

**UNFOLDING THE LANCET:
THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF SMALLPOX
INOCULATION AND VACCINATION IN THE
LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

by

Rebecca Lo Presti

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Degree in Major with Distinction

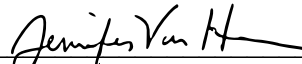
Spring 2024

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Approved: 

Jennifer Van Horn, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: 

Martin Brückner, Ph.D.
Director of the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture

Approved: _____
Debra Hess Norris, M.S.
Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved: _____
Louis F. Rossi, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate College and Vice Provost for Graduate and
Professional Education

ABSTRACT

This thesis positions the lancet – a small tool largely associated with bloodletting and other topical incisions – within the material culture of inoculation and early vaccination in the long eighteenth century of the Atlantic World. In doing so, the lancet activates the networks of exchange, consumption, and materiality that define the assumption of inoculation, and subsequently vaccination, within Euro-colonial health systems. Furthermore, the lancet is used a point of access in medical archives through which patient narratives of bodily autonomy and choice can be extracted. First, an overview of the history of the lancet is provided to understand its role as an adaptive and dynamic object in the eighteenth century, thus explaining its ultimate implementation in early inoculation procedures. Then, the lancet is framed as an imperial object implicit in professionalization of medicine by locating it within medical texts produced throughout the colonial Atlantic World. Finally, the focus turns to a variety of individual encounters with lancets to explore the intimate experience of inoculation that varied widely depending on race, gender, and class. The thesis concludes with an examination of the role of lancets in anti-vaccination prints in the early nineteenth century, thus demonstrating the object's prominence within the visual and imagined spheres of inoculation practices. Ultimately, this analysis of the lancet highlights a previously understudied component in the histories of smallpox, inoculation, and vaccination, while also expanding upon the networks that defined the material culture of the long eighteenth century.