

qualités politiques, militaires ou religieuses. Les deux chapitres suivants envisagent des formes de beauté spécifiques via les concours de virilité (*euandria*) ainsi que les concours de prestance (*euaxia*) connus à partir de l'époque classique et organisés dans le cadre de fêtes religieuses comme par exemple les Hermaia. Ces compétitions peuvent être vues comme des moyens d'affirmation de la cité à travers la puissance et la force qui se dégagent des vainqueurs et qui sont données à voir lors des festivités. La conclusion interroge la notion de beauté dans le monde grec et l'ouvrage se clôt sur une abondante bibliographie, un index des sources et un index général. Il s'agit d'un livre très bien construit avec un fil conducteur clair et qui a le grand mérite d'aborder un sujet ayant jusqu'ici peu suscité l'intérêt des chercheurs.

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Véronique DASEN, *Le sourire d'Omphale. Maternité et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité*. Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015. 1 vol., 408 p. (CAHIERS D'HISTOIRE DU CORPS ANTIQUE, 4). Prix : 22 €. ISBN 978-2-7535-4015-6.

In the last decades, studies on ancient families and childhood received a strong boost. While pregnancy, birth and early infancy often were first chapters in broader overviews on ancient children, the available source material has now been studied so intensively that a separate monograph on the subject can be written. The aim of the present study by Véronique Dasen is overtly ambitious: to write a history of early childhood which goes beyond the traditional approaches dealing with infant mortality, infanticide, contraception and abortion – all themes which are often treated from the traditional male/medical point of view. Instead, Dasen proposes to bring together the study of the history of women with that of early infancy. Writing the history of the intimate connection between mothers and their young offspring needs to be done by resorting to a wide range of approaches: folklore, comparative anthropology, iconography and the study of ancient artefacts are as much part of the picture as the ancient literary sources and, to a lesser extent, papyri and inscriptions. As such, the reader is confronted with a wide range of often unexpected facts, stories and sources. While few will perhaps ever have heard about the healing or procreative capabilities of stones, the first chapter *Sexe et sexualité des pierres* (p. 25-51) introduces the reader to a catalogue of more than 200 such stones, to speaking stones, to their animalisation or gender, and to ancient views on the healing power of magnets. Such beliefs were shared by both what we now call folkloristic medicine and reputed physicians as Soranus or Galen. The second chapter *Métamorphoses de l'utérus, de la ventouse à la Gorgone* (p. 53-85) brings us as close as one can get to the intimate life of mothers in Antiquity. Literary testimonies on female masturbation, sensing early pregnancy, and the uterus are confronted with artefacts as diverse as suction cups, keys to guard the uterus, gems with images of octopuses and their tentacles protecting the uterus from possible incidents such as eclampsia, and monsters such as the Gorgo which stood as a symbol for the womb. All this is illustrated by beautiful parallels, from pharaonic Egypt up to the Modern Age. *Le secret d'Omphale* (p. 87-112) deals with the legendary story about the slavery and the inversion of gender roles of the hero Heracles while he was with Omphale. As such, Heracles' swollen belly is sometimes

connected to pregnancy, and the figure of Omphale, often connected to the Egyptian god Seth, seems to be a symbol for unbridled sex. Dasen carefully tracks down this tradition, which hardly appears in the literary sources, but which is amply attested in the iconographic record. The chapter *Exister avant de naître* (p. 113-152) convincingly contradicts the outdated view that pagans would not have cared about the foetus while still in the uterus and the idea of life as something to be protected *in utero* as an exclusively Christian one. Indeed, ancient doctors already applied numerical divisions to the development of the child in the womb. While Galen advocated dissections on bodies of exposed newborns, there also exists a rich tradition of prayers and expressions of concern for the child *in utero*: deities who took care of the different phases in the development of the foetus, ex votos of wombs containing little balls, and rattles consisting of little puppets are examples Dasen extensively elaborates on. Chapter 5 *Taches de naissance* (p. 153-177) is a wonderful contribution to the expanding field of the history of disabilities, as it deals with both the subject of congenital deformity and the physiognomical interpretation of bodily signs. Here, one reads fascinating stories on subjects as wide-ranging as the colour of eyes and the way this was understood, the consequences of sex during menstruation, impregnation by looking at objects or persons, alcohol and procreation/pregnancy, predicting deformities during pregnancy, the role of accidents, divine marks on the child's body, or how to find out beyond doubt who the father was. For the subject, Dasen should have made use of the rich monograph by C. G. Bien, *Erklärungen zur Entstehung von Mißbildungen im physiologischen und medizinischen Schrifttum der Antike* (Stuttgart, 1997). *Le regard des astrologues. Naître jumeaux : un destin ou deux ?* (p. 179-196) is again a fascinating account, dealing with topics including retrospective calculation of the conception by astrologists, superfetation and rumours or jokes about different fathers involved in the case of birth of multiples, differences between twins (both physical and psychological), apotelesmatic significance of certain days for the giving of birth. Again, Dasen touches upon a very wide scope, ranging from Egyptian Isis and Osiris up to nineteenth century poems on the numerological significance of days for giving birth. Chapter 7 *Mourir avant de naître* (p. 197-215) deals with the subject of the survival of the weakest, where Dasen traces examples of "monsters" who were allowed to live on. At the same time, funerals with special ceremonies for deceased fetuses existed. The case of the mummy of a deadborn anencephalous child in Egypt is interpreted by Dasen as a token of respect and special protection. The baby was not regarded as an extravagant monkey. Chapter 8 *Les Parques et le pouvoir des femmes* (p. 223-247) is on the well studied subject of female decision making during childbirth and the issue of maternal death during delivery. In line with most recent studies, Dasen makes a strong point for the profound impact of both midwives, mothers and other females in making sometimes difficult decisions in the first hours after delivery. Males, and surely fathers, were largely absent at these crucial moments, and the importance of paternal power or the gesture of lifting up the baby as a sign of acceptance has been largely and wrongly overestimated. Dasen also relativises the importance of the *dies lustricus* as the moment of social birth, but her account on this may be supported further by two of my recent publications (Chr. Laes, *Infants between Biological and Social Birth in Antiquity: A Phenomenon of the longue durée*, in *Historia* 63, 3 [2014] p. 364-383; Chr. Laes, *The Youngest Children in Latin*

