PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH, AND PRIMARY CARE-GIVERS IN ANCIENT ROME

PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH, AND PRIMARY CARE-GIVERS IN ANCIENT ROME

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the array of evidence concerning three crucial aspects of Roman maternity: pregnancy, childbirth, and primary care-givers. I explore how these elements of maternity are represented in the ancient sources and observe how the evidence corresponds to and diverges from the established impressions of these facets of maternity. I consider several issues surrounding the critical, initial moments of the life-cycle and how they are informed by biological factors, social structures, and cultural projections. Motherhood and childhood at Rome have garnered a great deal of interest, but issues of conception, gestation, childbirth, and early infant care have received much less attention. In this thesis they are considered together and thus in light of one another. The first chapter of this study surveys the social context of Roman maternity through an examination of the purpose of an extensive reproductive period, its associated problems, and the impact that such a practice had on Roman attitudes towards pregnancy and childbirth. The second and third chapters of this study are dedicated to an examination of the social and cultural identity of the two slaves who provided crucial functions throughout the pregnancy, delivery, and post-natal care of the Roman mother and child: the *obstetrix* (midwife) and the *nutrix* (wet-nurse). The final chapter shifts the focus from couples who sought to create a Roman family of their own to those who chose to limit the size of their families through contraception, abortion, infanticide, or infant exposure. I examine the attitudes towards these methods of family limitation and the critical role that parental intent had in the formation of these perceptions. By drawing on a range of ancient material, chief among which are medical writers, jurists, and funerary inscriptions, I argue that social status and demographic realities, such as high maternal and infant mortality rates, played equally significant roles in these central aspects of Roman maternity, and indeed influenced one another.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of abbreviations for journals and reference works. Abbreviations for ancient authors and their works follow those of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Abbreviations for journals follow the conventions used by *L'Année Philologique*; abbreviations for reference works are those commonly used by modern scholars.

1. Journals

AAAH	*Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*
ABSA	*The Annual of the British School at Athens*
AClass	*Acta Classica: verhandelinge van die Klassieke Vereniging van Suid-Afrika*
AJAH	*American Journal of Ancient History*
AJPh	*American Journal of Philology*
AncSoc	*Ancient Society*
CPh	*Classical Philology*
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
G&R	*Greece and Rome*
Historia	*Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*The Journal of Roman Studies*
Klio	*Klio: Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte*
MDAIR	*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*
P&P	*Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*
PCPhS	*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*
RHD	*Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis*

TAPhA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

2. Reference Works

AE	*L'Année Épigraphique*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
CLE	*Carmina Latina Epigraphica*
CMG	*Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*
ICUR	*Inscriptions Christianae Urbis Romae*
ILCV	*Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*
ILJug	*Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia*
IPOstie	*Inscriptions du Port d'Ostie*
OCD	*Oxford Classical Dictionary*
PIR^2	*Prosopographia Imperii Romani (second edition)*
P. Oxy.	*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*

INTRODUCTION

In Roman society, one of the primary goals of marriage was the creation of legitimately recognized children who served several important social functions: they were heirs to their parents' physical property, continued their family's *nomen* and *sacra* (household religious rites), fulfilled the obligation of supporting their parents when they approached advanced age, and ensured proper funerary commemoration upon the death of their parents. In addition to these positive, private motivations for rearing children, at the onset of imperial rule married couples were encouraged by the state to procreate through juridical means. The *Lex Iulia de Maritandis Ordinibus* of 18 BC and the *Lex Papia Poppaea* of AD 9 incentivized Roman couples with financial rewards and other social benefits that appealed to both women and men, as it provided honours to prolific women and offered advantages to men of the senatorial or equestrian order who were pursuing a political career. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Rome a woman's pregnancy, and the subsequent birth of her child, was an occasion of great importance that could have a significant impact on the parents' social and economic status.

To some extent, these social and economic advantages were the result of the negative consequences of a society with a high mortality regime. At Rome, where the average life expectancy at birth was approximately 20 to 30 years,[1] demographic realities affected members of all social and economic backgrounds, but two population groups, mothers and infants, were particularly vulnerable. Thus, demography played an influential role in the social structures of pregnancy and childbirth in a Roman context.

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[1] Hopkins 1966: 264; Parkin 1992: 84; Scheidel 2001: 24.

Modern demographic analyses, which employ both empirical and theoretical evidence, suggest that a Roman woman had a 17 in 1000 risk of death in childbirth, while approximately a third of newborns probably died under the age of one year, and half of all children in one birth cohort by the age of 10 years.[2] Although these calculations are estimates and only provide an impression, the extant evidence appears to suggest that frequent maternal and infant death were a reality for many. Juvenal, for example, laments the fate of poor women who were subject to the dangers of childbirth and the pains associated with nursing, while an epitaph that commemorates the 27-year-old Veturia praises her for her sixteen-year marriage, mourns that she died after six deliveries, and indicates that only one of her children survived.[3] A year after suffering a miscarriage, Julia, the daughter of Caesar and the wife of Pompey, died in childbirth in 54 BC, while the inscription erected for a slave named Candida states that she died during delivery, as she was unable to endure labour pains.[4] The personal motivations and state incentives caused motherhood and its associated advantages to be desirable, but there were also societal pressures and serious risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth in Rome.

Social status and cultural projections likewise contribute significantly to our understanding of Roman maternity. The two key facilitators of maternity in a Roman context were the midwife, who is referred to as the *obstetrix* in Latin, and the wet-nurse, or *nutrix*. These two individuals, who were both women and of either slave or freed status, had a significant impact on maternal and fetal health. The slave and freed status of these women caused them to be stigmatized, branded as morally inferior, and their low social status was a source of anxiety for the freeborn Roman family. Nevertheless, these women were entrusted with the care of the mother and her newborn. Moreover, enslaved women themselves also became pregnant. Whether she was part of a *contubernium*, an informal slave union with a fellow slave, or was used as a form of sexual release by her owner, the outcome of a slave woman's pregnancy was ultimately dictated by her social status. The Hippocratic account of a pregnant singer, for example, saw the slave girl induce an abortion because her mistress did not want her to depreciate in value.[5] For slaves involved in *contubernia,* the very existence of these informal marriages was subject to the discretion of the master and the resulting children, or *vernae*, were considered the property of the owner. Social status is a significant factor that underlines my discussion throughout this thesis.

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[2] Maternal mortality rates: Rawson 2003: 103-104; Laes 2011: 50. Infant mortality rates: Hopkins 1983: 225; Parkin 1992: 92; Bradley 2005: 69.

[3] Juv. *Sat*. 6.592-593; *CIL* III 3572.

[4] Plut. *Vit. Pomp*. 53; *CIL* III 2267.

The goal of this dissertation is to present the array of evidence concerning three crucial aspects of Roman maternity: pregnancy, childbirth, and primary care-givers. I explore how these elements of maternity are represented in the sources (for example, social attitudes towards them, ideal notions associated with them) and observe how the evidence corresponds to and diverges from the established impressions of these facets of maternity. I consider several issues surrounding the critical, initial moments of the life-cycle and how they are informed by biological factors, social structures, and cultural projections. I first examine the social and cultural context of maternity at Rome; next, I focus on the two major figures who facilitated maternity and emerge as dominant in this landscape, the *obstetrix* and the *nutrix*; lastly, by contrast, I consider the efforts that were made to purposefully thwart maternity. Motherhood and childhood at Rome have garnered a great deal of interest, but issues of conception, gestation, childbirth, and early infant care have received much less attention. In this dissertation they are considered together and thus in light of one another.

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[5] Hippoc. *Nat. puer*. 2.

Overview of Key Ancient Sources

Throughout this dissertation, I draw on a range of ancient material, chief among which are medical writers, jurists, and funerary inscriptions.

(i) Medical writers

Obstetrics, gynaecology, and paediatrics were of great interest to the medical writers of the Roman period and have a significant presence in their didactic treatises, texts in which physicians provided their clients with medical instruction. The *Gynaikeia* of Soranus of Ephesus is the most significant source that contributes to our understanding of Roman notions surrounding reproduction, maternal and infant care, and the key figures in this female sphere. Soranus, who was active at Rome during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, was a follower of the school of Methodic medicine.[6] The Methodic approach had its physicians treat the illnesses of their patients by investigating two 'commonalities', or qualities: excessive constriction and excessive fluidity. In this approach, the commonalities in a sick patient's body revealed themselves to the doctor and help guide him in his observations of the abnormal state toward the proper therapies that countered the abnormality and eventually cured the patient.[7]

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[6] The terms 'Methodist' and 'Methodic' are interchangeable, as are 'school' and 'sect'. The other two medical sects were the Empirics and the Rationalists (sometimes referred to as Dogmatics). The Rationalists are defined by their use of observation, reason, and speculation in making inferences about the body's health and disease. They were also concerned with the anatomical and physiological changes that are characteristic of particular diseases (what critics refer to as 'hidden causes'). Empirics, who were characterized by their skepticism, rejected speculation and the theorizing of the 'hidden causes', instead

The identity of the true founder of the Methodist sect is subject to debate; however, Asclepiades of Prusias in Bithynia, who practiced at Rome in the late 2nd century BC, is a distinct possibility. Soranus often refers to Asclepiades in his *Gynaikeia*, in both a positive and negative manner. It appears that the passive exercises, such as rocking and massaging, for which Asclepiades was an advocate, had a great influence on Soranus since he frequently prescribes these to his female patients. Thessalus of Tralles, who is often characterized as the supposed founder of the Method, allegedly informed Nero that he established a new school of medicine because other doctors did not offer anything that could help either preserve health or treat diseases. Themison of Laodicea is another important figure in the history of this sect, acting as a link between his teacher Asclepiades and Thessalus. Although it is difficult to determine with certainty who founded the Method, Soranus' work is our best source for the sect, and the references to his Methodic predecessors throughout his treatise suggests that the Method had a rich past that experienced significant periods of development.[8] What distinguishes Soranus from

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favouring trial and experience to treat their patients (Drabkin 1951: 504-505; Hanson and Green 1994: 994, fn. 99).

[7] Hanson and Green 1994: 989.

[8] Hanson and Green 1994: 991-992.

his fellow Methodic practitioners, however, is that before Soranus' *Gynaikeia*, there was no Methodic treatise on obstetrics and gynaecology.

The *Gynaikeia* itself is a practical manual of obstetrics and gynaecology. The treatise showcases how careful Soranus is in his explanation of terms and in his criticism of the methodologies of earlier physicians.[9] The work is divided into two parts: the first section is dedicated to the midwife herself and the second is dedicated to the broad subject of midwifery, or the 'things with which the midwife is faced'. The first book provides an image of the ideal midwife, and provides an overview of the necessary qualifications that a midwife ought to have as well as the qualities that the best midwives possess. The remaining three books are divided into matters of obstetrics and gynaecology that are in accordance with nature, *κατὰ φύσιν*, and those that are contrary to nature, *παρὰ φύσιν*. The topics range from a discussion of the female genitals and their function, to pregnancy and labour, infant care and the afflictions of children, to dystocia, or difficult pregnancy.[10] Soranus creates a distinction between his method and those of superstitious medical practitioners, whom he rebukes on several occasions.[11] Perhaps the most significant feature of the *Gynaikeia* is that throughout the work Soranus demonstrates a preoccupation with the welfare of his patients, with the health, comfort, and dignity of the parturient being his top priority. The best example of this concern is the physician's instruction to the midwife of ensuring that the mother's face is visible so that she, the midwife, can calm any anxiety and assure the parturient that there is nothing to fear and that childbirth will be easy.[12]

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[9] Hanson and Green 1994: 972-973.

[10] Temkin 1991: xxxvi-xxxviii; Hanson and Green 1994: 1025-1026.

[11] See, for example, Sor. *Gyn*. 2.11 ('How to sever the navel cord').

Although Soranus' *Gynaikeia* is the primary didactic treatise that has helped to shape our understanding of pregnancies, deliveries, and the women who administered care to the Roman mother and newborn, the efforts of other medical writers, chief among whom are Caelius Aurelianus and Galen, are also of great value. Caelius Aurelianus, a physician from Sicca Veneria in Africa Proconsularis, active in the late 4th or early 5th century AD, was a follower of the Methodic school of medicine and adapted as many as ten of Soranus' works into Latin; however, only his 'Acute Diseases', 'Chronic Diseases', and parts of his 'Genecia' and 'Medical Responses' survive.[13] Caelius Aurelianus' 'Genecia' is referred to as an adaptation of or a version of Soranus' *Gynaikeia*, rather than a Latin translation, because the physician modified a complete Greek text on obstetrics and gynaecology in order to suit his own purposes. His 'Genecia' adopted a more abridged, question-and-answer format, omitting much of the historical information and doxographic material that marks the *Gynaikeia*. Even though he made changes to the text and his medical opinions differ from those of Soranus on occasion, Caelius Aurelianus did not attenuate the Methodic principles of Soranus and his rejection of the methods of earlier physicians.[14]

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[12] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.5.

[13] Drabkin and Drabkin 1951: viii; Hanson and Green 1994: 1045-1046; Flemming 2000: 230. The other works are possibly, 'Causes', 'Fevers', 'Hygiene', 'Remedies', 'Drugs', 'Surgery', and 'Problems' (Hanson and Green: 1046).

Galen of Pergamum (AD 129 to ca. 216) was a prolific medical writer whose works include *De Sanitate Tuenda*, *On the Natural Faculties*, and *On Prognosis*, all of which address some facet of obstetrics, gynaecology, and paediatrics. Galen created an 'objective standard' of the ideal physician, who according to Galen, started his training in childhood, possessed a quick nature, an impressive attention span, studiousness, a longing for the truth, an ability to separate truth from fiction, and displayed his actual practice of this truth-seeking.[15] This ideology heavily influenced Galen, as this preoccupation with the perfect *ἰατϱός* (doctor) is demonstrated throughout his works and in his own training. Although he rejected the teachings of the Epicureans, the influence of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics are evident in his works,[16] and he frequently uses his own personal experiences to help illustrate and explain his methodologies. While he portrays himself as a rational and moral medical practitioner, Galen's works are characterized by his arrogance, self-promoting tendencies, tedious length, and attacks on his contemporaries and predecessors. Even Soranus is not immune to Galen's invective, as he rebukes Soranus for his sloppy language and use of highly technical Methodic language.[17] The ordeal of the wife of the ex-consul Flavius Boethus is a prime anecdote to demonstrate Galen's use of personal experiences in his writings.[18] After several attempts by her attending midwives, Flavius Boethus' wife, who suffered from female flux (possibly menorrhagia, or heavy menstrual bleeding), was treated by Galen, who scolded her nurses because they were screaming about and overreacting to her condition. Despite the criticisms of his works, it is nevertheless clear that women benefitted greatly from his practice.

