

Helen KING : **Galen and the widow. Towards a history of therapeutic masturbation in ancient gynaecology.**

This paper offers a close reading of the ancient Greek and Roman texts which Rachel Maines (*The Technology of Orgasm*, 1999) used as evidence for therapeutic masturbation in the ancient world, and thus presented as precursors for the vibrator. Examining the evidence of the Hippocratic corpus, Celsus, Soranus and Galen, it shows that the lines of transmission between the ancient sources, and in their later reception, are far more complex than her work suggests, and thus challenges her claims for the normality of massage to orgasm in Western medicine. While Maines herself has subsequently insisted that she proposed a 'hypothesis' rather than a 'fact', in the popular reception of her book this distinction has been almost entirely overlooked, leading to an obscuring of female agency – both as patients, and as healers.

Mots-clés :

Vibrator – desire – orgasm – hysteria – masturbation – massage – seed – midwives – translation