Childbirth in Ancient Greece and Rome: basic bibliography


Dasen has also published on other topics to do with the ‘unnatural’ body, including disabilities. She is particularly strong on the archaeological evidence.


Concentrates on 5th/4th c BC and on comparing aspects of women’s bodies as discussed in Aristotle, with what the Hippocratic medical writings say.


When this came out it was quite controversial due to the claim that midwives could improve their status by working alongside a Hippocratic male doctor under his supervision. Also has interesting material on the effects of malaria on giving birth, and on gravestones that appear to commemorate women who died in childbirth, but could equally well commemorate midwives.


A rare book in that it focuses on the Roman world.

Valerie French, ‘Midwives and Maternity Care in the Greco-Roman World,’ *Helios* 13 (1987) 69-84

Still the standard article on this topic.

Hanson looks at the belief that the eight months child always dies whereas the seven month child may survive, interpreting this in terms of providing a let-out clause for the men and women assisting in childbirth, and for any feelings of guilt or responsibility on the part of the mother or other family members.

Ann E. Hanson, ‘A division of labor. Roles for men in Greek and Roman births,’ *Thamyris. Mythmaking from past to present* 1,2, Amsterdam (1994) 157-202

Hanson argues persuasively that men were involved in birthing, suggesting birth was a ‘crowded scene’ in which more and more helpers would be added on if things went wrong.


Discusses a wide range of aspects of ancient women’s medicine and its relationship to beliefs about the female body found in myth and ritual. Includes a chapter on the history of ‘hysteria’

Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013

Four chapters focus on the ancient story of Agnodice, ‘the first midwife’, and how this was interpreted up to the nineteenth century as ideas about who should attend women in childbirth were contested.

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