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[14] Hanson and Green 1994: 975, 1050. Drabkin and Drabkin 1951 and Flemming 2000 also refer to the work of Caelius Aurelianus as a 'version' or 'adaptation' of Soranus' work.

[15] Flemming 2000: 256-257. 'Objective standard' is Flemming's phrasing.

[16] Brock 2006: xvii, xxv.

[17] Nutton 1972: 50, 55; Hanson and Green 1994: 969; Flemming 2000: 229, 255.

(ii) Legal sources

The second category of evidence that provides significant insight into the concept of Roman maternity are the works of the jurists, primarily the *Institutes* of Gaius and the *Digest* of Justinian, with social status and demographic issues being at the forefront. The *Institutes* of Gaius, which dates to approximately AD 160, is a systematic textbook for students, outlining and summarizing the laws as opposed to providing analytical commentary. The *Institutes* consists of four books; however, Book One is of particular interest to the study of Roman maternity, since it is concerned with the law of persons, outlining issues of status, manumission, *patria potestas*, and guardianship.[19] Gaius is concerned with the workings of Roman private law and neglects religious, criminal, and constitutional legal matters. The *Institutes* is considered the most important pre-Justinianic legal source because it is almost complete and, perhaps on account of its accessibility, it has maintained a presence in the post-classical world, as it has had an influence on the development of later legal systems in Europe.[20]

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[18] Gourevitch 1996: 2090-2092; Flemming 2000: 263; Gal. *Praen.* 8.1-21.

[19] Robinson 1997: 62-63; Du Plessis 2010: 48.

At the behest of the emperor Justinian, the four components of the body of civil law, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, were prepared during the 530s AD. The core component of this legal collection, which is also the most important source for Roman law, is the *Digest*,[21] a compilation of juristic writings created by Tribonian, the chief lawyer of Justinian, and an accompanying juridical committee. This group gathered together passages on a variety of subjects, selecting and occasionally editing the entries so that they provided recent information. The goal of Justinian and Tribonian was to create a collection of laws that were approved by the state, replacing the original texts, statutory laws, and edicts that they quoted. The compiling of all this legal material took approximately three years, and resulted in thousands of books, which were later edited down to fifty. Although the *Digest* is considered by scholars to be a failure, since it was too complex, far too large, and historical in nature, it is nevertheless an invaluable document as it provides an enormous mass of legal material for which there are citations to previous sources, thanks to the diligence of the editors.[22]

The entries that comprise the *Digest* are quotations of edicts and rescripts as well as the works of earlier jurists. Edicts, which usually pertained to general legislation and were broad in scope, were issued by Emperors and high-ranking magistrates;[23] rescripts, were responses from an Emperor to enquiries or petitions that were addressed to him.[24] For the purpose of this study, the praetorian edict of most interest was issued by the urban praetor Valerius Priscianus, who was concerned with maternity, specifically inheritance and legitimacy. His edict, which was issued during the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (AD 161-169), involved the examination of pregnant women and the observation of delivery: it was delivered as a rescript in response to a husband who insisted that his ex-wife was pregnant, although she denied it.[25] In addition, the jurists provide insight into the social status of *obstetrices* and *nutrices*, including their cost, punishments for malpractice, and the circumstances surrounding their potential early manumission.

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[20] Robinson 1997: 62-63; Riggsby 2010: 38; Du Plessis 2010: 48.

[21] Riggsby 2010: 39. The other parts of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* are the Institutes of Justinian, the Code, and the Novels of Justinian (Robinson 1997: 61-62).

[22] Riggsby 2010: 39-40; Du Plessis 2010: 55-56.

(iii) Funerary inscriptions

The third significant category of evidence that contributes to our understanding of Roman ideals surrounding motherhood, childbirth, and the figures who were entrusted with the welfare of mothers and infants is epigraphic, specifically funerary inscriptions. The benefits and limitations of inscriptions are discussed at length throughout the dissertation; however, several issues deserve attention at the outset of this study.[26] Perhaps the most significant problem with utilizing funerary epigraphy is the issue of representation: the inscriptions were set up by those who could afford it. Moreover, the majority of epigraphic evidence was found in Latin-speaking urban centres of the empire.[27] As for the inscriptions that commemorate enslaved midwives and wet-nurses, there are several problems of interpretation, such as the difficulty in discerning the social status of some of these women and the relatively small sample size. It is important to acknowledge that the information that is gleaned from these epigraphic collections cannot necessarily be applied to all areas of the Roman empire.[28] Nevertheless, funerary inscriptions are a useful source for understanding attitudes toward Roman maternity. In addition to shedding light on Roman marriage and the circumstances surrounding maternal death, inscriptions are useful for understanding aspects of the lives of midwives and wet-nurses, including their relationships and family, as well as how they themselves viewed their occupation.

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[23] Robinson 1997: 34; Du Plessis 2010: 41. As for the validity of edicts, those issued by magistrates were enforced during their time in office, and those enacted by an Emperor continued to remain valid, even after death, unless they were repealed.

[24] Robinson 1997: 36; Kapparis 2002: 183; Du Plessis 2010: 42-43. There were two types of rescripts: *epistulae*, which were replies to officials who had enquired about their rights and responsibilities, and *subscriptiones*, which were responses to questions from private citizens.

[25] *Dig*. 25.4.1 (Ulpian).

Literature Review

Issues surrounding maternity arose out of Roman family studies, which emerged along with the much broader study of Roman social history in the 20th century. Beginning in 1965, Keith Hopkins' seminal study of contraception in the Roman Empire was the first to explore an important facet of maternity by utilizing the works of Roman medical writers to understand the social issues associated with contraception. The field expanded further in the 1980s and 1990s with Suzanne Dixon's book on Roman motherhood in 1988 and with the work of Keith Bradley, who investigated several aspects of the relationship between the figure of the *nutrix* and social status.[29] At the same time, Beryl Rawson began the tradition of publishing the papers from the Roman family conferences, in which the contributors surveyed various subjects relating to social status, demography, and the family.[30] In her work of the 1980s, Danielle Gourevitch discussed the technical aspects of conception, pregnancy, contraception and abortion, as well as the dangers of the delivery process and the death of women in labour.[31] In more recent years, Rebecca Flemming has made an important contribution to the study of Roman women and medicine by considering the role of women in medical discourse, both as practitioners and patients, and how their place in Roman society was affected by this.[32]

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[26] See, for example, in Chapter 1, the discussions of age at first marriage – the epigraphic debate (pp. 38-41) and epitaphs commemorating young mothers (pp. 51-63); in Chapter 2, consult the discussion of the inscriptions of midwives (pp. 118-126); lastly, in Chapter 3, see the section on the family life of *nutrices* (pp. 167-174).

[27] Scheidel 2007: 401 and 2012: 107.

[28] Bradley 1986: 202.

The construct of Roman maternity is a field that continues to unfold.[33] The discipline is evolving and welcoming new methodologies, as the recent work of Maureen Carroll has shown. By adopting the approach established by life cycle studies, Carroll's book on infancy and earliest childhood in the Roman world uses social history and archaeological evidence to explore the age group of infants who were under the age of one.[34] This is a rich scholarly tradition on which I am drawing, but it is a developing one. The evidence presented by ancient medical writers, legal sources, and funerary inscriptions can still be mined and reveal important new information about maternity.

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[29] Bradley 1980, 1986, 1991a, 1994a.

[30] Rawson 1986 and 1992; Rawson and Weaver 1999.

[31] Gourevitch 1984 and 1987.

[32] Flemming 2000.

[33] E.g., French 1987; Dasen 2004; Laes 2010; Hackworth Petersen and Salzman-Mitchell 2012; Carroll and Graham 2014.

Dissertation Structure

Four aspects of child-bearing in the Roman era form the core of this thesis. First, I consider the social context of Roman maternity, with a special concentration on the relationship between the age at menarche, the average age at first marriage for Roman girls, and the consequences of childbirth at a young age. Next, I study the significant relationship between slavery and Roman maternity by looking at the role of the *obstetrix* and the *nutrix* in a Roman woman's pregnancy, the delivery process, and the care of the mother and neonate. Lastly, I direct my attention to unwanted pregnancies, and to abortifacients and contraception, as well as the normative social practices of infant exposure and infanticide.

(i) The Social Context of Roman Maternity

Chapter 1 of this study surveys the social context of Roman maternity through an examination of the purpose of an extensive reproductive period, its associated problems, and the impact that such a practice had on Roman attitudes towards pregnancy and childbirth. At Rome, a girl's first menstrual period, which occurred approximately at 14 years old, signified that she was prepared for marriage and childbearing, and, according to Roman law, girls were permitted to marry at 12. Furthermore, the epigraphic analyses demonstrate that freeborn Roman girls typically experienced their first marriage in their mid to late teens or early twenties, with some marrying much earlier. The goal of this custom was two-fold, as it sought to create a substantial fertile period and also to exercise some form of control over the sexuality of young Roman women. Such a custom helped to allay the male anxiety surrounding female sexuality and ensured the production of legitimately recognize heirs. However, this had consequences for the reproductive health of the young Roman woman which could put her life and that of her child at serious risk. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of the ramifications of childbirth in general, the challenges that maternal physical and emotional underdevelopment presented to pregnancy and childbirth, as well as other pressures and conditions that were brought to bear on women in their childbearing years. In addition, I discuss the demographic reality of neonatal and infant mortality in a Roman context, since children who were in this stage of the life course were subject to in utero afflictions, the trauma of childbirth, and the dangerous period of early infancy.

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[34] Carroll 2018.

(ii) The Role of the Obstetrix *in Roman Childbirth*

The second and third chapters of this study are dedicated to the two slaves who provided crucial functions throughout the pregnancy, delivery, and post-natal care of the Roman mother and child: the *obstetrix* and the *nutrix*. Chapter 2 analyzes the social identity of the *obstetrix*, beginning with an overview of her responsibilities during the pregnancy, labour, and delivery process. Using primarily the medical treatises of Galen, Soranus, and Caelius Aurelianus, I explore how *obstetrices* helped to preserve feminine modesty and aid the would-be mother in her pre-natal regimen, as well as in the post-natal care of both mother and infant. The most important task that the *obstetrix* had was determining the viability of the newborn, a significant judgement that had an impact on the freeborn family unit. The remainder of the chapter explores the mixed and often contradictory attitudes toward women who were *obstetrices*. On the one hand, the extant legal, historical, and medical sources reveal how a midwife's low social status, combined with her authority over the life of a mother and her newborn, was a cause of anxiety for the freeborn Roman population. *Obstetrices* are characterized as dishonourable and greedy women who were easily bribed and corruptible. Moreover, midwives would conspire with deceitful mothers who sought to deprive their husbands of legitimate children. On the other hand, these same sources contribute to an image of a dignified *obstetrix*. In addition to the personality and physical traits that Soranus outlines as ideal for an *obstetrix*, these women were highly trained, had a high monetary worth (if enslaved), and were trusted members of the *familia* who typically had a close relationship with their *dominae*. In the final section of this chapter, I use the epigraphic dossier that was compiled by Christian Laes in 2010 to study the funerary inscriptions of midwives, focussing primarily on how some of these women achieved familial stability and had a sense of pride in their work.

(iii) The Role of the Nutrix *in Roman Post-Natal Care and Early Childhood Development*

Once the *obstetrix* had fulfilled her duties, the *nutrix* became a central figure in the life of the mother and her newborn. In Chapter 3, I examine the social and cultural identity of the *nutrix*, focussing specifically on the factors surrounding their use in the Roman household, which includes aesthetic concerns, status distinctions, and demographically influenced psychological dynamics. I provide an overview of the duties of the wet-nurse, in which I discuss the relative neutrality that ancient physicians had towards these women, how a household selected a *nutrix*, their responsibilities, how they were to be supervised in their tasks, and how wet-nurses were used as treatments for infant ailments. The second half of this chapter is concerned with the relationships of the *nutrix*, specifically the bond that the wet-nurse had with her nursling and those who had a family of their own. Although *nutrices* are considered to have been a regular fixture in the Roman household, some literary sources rebuke women who use wet-nurses. Tacitus and Fronto, for example, claim that the affectionate relationship that developed between a *nutrix* and her charge could damage the natural parent-child bond, while Juvenal launches an invective against wealthy women who chose to use *nutrices* instead of nursing their children themselves. Other sources such as Pliny the Younger, the jurists, and funerary evidence, however, reveal how, despite the silence on the part of *nutrices*, the affective bond might have had a positive influence on the nursling and might have benefitted the *nutrix*. Lastly, through employing the seminal studies of Keith Bradley and Sandra Joshel, I examine the funerary inscriptions that commemorate and were set up by *nutrices*. This category of evidence demonstrates how some *nutrices* managed to have familial relations that extended beyond the confines of the bond with her nursling.

(iv) Unwanted Pregnancies at Rome

The final chapter of my dissertation shifts the focus from couples who sought to create a Roman family of their own to those who chose to limit the size of their families through contraception, abortives, infanticide, or infant exposure. I examine the attitudes towards these methods of family limitation and the critical role that parental intent had in the formation of these perceptions. *Patria potestas*, the ultimate authority of the Roman *paterfamilias* that came into effect at the birth of a child, protected fathers who decided to exercise control over the size of their families. When *patresfamilias* made the choice to utilize their *potestas* in this respect, it was viewed as a responsible action and women whose welfare was at risk because of pregnancy and enslaved women who could not raise a child in addition to enduring their own enslavement were met with a similar response. The sources, such as Soranus and Juvenal, however, reproach freeborn women who resorted to contraception and abortion for the purpose of maintaining their appearance or concealing adultery. These methods afforded women a degree of autonomy which enabled them to control the birth of illegitimate children, as well as allowing them to deviate from the social norm of becoming a mother. The male anxiety that is closely associated with family limitation appears to have been felt not just within the household, with husbands who feared that their wives deprived them of heirs, but it was also very much a concern of the state, since in such cases Rome was denied citizens. Infanticide and infant exposure were the options available for parents whose babies had been brought to term but were unlikely to survive. These two methods lacked the social stigma associated with abortion because the baby had been born and undergone a physical examination. More importantly, however, the decision was made when newborn was still in a liminal position within the family and it was a choice that was an important part of a father's *potestas*.

