

## Frieze Frame

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This marble relief carving of a birth scene was created by an unknown sculptor some time between 400 and 300 BCE (Roman times). The plaque measures approximately 30 cm × 15 cm and was excavated in Ostia, Italy. It depicts a woman in an almost relaxed reclining pose, on a drape-covered plinth. She is attended by three contented women. Given the delivery practices of the time, it is likely that the woman has delivered the infant on a birthing chair and has been moved to a softer couch for aftercare. One of the birth attendants appears to be holding either the placenta or wadding cloths. Midwives of the time were female; male

physicians typically would not attend a birth, except in cases of difficult labour in high status women. The carving was likely created to ease the concerns of expectant mothers by depicting a positive image of childbirth, or it could have been a funerary plaque to commemorate the work of a particular midwife. Whatever its purpose, this frieze is a beautiful and—for the time—realistic view of a magical theme.

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Photo credit: Science Museum London [exact wording to come]