

Book Review

The History of Cesarean Section

Author: Samuel Lurie (Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology, Edith Wolfson Medical Center, Holon, Tel Aviv University, Israel)

Professor Samuel Lurie, a member of the International Society for the History of Medicine and a regular contributor to this journal has performed a great service to his colleagues in compiling this short account of the history of cesarean section. As the author notes the procedure has intrigued mankind through recorded time and in many ways the history of this operation reflects the progress of medical practice through the ages.

Cesarean section has also been responsible for controversy in practice with the heated debate, from eighteenth century France to nineteenth century Britain, described in appropriate detail. Of course, in ancient times the operation almost invariably resulted in the death of the mother but of course these earlier societies were accustomed to a high perinatal and maternal mortality. However, some of conclusions in the book will elicit surprise, though one example must suffice in a short review. The writer claims that sections were performed on living women in the period of compiling the Jewish Talmud but leading authorities, including Julius Preuss, have concluded that such an operation never occurred.

The book is enhanced by numerous line drawings by Einav Lurie which illustrate the story from earliest times. While the text is brief and concise the references are extensive enabling the reader to make their own judgment on the history of the operation. Like many academic books today this one carries a very heavy price which will deter most individual readers but it is likely that the book will find its way to the shelves of many academic and university libraries where it will surely be consulted by those with an interest in a procedure which has attracted the attention of society from earliest times.

Review provided by Kenneth Collins