The impact that social structures, cultural projections, and demographic realities had on pregnancy, childbirth, and primary care-givers at Rome will become evident through my examination of the social context, the influential roles that enslaved *obstetrices* and *nutrices* had in the pregnancy and care of the mother and newborn, and the social consequences of unwanted pregnancies.

CHAPTER 1

The Social Context of Roman Maternity

Introduction

In Rome a woman's pregnancy, and the subsequent birth of a child, was an occasion of great importance that had a significant impact on the parents' social and economic status. Maternity offered both freeborn and freed couples many advantages: first and foremost, it enabled them to create a family unit, the fundamental social institution throughout the Republic and Empire. Through the creation of legitimately recognized children, referred to in Roman law as *iusti filii*, parents were able to facilitate the control of family property as well as ensure the continuation of their family's *nomen*. Moreover, the children, it was assumed, would fulfill the social obligation of supporting their parents when they approached advanced age and would ensure proper funerary commemoration upon their parents' death.

In addition to the stability that the Roman family provided to married couples, maternity was further encouraged at the onset of imperial rule through the Augustan legislation on marriage and the family, the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* of 18 BC and the *lex Papia Poppaea* of AD 9.[35] These new laws introduced the *ius trium liberorum*, which granted rewards to freeborn couples who had three children and to freedmen who had four children. By means of the *ius trium liberorum*, free women were released from

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[35] The primary regulations introduced under the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *lex Papia Poppaea* are outlined in *Dig*. 23.2.19 (Marcian), 44 (Paul), 45 (Ulpian), 46 (Gaius).

tutela mulierum perpetua, or life-long guardianship, and freedwomen from the guardianship of their patrons and their descendants.[36]

There were certainly incentives that helped to encourage maternity in a Roman context; however, it is also evident that there were societal pressures that were brought to bear on women to marry and reproduce, as well as serious risks associated with childbirth. The age at first marriage for Roman girls and the age at which menarche occurred had a significant impact on the outcome of a woman's pregnancy. Amundsen and Diers suggest that the average age at which menarche occurred for Roman girls was thirteen to fourteen years of age, while the minimum legal age of marriage for girls was twelve.[37] The actual age of girls at first marriage has been at the centre of a debate among scholars of demography, but the suggested ages range from pre-puberty to the late teens and early twenties.[38] The rather close relationship between these three elements suggests that there was a conscious effort to create a substantial time span for reproduction before menopause or death could occur. While a rather young age range at first marriage might have been considered beneficial, it was not without its problems. It is possible that at the time of marriage, the girl might not have been completely physically and mentally mature, which posed serious risks for both her and the child during pregnancy and delivery.

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[36] Gai. *Inst*. 1.145; 1.194; *Tit. Ulp*. 11.28a; 11.29. In addition, a wife improved her position with respect to matters of inheritance, as she was allowed to inherit 10 percent of the estate from her husband. Prior to this change, the *lex Voconia* of 169 BC stated that a wife could only be a legatee, and that prevented her from receiving more than the heir (*Tit. Ulp*. 15.1-4; Treggiari 1991: 69-70).

[37] Hopkins 1965: 313; *Cod. Iust*. 5.4.24 (age minimum for legitimate marriage); Amundsen and Diers 1969: 127; Diers 1974: 932 (age of menarche).

[38] Hopkins 1965: 326; Saller 1997: 32; Shaw: 1987: 43; Lelis *et al*. 2003: 14.

In this chapter I will survey the social context of Roman maternity by exploring the goal of an extensive reproductive period, its associated problems, and the impact that such a goal had on Roman attitudes towards maternity. I will begin by analysing the sources concerned with the age of menarche and attitudes towards female puberty, and then discuss the Roman age at first marriage. I will then consider the potential consequences of these factors on pregnancy and childbirth, as well as examine the reaction towards these complications in epitaphs that commemorate young women who died in childbirth. Since these consequences affected not just mothers but also their children, I will end this chapter with a discussion of neonatal and infant mortality.

The Age of Menarche and Attitudes towards Female Puberty

The period of adolescence is marked by sexual maturation, with menarche occurring in girls at approximately 12.8 years of age in modern, developed societies (such as the United States and western Europe). Prior to the commencement of the menstrual cycle, other changes occur in the female body, the very first being the appearance of the breast bud (thelarche) and pubic hair, both the results of the secretion of estrogen and C-19 steroid respectively. In addition, an adolescent girl experiences an increase in body fat and osseous (bone) maturation in the time leading up to her first period. Although it has been determined that the increase in the frequency of the gonadotropin releasing hormone, commonly abbreviated to GnRH, in the hypothalamus region of the brain is the primary cause of menarche, the age at which menstruation begins still varies greatly from person to person.[39] Recent studies suggest that the low age ranges of menarche in the developed world have been attributed to numerous factors, such as socio-economic circumstances and improvements in nutrition and general health, while conditions such as malnutrition, urban residence, obesity, and the number of children in the family can either advance or delay menarche.[40]

There are no major physiological differences worthy of note between Roman and modern women, and the ancient sources suggest that it was commonly thought that boys and girls reached puberty at different ages in the Roman era, with girls beginning to show signs of physical maturation approximately two years before boys.[41] Perhaps our best source for these precise ages are the jurists, who are concerned with the minimum ages at which Romans were able to make a will. Ulpian, for example, explicitly states that the age at puberty is fourteen years for males while for girls it is twelve. These ages are confirmed by Macrobius, who, in his discussion of the innate warmth of women, states that the twelfth year marks puberty in the case of women and the fourteenth in the case of a man.[42]

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[39] Lassek and Gaulin 2007: 1147. Lassek and Gaulin (1149-1150) argue that the timing of menarche is related to a higher proportion of lower body fat (as opposed to overall body fat levels).

[40] Ferin, Jewelewicz, and Warren 1993: 78-86. For a more in-depth description of the physiological changes that occur during puberty for females, consult Ferin, Jewelewicz, and Warren 1993, Chapter 7: ‘The First Menstrual Cycle: Adolescence and Puberty’.

[41] Treggiari 1991: 40. For a comprehensive analysis of the process of male puberty in the Roman period, consult Eyben 1972; Fraschetti 1997.

[42] *Dig*. 28.6.2.pr. (Ulpian): ‘moribus introductum est, ut quis liberis impuberibus testamentum facere possit, donec masculi ad quattuordecim annos perueniant, feminae ad duodecim’; Macrob. *Sat*. 7.7.6. See also *Dig*. 28.1.5 (Ulpian); *Cod. Theod*. 2.17.1a.

As for the average age of menarche, most ancient medical writers accept that fourteen was the approximate age at which menstruation began in most girls. Soranus of Ephesus, whose *Gynaikeia* was the prominent text on gynaecology and obstetrics in the early 2nd century AD, observed that menarche typically occurred around the time of puberty, noting specifically that it coincides with the time when the breasts start to appear, around age fourteen. Rufus of Ephesus, a contemporary of Soranus, and the Greek physician Galen also suggested fourteen as the average age.[43]

It is important to acknowledge that the sources emphasize the fact that they provide only an approximation, which demonstrates an awareness of the contemporary reality that the age of menarche varied and that it was difficult for them to identify a specific age at which it occurred. Soranus in particular stresses throughout his discussion entitled ‘On the catharsis of the menses’ (‘Περὶ ἐμμήνων καθάρσεως’) that girls and women differed greatly in this respect. He notes, ‘for each woman it occurs at a stated time characteristic for her and it does not <seize> all women at the same <period>’.[44] This acceptance of variation appears to have continued into late antiquity. For example, Caelius Aurelianus, the Latin translator of Soranus’ *Gynaikeia* who was probably active in the 5th century AD, acknowledges that menstruation often begins at fourteen, but he is careful to mention that it can occur earlier for some and later for others.[45] While ancient doctors were able to provide an approximate age range of menarche, they were willing to accept the fact that the precise age could differ from woman to woman.

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[43] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.20; Ruf. ap. Orib. *Coll. Med. lib. inc*. 18.24; Gal. *San. tuenda* 6.2.16.

[44] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.21: ‘Τοῦτο δὲ ἑκάστῃ κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν ἀπαντᾷ προθεσμίαν, καὶ οὐ <πάντως> κατὰ τὰς αὐτὰς <περιόδους>, ὥσπερ ὁ Διοκλῆς <νομίζει>, πάσαις, καὶ πάλιν Ἐμπεδοκλῆ, ἐλαττουμένου τοῦ φωτὸς τῆς σελήνης’ (trans. Temkin 1991). See also Sor. *Gyn*. 1.24.

[45] Cael. Aurel. *Gyn*. 1.24.

The medical writers typically approach the subjects of female puberty and menarche with a degree of indifference, as they are chiefly concerned with the health of women who are potential mothers. Moreover, these authors, like the vast majority of ancient sources, represent a specific group of the Roman population, that is, the wealthy elite. Although the writers are primarily concerned with women from this specific group, their work nevertheless reveals what were likely common attitudes towards not only menarche and puberty, but also towards the girls who experienced them. Furthermore, these texts can also provide insight into the social significance of menarche and female maturation as a whole.

Adolescence was a crucial period for Roman youths in terms of social status and identity. Boys who were not in *patria potestas* (i.e., those without a living father, grandfather, or great grandfather, or those who had been legally emancipated) and survived to the age of fourteen were no longer burdened by the conditions of *tutela impuberis* (the legal guardianship of children below the age of puberty) and became legally independent persons.[46] In addition, their entrance into adulthood was celebrated by their donning of the *toga virilis*, the toga of manhood, which served as an official sign of their status as freeborn Roman citizens.[47]

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[46] Macrob. *In. Somn.* 1.6.71; Gardner 1986: 14; Gardner and Wiedemann 1991: 5; Rawson 2003: 74.

[47] For a detailed analysis of the *toga virilis* and a reconstruction of its associated ceremony, consult Dolansky 2008.

As for Roman girls who were going through puberty, the impression that emerges from the literary sources is rather mixed. In her brief discussion of whether puberty was a joyous occasion for girls and their families, Gourevitch suggests that the Romans assigned both positive and negative aspects to it, categorising the process as 'un petit drame pour la fillette'.[48] Menstruation was viewed as an uncomfortable part of a woman's life, as the symptoms associated with it were deemed unpleasant. Soranus observes that it is difficult for most women to move around, since their loins are sluggish and in pain, as well they are often exhausted and their limbs are tense. He also acknowledges that some young women experience severe stomach aches, a lack of appetite, and nausea.[49] Rufus describes the process as being 'necessarily very painful', due to the veins dilating and the need for the blood to create a path leading out of the body. He also discusses ailments associated with first menstruation that are similar to those described by Soranus, namely stomach pain, headaches, fevers, and dizziness.[50]

There is an important dimension to puberty that adolescent girls experience in addition to the physical changes: an awakening sexuality. A young woman's sexuality seems to have been a cause of concern for the Romans and so it is addressed among the ancient physicians. According to Soranus, girls develop an interest in sexual relations as soon as puberty begins; however, those who have not received a proper upbringing and are uneducated are more inclined to 'premature desires' and so their appetites are not to be trusted.[51] Rufus presents a similar observation: the weight gain that occurs during puberty causes the girl to become interested in sexual relations and also triggers her maternal instincts and her desire to reproduce.[52] This attitude suggests that the sexual behaviour of some Roman girls required control and that the only appropriate place for a freeborn Roman woman to have sexual relations was within the confines of a legitimately recognized marriage. It was crucial that her virginity remain intact for when she entered into her first marriage, as it was deemed a valuable asset that had a significant impact on whether she was viewed as an appropriate option for a spouse and thus might affect her marriageability.[53]

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[48] Gourevitch 1984: 81, 86.

[49] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.24.

[50] Caldwell 2015: 84; Ruf. ap. Orib. *Coll. Med. lib. inc.* 18.25; 18.26-27.

A young Roman bride was expected to have kept her virginity intact throughout her girlhood, as it served as a sign of her *pudicitia* (chastity), which was the most valued virtue associated with the ideal Roman *matrona*. The importance of virginity and *pudicitia* in a new bride is stressed throughout the literary sources. For example, the moralist Musonius Rufus counts a woman's *pudicitia* and self-control among the first of the ideal traits for a potential bride.[54] Pliny the Younger also alludes to the attractiveness of virginity in his recommendation of Minicius Acilianus as a husband for one of his friend's daughters. He claims that Acilianus' wealth, military achievements, good looks, and 'senatorial bearing' ought to be awarded to a girl who was able to maintain her virginity.[55]

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[51] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.33.

[52] Caldwell 2015: 84-85; Ruf. ap. Orib. *Coll. Med. lib. inc*. 18.2.

[53] Harlow and Laurence 2002: 57.

[54] Treggiari 1991:103; Muson. 3.

Perhaps the embodiment of the ideal, chaste maiden is the young Minicia Marcella, who succumbed to a *mors immatura* at the age of 13 just before her imminent marriage to a worthy suitor.[56] In his letter to Aefulanus Marcellinus, Pliny mentions that Marcella, who was the beloved daughter of their mutual friend Fundanus, was not only a pleasant young maiden who was affectionate towards her father, nurses, and pedagogues, but also that she preferred to spend the majority of her time reading as opposed to playing. What is of particular interest in this letter, however, is that Marcella is portrayed as the perfect combination of the wise *matrona* and youthful girl. Pliny observes that she had the wisdom and dignity of an old woman, while maintaining her girlish sweetness and virginal modesty.[57] Although Marcella's intelligence and kind demeanour evidently contributed to her marriageability (and also to Pliny's high opinion of her), her *virginalis verecundia* demonstrates that Marcella was able to maintain her virginity, as well as her *pudicitia*, throughout her youth, which made her an ideal bride.

Furthermore, virginity and chastity were regarded as such significant endowments, that they could have, in some cases, been viewed as a compensation for an insubstantial dowry. Livy provides an excellent example of this in his account of Spurius

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[55] Caldwell 2015: 126-127; Plin. *Ep*. 1.14.8.

