This slim volume is a highly readable account of the possible effects on the dentition of suckling and sucking habits. It approaches the subject from many directions—scientific, philosophical, epidemiological and clinical—but, commendably, there are no clear divisions between these—the transitions are seamless. The approach is thought provoking throughout and arguably more philosophical than many larger clinical texts.

The first three chapters relate anthropology and social history to the history of breastfeeding and other means of feeding infants. These chapters are fascinating and excellently written. They will almost certainly be educational to the vast majority of readers. My only criticism of this section of the book is on page 20, where other Scottish readers will be as surprised as I was to read that the great William Hunter was ‘an English doctor’!

The next three chapters deal with other ‘sucking’ behaviours in children from a scientific and clinical viewpoint. Again these are very readable chapters. As a neurophysiologist, I would argue with the statement (page 29) that ‘Sucking habits are reflexes’. Sucking can be a reflex; sucking can be a habit; one could even say that reflex sucking can be a habit. However, I cannot think of a definition of ‘reflex’ which would permit a habit to be classified as a reflex. That tiny criticism apart, it is difficult to find serious fault with the author’s approach in this section of the book. Indeed these chapters contain many interesting facts and hypotheses.
which I at least had never considered, for example theories concerning the aetiology of posterior crossbites and the failure to find evidence of such conditions in the skulls of medieval children. As with the rest of the book, you feel better educated for reading these chapters.

The final two chapters bring everything together nicely by referring to recent research and then setting out some reasonable conclusions.

As someone who teaches aspects of the basic science underlying the topic, but who has little research or clinical expertise in the area, I was surprised by just how much I enjoyed reading this book. I would commend it to anyone with an interest in this area.

Samuel W. Cadden