

Are Women as Smart as Men?

*Midwives and Medical Men in
Seventeenth-Century France*

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Engraving of Louise Bourgeois from a German edition of her birthing manual, 1644-52



Woodcut of women attending to a pregnant woman from German birthing manual, 1554



CONTEXT

❖ The Woman Question or the *Querelle des femmes*

- René Descartes (1596-1650)
- François Poulain de la Barre (1648-1723)

Scientific Revolution

- Hippocrates (450-370 BCE)
- Galen (129-200 CE)

LOUISE BOURGEOIS (1563-1636)

❖ Royal midwife to Queen Marie de Médicis beginning in 1600.

❖ Birthing manual:

Louise Bourgeois, *Diverse Observations on Sterility . . . deliveries, and illnesses of women & newly-born infants, treated and happily practiced by L. Bourgeois* (Written in French, 1609-1626).

❖ Manual was translated into several languages:

1619 - Latin; **1628** - German; **1658** – Dutch; **1659** – English

BOURGEOIS vs. PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

- ❖ 1627 - The Death of the Royal Princess Marie de Bourbon-Montpensier following childbirth (Wife of Gaston d'Orléans, King Louis XIII's brother)

- ❖ Publications:
 - ❖ Bourgeois, Louise (Boursier). *Apologia of Louise Bourgeois . . . Midwife to the Queen Mother of the King, & to the deceased Madame [Princess]. Contrary to the Report of the Physicians*. Paris: Chez Melchior Mondiere, 1627.

 - ❖ Guillemeau, Charles. *Remonstrance to Madame [Bourgeois] concerning her Apologia against the Report that the Physicians had made about what caused the deplorable death of the Madame [Princess]*. Paris: J. Jacquin, 1627.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LOUISE BOURGEOIS'S LIFE & WORKS

- ❖ Scientific Revolution
- ❖ The Woman Question and the Problem with Difference

Etching of a “Man-midwife” from English Birthing Manual, 1793-5?



Engraving of woman in labor being delivered by a surgeon from Dutch edition of Louise Bourgeois's Birthing Manual, 1701



Der Frauen