[56] Plin. *Ep*. 5.16. Marcella's epitaph (*CIL* VI 16631: *D(is) M(anibus) | Miniciae | Marcellae | Fundani f(iliae) | v(ixit) a(nnos) XII m(enses) XI d(ies) VII*) states that her age at death was 12 years, 11 months, and 7 days. For a detailed discussion of this discrepancy between Pliny's account and her funerary inscription, consult Bodel 1995.

[57] Plin. *Ep*. 5.16.

Ligustinus' appeal before the consuls, which was part of his request for promotion in the military. In the beginning of his speech, the centurion mentions that he was married to his cousin, who was unable to afford an adequate dowry. Despite her poverty, Ligustinus' new bride was still a good match for him, as she brought her free birth and *pudicitia* to the marriage, which Ligustinus considered a suitable replacement.[58]

In a Roman context menarche signified that a girl was prepared for marriage, and so the young women who were approaching that age and experiencing menstruation for the first time were protected by Juno Lucina, the goddess of childbirth, and her step-daughter Mena, who presides over menstrual flow.[59] While Mena is described as a divinity 'without renown', or *ignobilis*, she is paired with a province of Juno that is directly related to menarche. Assigning such goddesses to this aspect of puberty suggests that menarche was considered a significant rite of passage for Roman girls that occurred before marriage and, ultimately, childbirth.

The onset of puberty was also considered advantageous to the health of Roman girls. In Rome, childhood was considered an anxious and perilous period for parents due to high infant and child mortality rates. The medical writers of the Roman period acknowledge the fact that infants and children were prone to specific conditions. In his *De Medicina*, Celsus observes that children are more likely to suffer from certain ailments, such as tonsil infections, spinal curvatures, and neck swellings. Likewise,

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[58] Treggiari 1991: 106; Livy 42.34.

[59] Gourevitch 1984: 81; August. *De civ. D.* 7.2.

Soranus addresses childhood afflictions, including inflammation of the tonsils and respiratory issues, and provides non-invasive remedies.[60] It is clear that the medical writers and doctors recognized that the childhood years before puberty were dangerous, in medical terms, and that there were conditions that were specifically associated with prepubescent children.

Puberty, and more specifically, the beginning of menstruation, were considered beneficial to the health of the Roman girl, as they supposedly had healing properties. For example, Pliny the Elder notes in his discussion of the nature of illnesses that the fever associated with quartan malaria usually disappeared in women once they reached puberty.[61] Celsus also acknowledges that certain sicknesses associated with childhood tended to disappear with the onset of puberty. In what has been classified by Mudry as a catalogue on paediatrics, he mentions that the periods of childhood that are particularly dangerous can be categorized as follows: around the fortieth day, in the seventh month, during the seventh year, and after puberty. While he stresses that there are some conditions associated with puberty (namely chronic fevers and nose bleeds), he observes that the conditions which are considered 'puerile affections' (*morbi pueriles*) come to an end at either the time of puberty, first sexual intercourse, or menarche.[62]

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[60] Celsus, *Med.* 2.1; Sor. *Gyn.* 2.50-57.

[61] Sallares 2002: 132; Plin. *HN* 7.50.170.

[62] Celsus, *Med.* 2.1. For a discussion on the classification of Celsus' writings as paediatrics, consult Mudry 2004.

In addition, the commencement of puberty and menarche supposedly had an effect on neurological disorders, specifically epilepsy. While medical writers suggest that epilepsy, referred to as *comitialis*, is more common in men and can persist throughout their life, they assert that the condition is removed in women once menstruation begins.[63] Menarche and puberty had a special role in the health of Roman girls, as it ultimately served as a sign that the anxious period of childhood had passed and that the young woman was prepared to enter into what was considered the most important stage of her life: marriage and motherhood.

Roman Age at First Marriage

(i) Legal age at first marriage

According to Roman law, girls were permitted to marry at the age of 12 and boys at the age of 14. Many scholars have dated these age minimums to the beginning of imperial rule.[64] The primary source of this date range is a *Digest* entry by Ulpian, which outlines what legally constitutes betrothal. He mentions that the judgment of Julian concerning the subject follows the views of M. Antistius Labeo, a jurist who worked under Augustus, and that Papinian concurs:

> 'Julian was asked if a marriage contracted while the girl was under twelve years old constitutes a betrothal. I have always approved of the view taken by Labeo here, that if a betrothal took place before the marriage, it continued to exist, even though the girl had begun to live at his house as a wife; but if there was no betrothal beforehand, the fact

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[63] Celsus, *Med*. 3.23.

[64] Durry 1955: 85; Hopkins 1965: 313 (fn. 22); Watson 1967: 39; Treggiari 1991: 41; Lelis *et al*. 2003: 21.

> that she had been brought to his house is not held to constitute a betrothal. Papinian agrees with this view.'[65]

As for whether there were such age restrictions during the Republic, it appears that this aspect of marriage remained a private concern rather than a public one. Syme argues that, during the Republic, girls who were members of elite families likely married between the ages of 12 and 15, and that any marriages which occurred when the girl was over the age of 16 were considered unusual.[66]

Hopkins suggests that these ages were probably not part of specific marriage legislation, but rather fell under the legal opinion of the jurists. He states that, while the age is mentioned within the context of the *lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea* in Dio 54.16.7, it appears to him that the legislation was more concerned with the maximum length of betrothal, as opposed to the legal age minimums at marriage.[67] By contrast, Treggiari argues that the appearance of the age of 12 in Dio can perhaps help us to date the legal minimum age at marriage to AD 9. Shaw presents a similar suggestion, stating that the ages were set as legal barriers for the legislation.[68] The juridical evidence indicates that the ages of 12 and 14 were used to distinguish the minimum age of marriage in Rome into the late antique period.[69]

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[65] *Dig*. 23.1.9 (Ulpian): 'Quaesitum est apud Iulianum, an sponsalia sint, ante duodecimum annum si fuerint nuptiae collatae. Et semper Labeonis sententiam probavi existimantis, si quidem praecesserint sponsalia, durare ea, quamvis in domo loco nuptae esse coeperit: si vero non praecesserint, hoc ipso quod in domum deducta est non videri sponsalia facta. Quam sententiam Papinianus quoque probat' (trans. Watson 1985).

[66] Syme 1987: 318, 327.

[67] Hopkins 1965: 313; Cass. Dio. 54.16.7.

[68] Shaw 1987: 42; Treggiari 1991: 41.

It seems that the average age at which a Roman girl began to show signs of physical maturation had an impact on what was considered an appropriate age at marriage. Since it was accepted that girls reached puberty approximately two years before boys did, it was logical to the Romans to assume that they were prepared for marriage much earlier. As was mentioned above, Macrobius, who associates procreation with heat, claims that, since women are naturally warmer than men, they are ready to reproduce at around the age of 12. This was also the accepted reality among the jurists, who claim that girls matured faster than boys.[70] Therefore, it is not surprising that the Romans thought that girls were able to marry at such a young age.

Moreover, the view that virginity was an important asset for potential brides might have been a contributing factor to the low legal age at marriage for girls. In his comparison between the customs of the Spartans and the Romans, Plutarch observes that the Romans are inclined to marry their maidens when they were 12-years-old, or even younger, so that they would have both pure bodies and characters when they entered into the house of their husbands.[71] It is certainly logical to classify the Romans' ideal of what Hopkins terms the 'unformed character and an untouched body' as a primary motivating factor for why this was the recommended age.[72] This perhaps coincides with the observations of Soranus, mentioned above, which outline the Roman view that girls developed sexual desires at the onset of puberty, and so a low marriage age would help alleviate their supposed lack of control.

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[69] *Cod. Iust.* 5.4.24 (AD 530); Hopkins 1965: 313.

[70] Macrob. *Sat.* 7.7.6; *In Somn.* 1.71; *Dig.* 28.1.5 (Ulpian).

[71] Plut. *Comp. Lyc. Num.* 4: 'τῶν δὲ Ῥωμαίων δωδεκαετεῖς καὶ νεωτέρας ἐκδιδόντων οὕτω γὰρ ἄν μάλιστα καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὸ ἦθος καθαρὸν καὶ ἄθικτον ἐπὶ τῷ γαμοῦντι γίνεσθαι'.

Valerius Maximus, writing during the reign of Tiberius, expresses a similar sentiment. In his description of the ancient institutions of Rome, he mentions that women who enjoyed a single marriage were honoured with a crown of chastity, the *corona pudicitiae*. In the belief that the mind of a married woman could not be corrupted if 'it knew not how to leave the bed on which she had surrendered her virginity, believing that trial of many marriages was as it were the sign of a legalized incontinence'.[73] Evidently, the chaste bride was the ideal marriage candidate, as she was undefiled before entering into her marriage and so she remained loyal to her husband for the duration of their union. In addition to the Roman thought that girls were able to procreate before boys, it is likely that the desire to preserve virginity until marriage was another reason for a low legal age at marriage for girls.

In addition to the accepted notions that girls were capable of reproducing before boys and the Roman ideal of the chaste bride, the desire to create a substantial period for women to bear children and to achieve high reproduction rates were contributing factors to a low legal marriage age. Demographers often assign an average life expectancy at birth of 25 years to the Roman population ($e_0 = 25$), which is the calculation provided by the Coale-Demeny Model Life Table Level 3 West.[74] By accepting this estimation, Parkin concludes that a gross reproduction rate of over 2.5 is needed in order to maintain a stationary population; specifically, women needed to have 2.5 daughters, or five children. When this same population with an $e_0 = 25$ has a gross reproduction rate of 2, or four children, Parkin states that the population experiences a decline of about one percent every year.[75]

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[72] Hopkins 1965: 314-315; Brunt 1971: 137; Treggiari 1991: 40.

[73] Val. Max. 2.1.3: '…existimabant enim eum praecipue matronae sincera fide incorruptum esse animum qui depositae virginitatis cubile (in publicum) egredi nesciret, multorum matrimoniorum experientiam quasi legitimate cuiusdam intemperantiae signum esse credentes' (trans. Shackleton Bailey 2000 [Loeb]).

In a more recent study, Lelis, Percy, and Verstraete have determined that the women who survived to the peak reproductive age range of 15 to 45 had to each have over five live births in order to maintain a steady population with an $e_0 = 25$. If these women managed to have six live births, then there would be a growth rate of approximately 0.5 percent per year.[76] If we are to accept these calculations, then it is indeed plausible that one of the functions of a low legal marriage age was to attempt to make a high fertility rate possible among the freeborn Roman population. By contrast, Caldwell, using the data from the Egyptian census records compiled by Bagnall and Frier, states that women had to produce 5.87 children, on average, in order to maintain a steady population. In addition, she argues that this burden was actually spread out over a large portion of the female population, since almost all Roman women would have been married by age 30 at the latest, thus alleviating the pressure on individual women to reproduce.[77] While Caldwell's proposed demographic scenario is possible, her observations do not diminish the argument that a low legal marriage age was desirable in order to create a significant time period for reproduction.

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[74] Hopkins 1983: 72; Saller 1997: 23. For a more critical view of the use of model life tables, see Scheidel 2001. While there are issues with generalization (most notably, variations in time and space), as Scheidel indicates, it is important to acknowledge that the purpose of these tables is to provide a demographic impression of the Roman population, rather than actually to reflect reality.

[75] Parkin 1992: 111. This annual decline would result in a significant drop in the birth rate from 40 per 1000 to 30.

[76] Lelis *et al*. 2003: 23-25.

There is also extant evidence which demonstrates that some marriages occurred before the bride was twelve years old. Perhaps the best example of this indiscretion comes from the imperial family: Octavia, the daughter of Claudius and Messalina, married Nero when she was 11 and he was 16.[78] It is noteworthy that the historical writers who provide an account of the marriage, namely Tacitus and Suetonius, make no mention of how old Octavia was when she got married. Nero's age, on the other hand, seems to be worth mentioning, as it is listed as 16.[79] The authors' interest is clearly focused more on the emperor and the political strategy behind his marriage, as opposed to the welfare of the young Octavia. After the emperor Claudius adopted Nero in AD 50, Octavia was betrothed to Nero a year later, at the insistence of Agrippina the Younger. According to Tacitus, the purpose of this early marriage was to strengthen Nero's relationship with the emperor by being not only his stepson, but also his son-in-law, which helped to ensure his position as Claudius' successor over Britannicus, the emperor's biological son by Messalina.[80]

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[77] Caldwell 2015: 6-7; Bagnall and Frier 1994.

[78] Lelis *et al*. 2003: 62-63, 123-124; Tac. *Ann*. 12.58. Octavia was born in AD 42 and married in AD 53.

[79] Tac. *Ann*. 12.58; Suet. *Ner*. 7.

Underage marriage is also addressed in the legal sources, which suggests that it occurred not only in the imperial family, but also among the free population. Concerning these early unions, the jurist Pomponius states that a girl who marries before she turns 12 will not be considered a lawful wife until she reaches that age. However, the same *Digest* entry emphasizes that the underage girl in question would turn 12 while she is living with her husband. In addition, Ulpian, citing Julian, is of the opinion that an underage girl who is living with her husband is considered engaged, and not married, until she turns 12.[81] Hopkins states that this marriage law did not severely punish those who acted against it, but it did place certain limitations on the union; most notably, the legal advantages associated with marriage did not come into effect until the girl came of age.[82]

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[80] Smith 1963: 141-142; Tac. *Ann*. 12.3, 9.

[81] *Dig*. 23.2.4 (Pomponius): 'Minorem annis duodecim nuptam tun legitimam uxorem fore, cum apud uirem explesset duodecim annos'; *Dig*. 24.1.32.27 (Ulpian): 'et Iulianus tractat hanc quaestionem in minore duodecim annis, si in domum quasi mariti inmatura sit deducta: ait enim hanc sponsam esse, etsi uxor non sit.'

[82] Hopkins 1965: 313-314. For an in-depth discussion of underage marriage and cohabitation, see Caldwell 2015: 107-116.

(ii) Age at first marriage – the epigraphic debate

Age at first marriage	**Number of Women from Historical Sources**
11	1
12	4
13	5
14	6
15	6
16	2
17	2
20	1
24	1

Table 1. 1: Age of Roman girls at first marriage, historical sources (adapted from Lelis *et al*. 2003: 122).