*Epigraphy*, in M. Carroll, E-J. Graham (ed.), *Infant Health and Death in Roman Italy and Beyond* [Portsmouth, 2014] p. 131-144). The latter publication in any case predates Dasen's claims about the presence of very young infants on inscriptions. *Le monde des nourrices* (p. 249-279) is again an extensively studied subject, but here also Dasen manages to surprise her readers with case stories on family formation based on inscriptions, with remarks about the iconographical representation of breasts, and instances of very prolonged periods of breastfeeding. The Evil Eye and frustrated mythological mothers who became child killing demons are the subject of the tenth chapter, *Probaskania* (p. 281-318) in which the Evil Eye and all sorts of amulets and medals play a prominent role, ranging from *bullae* (also worn by girls) to medals with a lunar or phallic shape. The role of teeth in funerals of young children is elaborated on. The whole chapter is again illustrated with striking parallels from anthropology and folklore, as in the case of present-day Albania where mothers spit at young babies and wash them in dirty water, certainly when the child turns out to be particularly beautiful. As for the Mormones and other child-killing creatures, one would have expected references to the monograph by L. Cherubini, *Strix. La strega nella cultura romana* (Torino, 2010). The final chapter *Mors immatura* (p. 319-346) deals with puppets buried together with young girls who had never fulfilled the expectation of marriage and childbearing. More often than not, the dolls express the young adult mother the deceased had never been. Dasen of course does not deny that there were also dolls which were meant as toys, but such have hardly survived in the archaeological records. The chapter ends with a digression on the plaquette of the so-called Egyptian girl of Hawara. The way the young woman is represented reminds us of the figurines called Baubo, representing women with big breasts and swollen bellies – covered with amulets, their bodies point to pregnancy being imminent. The man depicted on the reverse side of the plaquette presumably was a doctor, as is clear from the instruments which are represented. Dasen concludes with an eloquent conclusion (p. 347-358), in which the vase of Pandora is used as a metaphor: a recipient in which hope is left as the final element, as was the case with pregnancies in Antiquity. The volume contains over one hundred illustrations, which are all represented in a most functional way and always carefully contextualised. A general index, next to an index of ancient authors and texts, a geographical index and an index of historical and mythological figures further adds to the value of the book, as does the very rich bibliography, which is rightly entitled as selective since for a subject as this completeness is hard to achieve (for that matter, I missed references to M. Lentano, "Noscere amoris iter": *l'iniziazione alla vita sessuale nella cultura romana*, in *Euphrosyne* 24 (1996) p. 271-282; B. Leyerle, *Appealing to Children*, in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5, 2 (1997) p. 243-270; W. Scheidel, *Roman Funerary Commemoration and the Age of First Marriage*, in *Classical Philology* 102 (2007) p. 389-402 – all of which have a lot to say on the female sphere as regards marriage, sexuality, and early childhood years). Though all chapters have been published elsewhere in a somewhat different form, the idea of bringing them together in a monograph was excellent. Dasen has produced a volume which will be both the standard work for the subject for years to come and a starting point for new comparative research on gender. In all, this is a great achievement, for which the scholarly world ought to be immensely grateful.

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