horse at age forty-six. He has become “the Fat” in the prime of life, thus confirming a clear physical weakening.⁴⁰ Louis’s friend L’Abbé Suger, the most attentive and laudatory commentator in the manuscript written on the ruler’s life, describes the growing “softening” and posits causes and consequences: dysentery, fevers, weaknesses, and disorders all attributed to his excessively “thick and heavy mass.”⁴¹ Extremely weighed down, the body of the king supposedly suffocates, losing food, blood, and waters leaking out of distended organs, provoking “stomach movements” and diarrhea.⁴²

Two types of bigness therefore exist in these old accounts: the one relates to forms and forces, compact flesh and vivacity; the other extreme one, though without exact numbers, smothers “vital warmth” through its irremediable excess. The first is a sign of opulence, the second of disability. The border between the two is, of course, uncertain, for the distinction makes use of a changeable sentiment of immediate efficacy linked to weight: mass and density elicit dreams of health and vigor. The border is significant, however, since the distinction confirms that in the middle centuries of the medieval period the prestige of bigness really existed. It also confirms the belief in the value of enormous feasts and endless eating.

Still, numerous ambiguities exist where alongside the apparent density of the big person, there are softer, mushier volumes that combine improbable liquids with air and water. The archeology of the big must also contend with these opaque volumes. Thus a double equivocation emerges that will long be a part of the modern vision of bigness: the confused definition of substances and the confused definition of thresholds.

2. Liquids, Fat, and Wind

An initial ambiguity arises around the very existence of the “adipose.” Hippocrates is careful to distinguish the big size of the athlete from that of the “fat man.” The first weighted down by flesh, the second by fat.¹ The distinction is sometimes difficult to pin down, however. Caelius Aurelianus, one of the rare Latin authors to comment on physical sizes, groups them together under the generic term *flesh* (*superflua carnis incrementa*),² thus mixing together fat and that which is not fat exactly, and assimilating this excess to cachexia or wasting syndrome when he insists on the slowness of movement and the debility provoked.

There is no doubt however that medieval texts refer to fat: an oily, pliable and fundamentally aqueous material, sometimes more compact depending on the location, and of a composite, somewhat obscure nature. What are its proportions of water, oil, blood, or phlegm? What is its consistency, its density? It remains difficult to specify its origin and content. All that is certain is the immediate evidence: colors, odors, resistance, and extension that lump together many possible substances as sources of fatness. Even air must be considered since it is thought to move through the body provoking swelling and puffiness, a by-product of body heat as much as smoke from fire.

Matters of Fat

Medical texts hardly concern themselves with this fat. It is not part of the organs themselves, but it is judged useful. Its disappearance is often a sign of illness. It shapes, forms, prevents dryness, aids digestion, and protects from the cold. It also causes a certain delicate moisture. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Henri de Mondeville offers this rather poetic description: it permits certain parts of the body to be “humidified and bathed in its unctuousity.”³ Fat serves and maintains the body’s appearance. This adds to its prestige, even though its excessive presence guarantees enfeeblement. How is its presence in the body to be explained if this material is supposed to be useless? It was impossible to imagine human anatomy without it; impossible to imagine the body properly protected. These views are of course far from the ones we have today. All the more considering that in those ancient times body shape was not a function of muscle, but of obscure layers of fleshy mixtures.

The substance, however, seems impenetrable. Both a necessary and yet degraded material, fat is a waste product. It is what “remains,” an accident, “undigested blood,” says Bartholomaeus Anglicus in the thirteenth century, who supposes the substance became dense because of super abundance or excessive cold.⁴ It is considered as one