While one of the goals of the low legal marriage age in Rome was to encourage an extended period of childbearing for women, it is evident that not all girls married at the age of twelve. By consulting the historical sources, which focus on women of the imperial family and those from wealthy, elite families, a total of 28 women are mentioned whose age at first marriage can be determined with some degree of certainty. While the youngest woman mentioned in the sources married at the age of 11 (Octavia to Nero) and the oldest was 24 at her first marriage (Julia to Pompey), the majority of women seem to have married between the ages of 12 and 15. This information reflects marriage customs from as early as 164 BC, beginning with the marriage of Sempronia to Scipio Aemilianus, to AD 422, Licinia Eudoxia's marriage to Valentinian III.[83] Although this information provides some insight into the social practices of members of the elite as well as members of the imperial family, it is clear that these women represent a small portion of the Roman population. On account of the relative paucity of information from this category of evidence (in comparison to the information concerning the first marriages of Roman men) and also due to the small population that it represents, it is useful to examine epigraphic evidence, primarily funerary inscriptions commemorating Roman women.

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[83] For detailed information on the age at first marriage of Roman girls from historical sources (including a more detailed breakdown of individual examples), consult Lelis *et al*. 2003, Appendix II: First Marriages of Roman Women, pp. 121-125.

Interest in the average age at first marriage began with the work of Harkness, who suggested that Roman girls married, on average, at the age of 18, and Friedländer, who estimated that marriage occurred between the ages of 13 and 17.[84] The debate reemerged in 1965, when Hopkins provided a reinterpretation of the epigraphic information used by Harkness in his early study of 171 inscriptions from the available *CIL* volumes. By examining these inscriptions, which provided the age at death and the length of the marriage, Hopkins determined that the modal age (the number occurring most frequently in a sample) of first marriage for Roman girls was between 12 and 15 and that the average age was approximately 15.5.[85] In their reexamination of the epigraphic evidence, Lelis, Percy, and Verstraete present a similar suggestion: they argue that overall Roman girls first married at some point between pre-puberty and the mid-teens, with the modal age range for females falling between 12 and 16. As well, they observed that girls who married later than 17 were considered unusual cases.[86]

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[84] Harkness 1896: 50-51; Friedländer 1964: 273 (this is the ninth and tenth edition of the *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms*, which was originally published between 1919-1921). See also Bang 1964: 134-137, who argues that the average age was 14.

[85] Hopkins 1965: 319-320.

[86] Lelis *et al*. 2003: 14.

Acknowledging the importance of the relationship between the age of girls at first marriage and the opportunity for legitimate fertility, Saller and Shaw contributed a new perspective to the debate. Their work was concerned with the age at death and the deceased's relationship with the commemorator, namely whether the dedicator was the individual's parents or spouse. While Saller's study focused on the age of men at marriage, Shaw's article explored the ages of women.[87] He sought to determine at what age parents ceased to be the commemorators of girls and when husbands took over the task of being principal dedicators. By exploring the epigraphic evidence in this manner, Shaw was able to increase the amount of data and thus provide a better sense of marriage trends from throughout the empire, rather than just the elite from the city of Rome.[88] Both Shaw and Saller concluded that the decline in the commemorations of daughters by parents coincides with the increase in those by husbands for their wives and that this trend appears to occur in the late teens. Therefore, the modal range at first marriage for girls in Rome and the western empire was, generally, in the late teens to early twenties.[89]

Although Scheidel hesitantly agreed with the hypothesis that Roman women married in their late teens, he highlighted some of the key issues that arise from the use of epigraphic evidence to determine the age of Roman girls at first marriage. He noted, for example, that most of the inscriptions that were examined by Hopkins, Saller, and Shaw came from households of means that desired, and could afford, commemoration. Immigrants and persons who were considered 'outsiders', who delayed marriage due to economic factors, were perhaps less inclined to pay for funerary commemoration. As well, Scheidel observed that the majority of the epigraphic evidence originates from urban centres, and so only the Latin-speaking parts of the empire are represented in the data.[90]

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[87] For men's age at marriage using this method, consult Saller 1987.

[88] For a full analysis of the epigraphic evidence from Rome, Italy, and the western provinces, see Shaw 1987:36-41.

[89] Shaw 1987: 37, 39; Saller 1997: 27.

While Scheidel's caveats are valid and should be borne in mind, the findings of Hopkins, Saller, and Shaw nevertheless do provide significant insight into Roman marriage practices and allow us to imagine the reality faced by many Roman girls: a marriage that began either during their mid to late teens or early twenties. Shortly after the Roman girl underwent the transition from being a maiden to a wife at a relatively young age, she then had to fulfill her ultimate role of becoming a mother, as well as become subject to the consequences that were associated with it.

The Consequences of Childbirth

While it was an accepted notion among the Romans that girls were capable of reproducing at the age of twelve, the fertile period for women most likely began around fifteen years of age and extended to the beginning of menopause (around the age of 44, on average), resulting in a fertile period of approximately 29 years. It is important to note that a late age at marriage decreases a woman's ability to reproduce, but an early legal marriage age does not necessarily increase her fecundity.[91] In reality, the relatively early age at marriage, and the expectation that motherhood would soon follow, brought about concerns for the reproductive health of the young Roman woman which had the potential to put both her life and that of her child at serious risk.

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[90] Scheidel 2007: 401 and 2012: 107.

Physicians who practised during the Roman period acknowledged that there were severe ramifications associated with childbirths that occurred at a young age. Although Soranus suggests that the age of menarche (around 14 years) is the appropriate time for a girl to be married and begin having intercourse, the physician notes that there are certain dangers that can arise if conception occurs in young women. In the section of the *Gynaikeia* entitled, 'Up to what time females should be kept virgins' ('Μέχρι τίνος τὸ θῆλυ παρθενοτροφητέον'), Soranus presents two key concerns that could prove detrimental to both the parturient and the fetus, both of which appear to address the issue of underdeveloped reproductive organs.

The first problem that might arise is conception in an underdeveloped uterus. According to Soranus, if this were to happen, the embryo is at risk of severe pressure being placed on it as it develops, often resulting in its destruction. Moreover, it is possible that the embryo would atrophy, since an immature uterus is incapable of providing essential nourishment to the fetus. Soranus explains this, in detail:

> '<For> danger arises when the injected seed is conceived while the uterus is still small in size. The embryo, in consequence, is subject to pressure after its enlargement and will therefore either be entirely destroyed or lose its characteristics…Thus it also happens that some embryos atrophy because the uterus has not yet been entwined with big vessels but only

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[91] Parkin 1992: 123-125.

> with small ones incapable of conducting sufficient blood to nourish the fetus.'[92]

The second hindrance to a safe childbirth mentioned by Soranus is that the cervix, referred to as 'ὁ τράχηλος τῆς ὑστέρας', is not fully developed and so it is far too narrow. While the uterus might be able to sustain the fetus throughout the gestation period, parturition could be dangerous since the baby would not be able to pass through the birth canal safely. The physician warns that 'the seed is formed and perfected into an organism in the roomy cavity of the uterus, but in parturition cannot easily pass through the narrow neck and brings about great trouble and danger.'[93]

These circumstances would have likely resulted in the baby being delivered via an embryotomy, which was a surgical procedure that involved the dismemberment of the fetus.[94] There is osteological evidence which shows that this procedure was indeed an unfortunate reality for some young Roman mothers. The remains of a full term neonate (PC 1414) from the Cemetery of Poundbury Camp near the Roman town of Durnovaria (Dorchester) reveal cut marks, which are well-defined and appear to have been made by a sharp instrument, on several bones as well as broken limbs.[95] Due to the fact that the remains are well preserved, Molleson and Cox determined that the neonate was notably large, with an estimated size of 54-56 cm. These factors suggest that the parturient was unable to give birth to a large fetus and so, as a last resort, the baby had to be extracted through the embryotomy.[96] It is clear that such a procedure resulted in the death of the baby and had the potential to cause fatal hemorrhaging and other complications for the mother.

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[92] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.33: 'Κίνδυνος δὲ τὸ καταβληθὲν σπέρμα συλληφθῆναι μικρομεγέθους ἒτι τῆς μήτρας ὑπαρχούσης καὶ διὰ τοῦτο θλιβησομένου μετὰ τὴν ὄγκωσιν τοῦ ἐμβρύου καὶ οὕτως ἤτοι φθαρησομένου παντελῶς ἢ τοὺς χαρακτῆρας ἀπολέσοντος... Συμβαίνει δὲ οὕτως καὶ ἀτροφεῖν ἔνια τῷ μήπω τὴν ὑστέραν μεγάλοις ἀγγείοις καταπεπλέχθαι, λεπτοῖς δὲ καὶ οὐχ ἱκανοῖς τοσοῦτον αἷμα παρακομίζειν ὅσον ἱκανόν ἐστιν τὸ κατὰ γαστρὸς διαθρέψαι' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[93] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.33: 'Οὕτως οὖν ἐν εὐρυχώρῳ μὲν τῷ κύτει τῆς ὑστέρας τὸ σπέρμα διαπλασθὲν καὶ τελειωθὲν εἲς ζῷον, διὰ στενοῦ δὲ τοῦ τραχήλου κατὰ τὴν ἀπότεξιν οὐκ εὐμαρῶς διελθεῖν δυνάμενον μεγάλας ὀχλήσεις καὶ κινδύνους ἐπιφέρει' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[94] For detailed information on the embryotomy procedure, consult Gourevitch 2004; Sor. *Gyn*. 4.3.9-13.

On account of similar demographic circumstances, including substandard medical care and early marriage patterns, an analysis of information on adolescent childbearing from the modern developing world can help provide a more complete picture of the dangerous relationship between female underdevelopment and childbirth in a Roman context. The conditions that are highlighted by Soranus are reminiscent of a condition that causes obstructed labour among adolescents who give birth in the developing world: cephalopelvic disproportion. Cephalopelvic disproportion is a significant problem for a woman whose pelvis has yet to reach full adult size, as the parturient has to deliver a full-term fetus through an underdeveloped birth canal. The bone growth that is essential for the birth canal to function properly is incomplete, which results in a more difficult delivery, causing prolonged labour; it also increases the risk of obstetric fistula, a hole that develops between the bladder and the vagina after birth. As for the frequency of these cases, in Niger, for example, 80% of the parturients who endure these conditions are between the ages of 15 and 19. Furthermore, Senderowitz notes that young women within this age range who give birth are subject to higher maternal mortality rates than older women.[97] While the conditions of the developing world are not completely identical to those at ancient Rome, the information on cephalopelvic disproportion and related demographic statistics can help us understand the realities of high maternal mortality among young Roman mothers.

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[95] Redfern 2010: 462. Redfern provides a drawing of the skeleton that indicates the locations of the cut marks; see page 462, figure 15.

[96] Molleson and Cox 1988: 53-56; Farwell and Molleson 1993: 152.

Another bone condition that likely caused obstructed labour was a flattened pelvic shape due to prolonged effects from childhood rickets, a Vitamin D deficiency. Since rickets is predominantly a result of the lack of exposure to sunlight, it is possible that the tendency to confine neonates to the indoors, in conjunction with the Roman practice of swaddling, increased the likelihood of developing this condition. Garnsey suggests that malnutrition was also a potential contributing factor, as an inadequate diet that consisted primarily of high-extraction, phytate-rich flour-based cereals ultimately hindered the body from absorbing beneficial minerals.[98]

Rickets was not exclusive to one socio-economic group, but it does appear that this type of vitamin deficiency was prevalent in larger cities, like Rome, as opposed to small rural towns.[99] Although Soranus seems to have recognized the symptoms associated with rickets, the physician did not consider it a specific ailment and he did not understand the cause of it: Soranus attributed the condition to the cold waters that flowed beneath the city (which resulted in bodily chill), women who have frequent sexual intercourse, and women who are not 'fully acquainted with child rearing'.[100] Furthermore, rickets had a significant impact on the pelvic girdle: the softened bones that were under pressure from the weight of the upper body and which were subject to the frontal pull of muscles, in addition to inactivity, would have likely resulted in a flattened pelvis.[101] This suggests that Roman women who suffered from rickets as children would have been more likely to have had to endure an obstructed labour, which would have increased the risk of both maternal and infant mortality.

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[97] Senderowitz 1995: 17; Mensch, Bruce, and Greene 1998: 43.

[98] Garnsey 1999: 48; Stone 2009: 46. For a discussion on the purpose of the Roman practice of swaddling infants, see Chapter 2: The Role of the *Obstetrix* in Roman Childbirth, p. 102.

[99] Garnsey 1999: 53; Sor. *Gyn*. 2.44.

While medical texts shed light on the complications associated with childbirth among young Roman women, epistolary evidence, from writers such as Cicero and Pliny the Younger, reveal the emotional impact that such difficulties had on the families that experienced them. Although there was the need to adhere to literary conventions, these letters provide valuable insight into a more tragic and personal aspect of maternity. In a letter to Atticus, for example, Cicero mentions that, despite her confinement and delivery in 49 BC being successful, his daughter Tullia's son, Lentulus, sadly proved to be very weak (*perimbecillum*). Cicero's grandson was born prematurely during the seventh month of pregnancy (*ἑπταμηνιαῖον*) which was the primary cause of his unfortunate state. It is likely that the child did not survive for very long, perhaps no more than a month. Tullia was also not immune to the perils of childbirth, as she died after giving birth to her second son in 45 BC.[102]

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[100] Garnsey 1999: 47; Sor. *Gyn.* 2.43-44.

[101] Stone 2009: 46.

The Helvidiae sisters, whose deaths are lamented by Pliny in a letter to his friend Velius Cerealis, furnish another prime example of women whose lives were cut short by pregnancy. Both of the daughters of the younger Helvidius Priscus, a long-deceased friend of Pliny, gave birth to baby girls and died as a result from complications that arose during their respective labours.[103] Throughout this correspondence, Pliny emphasizes that one of the reasons that their deaths were so tragic is their youth, describing their fate as 'tristem et acerbum' and lamenting that they were girls of noble lineage who were in the prime of their youth, which was cut short by their 'fruitfulness' (*fecunditas*).[104] As well, he regrets that their daughters have been left motherless and that their (unnamed) husbands are now without wives. However, according to Pliny, the most tragic part of their deaths is that the continuation of Helvidius' family line and his *nomen* are in jeopardy, and now rest solely on his remaining son.[105] Concerning this aspect of the letter, Carlon rightly argues that Pliny has identified the son of Helvidius, 'by the importance of his survival to the preservation of the family and the hope that he will be like his forebears'. Pliny is evidently apprehensive about the future of his dear friend's family and thus it is appropriate for him to grieve the loss of the Helvidiae and yet express his hopes for their brother.[106] These letters provide a glimpse into a more personal reaction to the complications that arose during pregnancy and delivery.

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[102] Cic. *Att*. 10.18; Carroll 2014: 162-163.

[103] Carlon 2009: 49; Plin. *Ep*. 4.21: 'Utraque a partu, utraque filiam enixa decessit'.

[104] Plin. *Ep*. 4.21: '…puellas honestissimas in flore primo fecunditas abstulit'.

[105] Plin. *Ep*. 4.21.

In addition to capturing the tragedy that is often associated with complicated pregnancies during the Roman period, Pliny provides insight into a significant aspect that is neglected by the medical writers concerning the relationship between maternity and young women: the impact that emotional immaturity can have on a pregnancy. The young woman who best demonstrates this is Pliny's young wife Calpurnia, who married Pliny when she was about 15 or 16 years old.[107] There are two letters in his collection of *Epistulae* which announce Calpurnia's unexpected miscarriage, that reveal the impact that it has had on her, and comment on the primary cause of the event: the first is addressed to her grandfather, Calpurnius Fabatus, and the second to her aunt, Calpurnia Hispulla. The feelings of disappointment at the loss of an heir, a sentiment present in the Helvediae example, are apparent; however, due to the fact that Calpurnia survived the ordeal, the miscarriage is taken more as a rather unfortunate sign of her fertility than a tragedy.[108] Furthermore, Pliny states that Calpurnia is recuperating successfully from the miscarriage, and that, despite narrowly escaping her dangerous ordeal, she is almost back to her regular self.[109] Although there is sadness and evident trauma, this ultimately helps to restore a sense of hope and also serves as a glimpse into the emotional toll that these complications took on Pliny and his family.

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[106] Carlon 2009: 51-52.

[107] Carlon 2009: 161.

[108] Plin. *Ep*. 8.10 (addressed to Calpurnius Fabatus).

[109] Plin. *Ep*. 8.11 (addressed to Calpurnia Hispulla).

What is particularly striking about these letters, however, is that they reveal the cause of Calpurnia's miscarriage: she was unaware that she was pregnant. In the letter to her grandfather Pliny emphasizes that Calpurnia failed to realize that she was pregnant and so carried on in a manner unfit for a pregnant woman. However, she has now paid for her mistakes by not only losing the baby, but also by risking her own life:

> 'I know how anxious you are for us to give you a great-grandchild, so you will be all the more sorry to hear that your granddaughter has had a miscarriage. Being young and inexperienced she did not realize she was pregnant, failed to take proper precautions, and did several things which were better left undone. She has had a severe lesson, and paid for her mistake by seriously endangering her life.'[110]

While Pliny's comments seem harsh, as they appear to place the blame solely on Calpurnia, the real issue is her youth and inexperience. In what can be considered the more compassionate letter to her aunt, Pliny stresses that the miscarriage was not Calpurnia's fault, but was rather due to her youth: 'The danger was indeed grave – I hope I may safely say so now – through no fault of her own, but perhaps of her youth. Hence, her miscarriage, a sad proof of unsuspected pregnancy.'[111] It appears that the young wife did not recognize the signs of pregnancy because of her inexperience. The example of

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[110] Plin. *Ep.* 8.10: 'Quo magis cupis ex nobis pronepotes videre, hoc tristior audies neptem tuam abortum fecisse, dum se praegnantem esse puellariter nescit, ac per hoc quaedam custodienda praegnantibus omittit, facit omittenda. Quem errorem magnis documentis expiavit, in summum periculum adducta' (trans. Radice 1969 [Loeb]).

[111] Plin. *Ep.* 8.11: 'Fuit alioqui in summo discrimine (impune dixisse liceat), fuit nulla sua culpa, aetatis aliqua. Inde abortus et ignorati uteri triste experimentum' (trans. Radice 1969 [Loeb]).

Calpurnia demonstrates how a young girl from an elite household, with resources and presumably concerned relatives who engaged in preparing her for marriage, was not educated about pregnancy.

Calpurnia's ordeal poses several questions. Since childbearing was the core purpose of Roman marriage, Calpurnia's apparent ignorance suggests that information about intercourse and pregnancy was not always conveyed to young brides. Ostensibly, the girls' mothers, other female relatives, and even slaves in the household *familia* who had borne children were fully capable of informing the brides of what to expect, in obviously non-technical terms, when they became pregnant. Pliny the Younger himself, a wealthy, intellectual, well-connected member of the senatorial order,[112] with all of the advantages that such a socio-economic status entailed, was likewise probably unaware of the intricacies of her condition. Girls from the lower social strata, on the other hand, possibly had a different experience. Children who were reared in a close-quarter environment, such as the notoriously crowded *insulae* of Rome, likely shared living spaces with other families and it is possible that their social relations mirrored the shared physical setting in which they lived. On account of their close physical proximity, these children were influenced by a variety of parental figures beyond their immediate kin connections.[113] Such circumstances might have resulted in these lower status girls having access to different resources, and by, extension, more information about sexual relations, pregnancy, and childbirth. The extant didactic medical texts certainly do discuss the signs of conception, how to handle labour and carry out a delivery, and how to face a problematic delivery; however, they do not provide instruction on how to discuss these crucial matters to young women and they neglect the profound impact that emotional immaturity can have on a pregnancy. The case of Calpurnia reveals the general state of ignorance about such matters among the elite and possibly among the general population. This is not necessarily a question of formal education, or even of actual knowledge, rather it is about a set of empirical observations, beliefs, and customs that made up the body of accepted wisdom concerning sex, pregnancy, and childbirth.

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[112] Carlon 2009: 5. Pliny the Younger was born into the equestrian order, but he was elevated to senatorial rank as a part of the state's attempt at increasing the senatorial population in the late first century AD (Pliny became a member of the Senate under Domitian).

[113] Bradley 1991b: 92-95.

Epitaphs Commemorating Young Mothers

Funerary epigraphy, especially the epitaphs that commemorate mothers who died in childbirth, is a valuable category of evidence that can help scholars understand the attitudes towards maternity and the strong societal pressure to bear children that was placed on Roman women. While the cause of death (e.g., old age) is not usually mentioned in funerary inscriptions, dramatic or extraordinary circumstances are sometimes highlighted, and women who died in childbirth are often included in this category. As Pikhaus notes, epitaphs that commemorate maternal death often contain the theme of ‘the loss of life to give birth to a new life’, which originated in Greek literary epigrams.[114] These epitaphs, which come from across the Empire, demonstrate great variety in their composition, and, more importantly, they represent women from a variety of social strata, which reveals that maternal death was not exclusive to any one socio-economic group.

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[114] Pikhaus 1988: 312.

A prime example of a commemoration to a young wife and mother who died in childbirth is a simple white marble funerary altar base that is decorated with a pyramid-shaped top and which comes from Ancyra (modern Ankara, Turkey).[115] Although there is some damage to the altar, as the pediment mouldings have been cut away, the inscription is rather well preserved and reads as follows:

D(is) · M(anibus) · (sa)c(rum)	Sacred to the spirits of the dead.
Aeturniae · Zotic(a)e	Aeturnia Zotica.
Annius · Flavianus	Annius Flavianus,
dec(urialis) · lictor · Fufid(i)	decurialis lictor of Fufidius
Pollionis · leg(ati) · Gal(atiae)	Pollio, legate of Galatia,
coniugi · b(ene) m(erenti) · vixit	to his well deserving wife. She lived
ann(is) · XV · mens(ibus) · V ·	to 15 years, 5 months,
dieb(us) · XVIII · quae	and 18 days. She died 16 days after
partu · primo post ·	her first child birth,
diem · XVI · relicto	with her son having been left
filio · decessit	behind.

The first epigraphic element featured in this inscription is the Latin invocation, *Dis Manibus sacrum*, which addresses the one 'sacred to the spirits of the dead', who in this particular case is a young woman named Aeturnia Zotica, perhaps a local girl from Ancyra. The next item that is given prominence is the name of the dedicator of the epitaph, Annius Flavianus, as well as his impressive occupation as the *decurialis lictor* of

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[115] *CIL* III 6759. Mitchell and French (2012: 198) date the inscription to shortly before AD 165, as L. Fufidius Pollio (*PIR*^{2} F 505) served as consul in AD 166 and should have been legate of Galatia immediately before this, sometime around AD 163-166.

L. Fufidius Pollio, the legate of Galatia.[116] It is clear that Flavianus wanted to communicate his family's noteworthy status by mentioning his high-ranking position. Although the couple's impressive social status is displayed in a rather conspicuous manner, Zotica remains at the forefront. She is identified as the wife of Flavianus and she is assigned the common epithet *bene merens*, or well-deserving.

While these elements help us to understand the link between the deceased and the dedicator, lines seven to eleven of this inscription are of most interest to my study. In keeping with epigraphic conventions, it is noted that she lived 15 years, five months, and 18 days. The fact that the details of her age are displayed at all on her epitaph conveys to the viewer that Zotica suffered a premature death, or *mors immatura*. However, more details are provided that help the viewer understand her tragic circumstances. The inscription reveals that Zotica died 16 days after she gave birth for the first time (*partu primo*) to her only son. The technical cause of her death is not outlined here, but her young age and the fact that this was the result of her first delivery raises the possibility that she suffered from complications that arose during her confinement and delivery due to her physical inability to deliver a child safely on account of her young age. We cannot determine with certainty the age at which Zotica married Flavianus, but it is likely that, since this was her first delivery, her marriage occurred shortly beforehand, perhaps around the age of 13 or 14. Zotica fulfilled her role as a Roman wife and was able to provide her husband with a legitimate heir, but she herself succumbed to the dangers of childbirth at a young age.

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[116] A *decurialis lictor* was an attendant who carried the *fasces* for *imperium*-bearing magistrates.

An inscription on a small, well-preserved marble *stele* dating to the 3rd century AD that commemorates a young mother from Ricina, a Roman town in central Italy, serves as a good illustration of a girl who married at a young age and bore children successfully until her death.[117] Her epitaph provides the following information:

D(is) M(anibus)	To the spirits of the dead.
Herennia L(ucii) f(ilia) Cervilla	Herennia Cervilla, daughter of Lucius,
uxor vixi annis XVIII et	a wife, I lived 18 years and
diem tricesimum	30 days.
liberis tribus relictis	With three children having been left
vita(m) finivi dolens	behind, I finished my life in pain.
co(n)iux karus ut memoriae	My beloved husband, while living, set
posuit hoc vivos mihi	this up as a memorial to me, so that such
ut prodesset in suppre	a monument would benefit my funeral
mis talem titulum	rites.
consequi C(aius) Carrenas	C. Carrenas Verecundus (set this up) for
Verecundus coniugi	his incomparable and well deserving
incomparabili b(ene) m(erenti)	wife.

Once more, the *Dis Manibus* invocation helps us to identify the deceased as a certain Herennia Cervilla, who was a freeborn woman, as is indicated by the presence of filiation in her nomenclature. Her marital status is also clearly displayed, as the word *uxor* appears in the third line of the inscription beneath her name. Her husband's name, C. Carrenas Verecundus, is not revealed until the conclusion of the inscription, where Cervilla is assigned a couple affectionate, albeit entirely conventional, epithets: she is described as an incomparable wife (*coniugi incomparabili*) and as well deserving of commemoration. It is possible that her role as a wife is mentioned twice because Verecundus wanted to highlight the affectionate relationship that he had with his wife. The importance of their loving bond is emphasized even further by the title of *coniunx karus* being attached to Verecundus in line seven.

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[117] *AE* 1985, 355. For the date of the inscription, consult Mercando, Bacchielli, and Paci (1984: 46).

Unlike Zotica's inscription, Cervilla's epitaph is written in the first person. Her age is broken down into years and days in lines three and four, as she lived for 18 years and 30 days; however, instead of the third person, singular, perfect form of the verb *vivere* (*vixit*, which is how it appeared in Zotica's inscription), it is written in the first person form, *vixi* ('I lived'). The mention of Cervilla's young age implies that her death was viewed as a *mors immatura*, but the first person form was used to perhaps rouse even more pathos for the deceased.

While this epigraphic element helps to convey the fact that Cervilla succumbed to a premature death, her epitaph does not provide much insight into the cause of her early demise. She states, quite simply, that, 'I finished my life in pain' (*vitam finivi dolens*). It is possible that these two biographical points are connected: that Cervilla's life ending in pain can be associated with her multiple deliveries at a young age. Caldwell suggests that the presentation of this pairing implies that Cervilla suffered from the severe physical stress that was placed on her body, as she had already given birth three times by the time she turned 18 years old.[118]

Although it is difficult to glean concrete information about her death, this inscription is nevertheless valuable to my study as it draws attention to the young woman's success as a mother. Although we do not know how old Cervilla was when she married Verecundus, it is probable that it occurred when she was in her early to mid-teens, due to the fact that she died when she was 18, and that she became pregnant for the first time shortly after the couple married. While the physical pressures associated with pregnancy and childbirth placed profound stress on a woman's body, which contributed to the reality that young Roman women who were expected to reproduce did not always survive, there is nothing present in this inscription which indicates that Cervilla died as a result of complications related to either a pregnancy or a childbirth. What the epitaph does reveal is that she had given birth three times and, perhaps more importantly, that her three children were still alive at the time when the monument was erected, all of which is stated in the fifth line of the inscription: *liberis tribus relictis*. It is more suitable to view Cervilla's situation as an example which demonstrates how, in at least some cases, a girl's early age at marriage could be prolific with surviving children.

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[118] Caldwell 2015: 99.

The previous two inscriptions provide considerable insight into the circumstances surrounding the pregnancies of freeborn Roman women; however, it is important to be mindful of the obvious fact that childbirth was not restricted to women of free status. A rather curious, yet suggestive, example comes from the columbarium of the Vigna Codini in Rome:[119]

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[119] *CIL* VI 5534.

Cornelia (in margin)
Calliste · mihi · nomen · erat
quod · forma · probavit · annus
ut · accedat · ter · mihi · quintus
erat · grata · fui · domino · gemino
dilecta · parenti · septima · [l]anguen
ti · summaque · visa · dies · causa
latet · fati · partum · tamen · esse
loquontur · sed · quaecumque
fuit · tam · cito · non · merui

My name was Cornelia Calliste,
which suited my appearance.
As for my age, I was 15 years old.
I was pleasing to my master and
loved by both of my parents.
Becoming ill, the seventh day was my
last. The cause of my fate is
unknown, nevertheless, they say it
was childbirth. Whatever it was, I did
not deserve (to die) so quickly.

Unlike the inscriptions commemorating Cervilla and Zotica, this small marble tablet does not feature the *Dis Manibus* abbreviation, as the young woman's name is the first element that is mentioned in the inscription. The deceased announces to the viewer that her name is Cornelia Calliste, as the phrase *Calliste mihi nomen erat* occupies the first full line of the inscription with her *nomen*, Cornelia, inscribed above the second half of her *cognomen* (the letters –iste) and the word *mihi*. Calliste then goes on to explain the origin of her nomenclature: the young woman must have been considered attractive to her *dominus* (master), as she was assigned the name Calliste, the Latin transliteration of the feminine form of the Greek superlative *κάλλιστος*, meaning very beautiful. The line, 'quod forma probavit', reinforces this notion, as it seemed only appropriate that the girl have a name that reflected her appearance. Moreover, Calliste's name and the phrase that comments on the justification of her name could possibly hint at a sexual relationship between the girl and her former *dominus*.

Calliste's age is revealed in lines three to five in a rather poetic manner. The girl's age is provided as, 'annus accedat ter mihi quintus erat', which is a highly stylish way of stating that she was 15 years old when she died.[120] The cause of her *mors immatura* is mentioned in line six and occupies a significant portion of the inscription. Although it is mentioned that the cause of her untimely fate remains unknown (*causa latet fati*), Calliste describes how she had become unwell and eventually died on the seventh day of her illness. The epitaph reveals further information, stating 'partum tamen esse loquontur', which implies that Calliste was either at a late stage of pregnancy or in the process of delivery at the time of her death and that her illness was a result of complications associated with childbirth. I agree with Laes and Pikhaus, who suggests that she likely died from puerperal fever, a bacterial infection of the genital tract, after suffering from its symptoms for seven days.[121]

The epitaphs that commemorate Zotica and Cervilla highlight that the persons responsible for setting up their monuments were their husbands, Annius Flavianus and C. Carrenas Verecundus, respectively; however, the identity of Calliste's commemorator remains unknown. While this is the case, it is nevertheless evident that there was an affective bond between the young Calliste and the unnamed dedicator. At the very end of the inscription a poetic variant of the standard epithet *bene merens* appears: 'tam cito non merui (morior)'. The use of *bene merens,* which was also present in the epitaphs of

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[120] For a more in-depth analysis of the poetic structure of Calliste's epitaph, see Laes 2004: 176 and 2011:54 (these two sources provide a more introductory discussion of the epitaph); Pikhaus 1988 (a more detailed examination of the poem). For a thorough discussion of the provenance of the stone, consult Timmers 1988.

[121] Pikhaus 1988: 312; Loudon 2000: 7; Laes 2004: 176. Puerperal fever occurs when acidic vaginal secretions become basic, the closed cervix opens, and the antibacterial nature of the inner lining of the uterus (endometrium) is stripped, all of which happens during childbirth and the post-natal period (the puerperium). These changes create a prime environment in the uterus where bacteria can enter and thrive (Loudon 2000: 7).

Cervilla and Zotica, establishes an affective bond between the dedicator and deceased, as well as suggests to the viewer that the dead was well-deserving of their commemoration. In the case of Calliste, such sentiment is implied, but it is also used to generate sympathy, as it emphasizes that her death was untimely and undeserved, by stating, 'I did not deserve (to die) so quickly'.

In addition to providing insight into maternal death among women from the lower social strata, Calliste's inscription brings about certain questions surrounding the circumstances of her pregnancy, especially concerning her own social status and the identity of the baby's father. Perhaps due to the poetic nature of her epitaph, Calliste's status is not noted outright by the use of the word *serva*, *ancilla*, *liberta*, or any other abbreviation. However, there are two rather interesting pieces of information present in this inscription that are related to Calliste's social status. The first element is that the young woman's full name is recorded as Cornelia Calliste, which indicates that she was a freedwoman at the time of her death. Her *nomen* also indicates that she belonged to the *familia* of the Cornelii Scipiones, as freed slaves took the *nomen* of their former owner. The epitaph mentions in line 6 that the girl was beloved (*dilecta*) by her parents, which could possibly indicate that Calliste and her parents served within the same household. Timmers argues that Calliste's affiliation with the Cornelii Scipiones is reinforced by the location of her grave, as the woman's remains were interred in the Vigna Codini columbaria, which was within close proximity of the burial monuments of the famous Roman family.[122]

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[122] Pikhaus 1988: 310; Timmers 1988: 309.

The second noteworthy aspect of this inscription is the phrase, *grata fuit domino* ('I was pleasing to my master'), in line 5. Despite her stylish epitaph, this brief item reveals significant information about Calliste's life: perhaps the most apparent fact is that the young woman had a servile past. As well, the use of the adjective *grata*, which can be translated as 'pleasing' or 'beloved', to describe her former master's perception of her suggests that there was likely an affective bond between Calliste and her unnamed *dominus*, prior to her manumission. It is also interesting that the connection shared between the girl and her erstwhile master is given before the one with her parents. If we consider this affective link in conjunction with the justification of her nomenclature, as was discussed previously, then it is logical to suggest that Calliste might have been involved in an intimate relationship with her former *dominus*, which resulted in her ill-fated pregnancy and her freedom.[123]

The relationship between the two would not have been deemed an unusual occurrence, since sexual relationships between freeborn males and their own slaves were viewed as being part of the 'degradation of being a slave'. Many masters purchased attractive slaves for the purpose of impressing their banquet guests as well as for their own sexual gratification. In addition, the house born slaves, or *vernae*, that were often produced as a result of these relationships were considered a valuable commodity for the household.[124] Some of these unions that were more permanent, referred to as

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[123] In his 2004 and 2011 studies, Laes briefly mentions that it is possible that Calliste's *dominus* could have been the father, due to the fact that she was an attractive young girl. However, he does not elaborate further on this point.

[124] Bradley 1994: 28; Edmondson 2011: 352.

concubinatus, resulted in marriages. Although a regulation outlined in the *lex Aelia Sentia* of AD 4 states that the manumission of a slave under the age of 30 was not considered legally valid, a free man was able to free his slave woman before she turned 30 if he desired to marry her.[125]

However, there were also *concubinatus* that existed without the intent of marriage.[126] These more casual affairs were a common and accepted occurrence, even among those of elite status. Perhaps the historical example that best illustrates this is Tertia Aemilia's acknowledgement and acceptance of her husband's (that is, the elder Africanus) relationship with one of her slave girls. Valerius Maximus, using Aemilia as an *exemplum* of wifely fidelity, states:

> 'To touch also upon wifely fidelity, Tertia Aemilia, wife of the elder Africanus and mother of Cornelia of the Gracchi, was so accommodating and patient that although she knew that one of her slave girls had found favour with her husband, she pretended to be ignorant of it, lest she, a woman, charge a great man, world-conquering Africanus, with lack of self-control. And she was so far from any thought of revenge that after Africanus' death she freed the girl and gave her in marriage to one of her freedmen.'[127]

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[125] An inscription from the city of Complutum (modern Alcalá de Henares) in Hispania Citerior that commemorates the 30-year-old freedwoman Atilia Senario helps illustrates such circumstances. Her epitaph (*CIL* II 5856: *D(is) Manibus) | Atil(iae) Senarioni | Atil(ius) Sosumu(s) | ux(ori) et lib(ertae) an(norum) | XXX f(aciendum) c(uraverunt) m(ater?) p(ater?) f(ilius?) | h(ic) s(ita) e(st) s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis)*) identifies her as the wife and *liberta* of a certain Atilius Sosumus. I would like to thank Dr. Evan Haley for kindly bringing this inscription to my attention.

[126] Treggiari 1991: 52; Evans Grubbs 1993:127; Gai. *Inst.* 1.18-19; *Dig.* 40.2.13 (Ulpian) [*matrimonii causa* exception in the *lex Aelia Sentia*].

[127] Val. Max. 6.7.1: 'Atque ut uxoriam quoque fidem attingamus, Tertia Aemilia, Africani prioris uxor, mater Corneliae Gracchorum, tantae fuit comitatis et patientiae ut cum sciret viro suo ancillulam ex suis gratam esse, dissimulaverit, ne domitorem orbis Africanum, femina magnum virum, impatientiae reum ageret, tantumque a vindicta mens eius afuit ut post mortem Africani manumissam ancillam in matrimonium liberto suo daret' (trans. Shackleton Bailey 2000 [Loeb]).

While this was the case for men, it appears that such relations between respectable, free women and male slaves were ridiculed and considered worthy of punishment. The freedman Trimalchio in Petronius' *Satyricon*, for example, recalls that when he was an adolescent slave he used to have intercourse with his *domina*. However, the master soon became suspicious of Trimalchio and subsequently banished him to work among the *familia rustica*.[128] As well, it is interesting to note that, unlike men who wanted to free their slave women for the sake of marrying them (*matrimonii causa*), a similar justification for manumission of a male slave by a *domina* was not permitted. Moreover, women did not receive exemption from the age restrictions of the *lex Aelia Sentia* as Roman men did.[129]

It is clear that relations between free males and female slaves for the sake of sexual gratification were not an unusual occurrence, and thus it is logical to suggest that the nature of Calliste's relationship with her former *dominus* was indeed sexual in nature and that it resulted in her pregnancy. It is difficult to determine with certainty whether her pregnancy resulted in her manumission at such a young age, as there is nothing in her epitaph which suggests that her former *dominus* had intended to marry her. Another possible conclusion is that if her *nomen* was added after the epitaph had been inscribed, then Calliste might have been manumitted posthumously. Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding Calliste's pregnancy could not have been unique to her and it is likely that her experience reflects those of many *ancillae* and freedwomen who became pregnant by their masters.

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[128] Petron. *Sat*. 69.

[129] Evans Grubbs 1993: 128-129.

Neonatal and Infant Mortality

In addition to contributing to an understanding of maternal mortality and its social and cultural conditions, these epitaphs also provide insight into the reality of high neonatal and infant mortality in a Roman context. An illustrative epitaph, which dates to between the late second and early third century AD, commemorates the wife of a centurion in Aquincum (modern Budapest) in Pannonia Inferior. The inscription is featured on the front panel of a modestly decorated sarcophagus. The sarcophagus and its accompanying inscription are well preserved, but its triangular, roof-style lid is quite damaged. As for the decoration, the front panel displays two male figures, both of whom Kovács and Szabó identify as Attis (*Ἄττις*), the young shepherd deity from Phyrgian myth, who are positioned in niches and flank the metrical inscription. The two figures are depicted leaning on their staffs and wearing Phrygian caps, but the Attis that is on the right hand side of the monument sports a beard. The epitaph provides the following information about the deceased:[130]

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[130] *CIL* III 3572; *CLE* 558. For the date of the stone, consult Parkin 2013: 44 (fn. 8). Translation aided by Gardner and Wiedemann 1991: 99; Parkin 2013: 45. For an image of the sarcophagus and the inscription, see Kovács and Szabó 1989: 199 (Cat. No. 745).

Hic · sita · sum · matrona · genus · nomen ·
que · Veturia · Fortunati · coniux · de patre · Vetu
rio · nata · (t)er novenos · misera · e(t) · nupta · bis · octo
per annos · unicuba · uniiuga · quae post ·
5 *sex partus · uno · superstite · obii ·*
T(itus) · Iulius Fortunatus · (centurio) · Leg(ionis) · II ·
Ad(iutricis) · P(iae) · F(idelis) ·
coniugi · incomparabili · et insigni in se pietate

Here I lie, a *matrona*, Veturia by birth and descent,
the wife of Fortunatus and the daughter of Veturius.
I, wretched one, lived three times nine (years) and I was
married for two times eight years. I slept with one man, I
was married to one man.
After I gave birth to six children, with one surviving, I
died.
T. Iulius Fortunatus, centurion of the Second Legion
Adiutrix Pia Fidelis, (set this up) for his wife, (who was)
incomparable and notably respectful to him.

The inscription is written in the first-person and begins with a modified version of the common funerary phrase, *hic situs est* (he/she lies here). It is then revealed that the deceased, a woman named Veturia, the daughter of Veturius, was a *matrona* who was married for 16 years and died when she was 27 years of age. Moreover, she was married to a centurion, T. Iulius Fortunatus, and her wifely devotion is emphasized by the appearance of the terms *unicuba* and *uniiuga* ('I slept with one man' and 'I was married to one man'). Although Veturia had become pregnant six times, only one of the couple's children survived. The inscription ends in a formulaic manner, stating that Fortunatus is the one responsible for his wife's commemoration and lastly it describes Veturia as an incomparable and notably respectful spouse.

It is interesting to note that the deceased's name does not appear in the inscription until the second line, while her title of *matrona* is the second element in the text. The fact that this role is given such a prominent position in her epitaph suggests that this was indeed a significant part of Veturia's identity, at least according to the dedicator of the monument, her husband T. Iulius Fortunatus. However, a tragic element in Veturia's maternity is revealed in lines 4 and 5 of the poem, which is that although she gave birth six times, only one of her children survived. This instance of such high fertility combined with high neonatal and infant mortality was not unique, as high mortality rates among newborns and young infants was a demographic reality in Rome.

That Rome was a high mortality regime, with a particular emphasis on the high mortality rates of neonates and infants, is an observation that has been made by many ancient historians and demographers. For example, in his article exploring the condition of the elderly population of ancient Rome, Finley states that 'any Greek or Roman who reached the age of marriage could look forward to burying one or more children, often very small ones'. This sentiment was subsequently echoed by Golden's seminal article in which he addresses the question of whether the ancients cared when their children died, as he remarks that infant death occurred with such frequency that early death was something to be expected. However, the high occurrence of infant death, according to Garnsey, did not necessarily cause parents to become indifferent to the death of their newborn children, but rather it made them become more realistic and accepting of the fact that their early death was an event that many parents would encounter.[131]

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[131] Finley 1981: 159; Golden 1988: 155; Garnsey 1991: 53.

Roman demographers provide a similar picture. Due to the unfortunate scarcity of empirical evidence about the Roman population, demographers use the data provided by the Coale-Demeny Model Life Tables to help create an impression of the demographic landscapes of ancient Rome. The tables of interest are the South and West models: the South model is generated from Mediterranean tables and is characterized by high infant and child mortality and a low marriage age, while the West model is used when specific information about a society is missing. It is important to understand that this category of evidence provides only approximations and that the tables certainly have their limitations; however, model life tables help to determine life expectancy age ranges and shed light on the general population patterns of Rome.[132]

Romans from all social and economic backgrounds were subject to high mortality rates. In his analysis of the age structure of the Roman population, Hopkins put forth the estimate, which was later supported by the work of Parkin and Scheidel, that life expectancy at birth (e_0) fell in the age range of 20 to 30 years.[133] Infants and neonates were subject to higher rates of mortality than full-grown adults. When compared to the infant mortality rate of a developed society in the modern world, whose rate is approximately less than 10 per 1000, the rates that have been suggested for the Roman population are striking.[134] While infant mortality rates have been the subject of much debate among scholars of ancient demographic patterns, it appears that the estimates only differ slightly. With the assumption of life expectancy at birth of 25 years ($e_0 = 25$), Hopkins suggests that approximately 28% of neonates did not survive to the age of one year. Likewise, Parkin hypothesizes that in Rome the infant mortality rate was about 30% within the first year of life. Laes provides a similar rate, but provides a further unsettling observation from the model life tables: 30 to 35% of neonates did not live to one full month.[135] These estimates differ only slightly, as the rates lie essentially within the same range, and although they can by no means provide a complete picture of Roman demography, the figures are nevertheless helpful and provide a possible reflection of the reality that children in Rome were indeed affected by high mortality rates.

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[132] Parkin 1992: 80. For the limitations and issues associated with model life tables (i.e., the fact that infant mortality rates for high mortality populations were predicted by algorithmic extrapolation) see the discussion in Scheidel 2001 and Parkin 2013: 49.

[133] Hopkins 1966: 264; Parkin 1992: 84; Scheidel 2001: 24.

Conclusion

It appears that there was a conscious effort to ensure a substantial time span for reproduction among Roman women through the customs that defined Roman marriage practices. The legal age minimum for marriage for girls was 12, which roughly coincided with the time at which puberty began, according to the legal sources, and was thought to have guaranteed this extended period of childbearing. However, ancient medical writers state that menarche, which occurred around age 14, served as the ultimate sign that a Roman girl was prepared for marriage, as she was considered capable of reproducing.

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[134] Parkin 2013: 47. The infant mortality rate for the United Kingdom, for example, is 5.08 per 1000, while the rate is 6.43 per 1000 for the United States.

[135] Hopkins 1983: 225; Parkin 1992: 92; Laes 2011: 26.

Furthermore, the epigraphic studies surrounding the actual age at first marriage show that girls tended to marry when they were in their mid-teens to early twenties. This age range was considered ideal since the fertile period for women is between 15 and 44 years of age. Although the young women who went through this transitional period, as well as the process of puberty and menarche, are portrayed in the sources in a mixed fashion, it was clear that the girl had entered into womanhood and was now ready to take on a new role as a mother.

Despite the positive goal of an extended fertile period, the rather early age at marriage and imminent motherhood proved to have serious consequences for the reproductive health of young Roman women. It is clear that physical underdevelopment, which was recognized to some degree by the medical writers, and the lack of mental maturity had a significant impact on the outcome of a woman's pregnancy. Unfortunate circumstances, such as being physically unable to carry a fetus to term, succumbing to complications that arose during delivery, or experiencing a miscarriage due to simple ignorance, were likely a reality for many young women. Moreover, children who were in the neonatal and infant stages of the life course were subject to high mortality rates, with some affected by in utero afflictions and trauma associated with childbirth, the same conditions that proved to be problematic for the mother.

CHAPTER 2

The Role of the *Obstetrix* in Roman Childbirth

Introduction

The birth of a viable child in Rome was an important event which signified that the parents had not only fulfilled the primary goal of marriage, but that they had also gained membership in the fundamental social institution of the Roman family. The birth involved the confinement of the parturient and required the father to excuse himself from public business. Suetonius, for example, reports that on the day of Octavian's birth, his father, Octavius, was late for a Senate hearing regarding the Catilinarian conspiracy because he had to be present for his wife's confinement. Upon providing justification for his tardiness, Publius Nigidius announced that 'the ruler of the world had been born'.[136] Moreover, it was a cause for celebration among the women and men of the household, as the parents would welcome their friends into their home and happily commemorate the birth of the child. Aulus Gellius relates an example of this joyous image in his description of the philosopher Favorinus' visit to a friend of senatorial rank whose wife had just given birth to a son.[137]

The family would also signal the birth of a healthy baby by placing a wreath of flowers at the entrance of their home as well as by making sacrifices at their altar to the household gods, the *Lares* and *Penates*. The festivities continued with the *dies lustricus*

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[136] Rawson 2003: 105; Suet. *Aug*. 94.5.

[137] Gell. *NA* 12.1: 'We who were present at the time went with Favorinus, attended him to the house to which he was bound, and entered it with him. Then the philosopher, having embraced and congratulated the father immediately upon entering, sat down' (trans. Rolfe 1960 [Loeb]). Suet. *Ner*. 6.1 also details a similar social practice of the parents receiving well wishes from visitors.

(the day of purification), a ritual that occurred on the eighth day after birth for girls and on the ninth for boys. During this celebration children would receive their name as well as either a *bulla* (the golden, bubble-shaped locket worn by boys) or a *lunula* (the half-moon amulet worn by girls), which were apotropaic items and signs of free birth and citizen status. Once again, family and friends gathered and rejoiced with gifts and sacrifices in honour of the newborn.[138]

The traditional celebrations surrounding the birth of a child involved the participation of all family members and friends, including men; however, the actual pregnancy, labour, and delivery were under the supervision of women, specifically the midwife, who is referred to as an *obstetrix* in Latin and as a *μαῖα* in Greek. The midwife had a crucial role to play in matters of gynaecology and obstetrics, as Roman women were famously hesitant about physical examinations and deliveries conducted by male physicians (*medici* or *ἰατροί*) due to modesty. Therefore, an ideal midwife was expected to have an advanced knowledge of gynaecology, its associated theories and disorders, as well as the ability to make sound decisions that affected the well-being of her patient. The *obstetrix* supervised pregnancies and monitored the health of the mother throughout the gestation period; and when a Roman woman gave birth, it was common for one midwife to be present and to be accompanied by three female attendants, who were either midwives themselves or friends of the parturient.[139] It was standard practice for an

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[138] Treggiari 1991: 428; Gardner and Wiedemann 1991: 31, fn. 1; Dixon 1992: 101; Hännien 2005: 57.

[139] Hanson and Green 1994: 974; Laes 2010: 268.

obstetrix to be on hand during a woman's period of confinement and her absence would have been considered unusual.

Although the services that were provided by *obstetrices* were indeed highly valued, these women and their specialization in gynaecology and obstetrics, as Flemming observes, were somewhat inhibited by restrictions that did not affect their counterparts, the male physicians, who were perhaps more respected because of their broader knowledge of all areas of medicine.[140] Moreover, male doctors dominate the medical literature, as is evident in the surviving medical treatises by the Hippocratics, Galen, and Celsus, whose works offer advice on treating everything from eye diseases to dysentery, but who also discuss theories of conception and the technical aspects of childbirth procedures.[141] As well, some literary sources characterize midwives in an unfavourable manner, with the authors portraying them as corrupt and untrustworthy figures. While it is clear that male physicians dominated the medical field, there are extant works that had midwives as their target audience, the prime example being Soranus' midwifery handbook, the *Gynaikeia*. In his work, Soranus discusses the role of the midwife in the birth of a child, the treatment of illnesses common among women, and provides insight into what kind of women he considered to be exemplary midwives.

In this chapter I will investigate the identity of the Roman *obstetrices* and their critical role in contributing to our understanding of the socio-cultural construction of maternity in a Roman context. I will begin by outlining the responsibilities of the midwife during the pregnancy, labour, and delivery process. Next, I will examine the conflicting image of the midwife that emerges from our extant sources by analyzing first the negative perception of *obstetrices* and then considering the more dignified portrayal of the midwife.

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[140] Flemming 2007: 258-259.

[141] See, for example, Blayney 1986: 230-236; Bestor 1991: 150-167.

The Role of the Midwife during the Pregnancy, Labour, and Delivery

(i) Women and physicians – the preoccupation with feminine modesty

In his work *On Prognosis*, Galen presents a vivid account of his treatment of the unnamed wife of Flavius Boethus. The physician recalls that the woman was suffering from female flux (referred to as *ῥοῦς γυναικεῖος* in Greek and *profluvia feminarum* in Latin), a condition that was believed to have started in her womb, which then spread outwards, and resulted in an irregular 'flow of material of varied colour, consistency, and volume from the uterus'.[142] The woman's regular midwives and female attendants believed that her swollen abdomen was a sign of pregnancy and began to bathe her regularly. However, this activity induced a seizure, which caused her attendants to panic and scream frantically. After scolding them for their unreasonable reaction, Galen proceeded to treat the afflicted woman by rubbing her hands, feet, and stomach with nard ointment (*ναρδίου μύρου*).[143]

Despite being highly critical of the women attending to the patient and their incompetence, Galen acknowledges that the midwives who cared for Boethus' wife were indeed highly capable women. He observes the following: ‘Boethus’ wife suffered from the so-called female flux. She was ashamed at first to tell this to the top doctors, of whom I was universally acknowledged to be one, but put herself in the care of her usual midwives, who were the best in Rome’.[144] In his other interaction with a midwife, which occurs in book 3 of his *On the Natural Faculties*, Galen remains neutral toward her in his description of childbirth. In this instance, the physician reports that during labour the midwife announces the progress of dilation to Galen, who is in the other room.[145] The gynaecologist Soranus also adopts a similarly neutral stance towards midwives throughout his *Gynaikeia*, with the exception of his critical attitude towards those who employ superstitious methods when treating their patients.[146]

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[142] Flemming 2000: 175, 211-212. The 'female flux' to which Galen refers is possibly menorrhagia, or heavy menstrual bleeding.

[143] Gourevitch 1996: 2090-2092; Gal. *Praen.* 8.1-21.

Galen reveals another important element in his anecdote of Boethus’ wife that sheds light on the relationship between women and male doctors. In addition to mentioning that the woman was affected by female flux and that her primary medical providers were exemplary midwives, Galen highlights the fact that the patient did not reveal her condition to the ‘top doctors’ (*τοὺς ἀξιολόγους ἰατρούς*) because she was ashamed to do so. This hesitancy about male physicians appears to have been relatively common among Roman women, especially when they were suffering from an ailment or condition that seemed to be exclusive to the female sex.

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[144] Gourevitch 1996: 2090-2092; Gal. *Praen*. 8.2: ‘ἡ γὰρ τοῦ Βοηθοῦ γυνὴ τῷ καλουμένῳ ῥῷ γυναικείῳ περιπεσοῦσα κατ’ἀρχὰς μὲν αἰδουμένη τοὺς ἀξιολόγους ἰατρούς, ὧν εἷς ἤδη κἀγὼ πᾶσιν ἐδόκουν εἶναι, ταῖς συνήθεσι μαίαις ἀρίσταις οὔσαις τῶν κατὰ τὴν πόλιν ἑαυτὴν ἐπέτρεπεν’ (trans. Nutton 1979 [*CMG* V.8.1]).

[145] Gal. *Nat. Fac*. 3.3.

[146] See, for example, Sor. *Gyn*. 2.11, where Soranus criticizes midwives who refuse to use iron blades when cutting the umbilical cord, and Sor. *Gyn*. 3.42, where the physician states outright that amulets have no real power to heal.

Galen is not the only ancient source to have encountered the issue of female apprehension of male doctors. The Hippocratic author of the treatise *Diseases of Women* 1 notes that some diseases become incurable for women because they are 'ashamed to tell even if they know, and they suppose that it is a disgrace, because of their inexperience and lack of knowledge'. The author also acknowledges that physicians are not blameless, since they do not ask the patient accurate questions and they treat the woman in the same manner as a male patient.[147] Soranus also mentions the reluctance about *medici* in his discussion regarding whether women have conditions that are specific to them (*Εἰ ἔστιν ἴδια πάθη γυναικῶν*): 'and the public is wont to call in midwives in cases of sickness when the women suffer something peculiar which they do not have in common with men'. Moreover, modesty was a primary concern for women, as they feared that a *medicus* who was examining them might gaze at their genitalia in an inappropriate manner, and thus they preferred to be examined by women.[148]

Celsus provides a more critical perspective than that of the Hippocratic author in the *prooemium* of his *De Medicina*, as he expresses frustration at the inability of male physicians to determine the condition of a certain female patient who had suffered, and eventually died from, the effects of a prolapsed uterus. Celsus places the blame exclusively on the *medici*:

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[147] Hanson 1975: 582; Hippoc. *Mul*. 1.62.

[148] Sor. *Gyn*. 3.3: 'καὶ μαίας ὁ βίος ἐν ταῖς νόσοις εἴωθεν παρακαλεῖν, ὅταν αἱ γυναῖκες ἴδιόν τι πάσχωσιν καὶ ὅ μὴ κοινόν ἐστιν πρὸς τοὺς ἄνδρας' (trans. Temkin 1991); Laes 2011: 57.

> 'I conclude that they attempted nothing because no one was willing to risk a conjecture of his own in the case of a distinguished personage, for fear that he might seem to have killed, if he did not save her; yet it is probable that something might possibly have been thought of, had no such timidity prevented, and perchance this might have been successful had one but tried it'.[149]

The physicians, who are described as being of the highest standing, remained completely ignorant of a female condition for fear of bringing about serious harm to her. This unfortunate situation represents the negative consequence of feminine hesitancy about male physicians, as some *medici*, due to the lack of access to and experience with female patients, were perhaps incapable of treating diseases and conditions that were exclusive to women.

While it is evident that gynaecology and obstetrics were of interest to *medici* to some degree, it is important to acknowledge the fact that female conditions were most often treated by women, even in cases where male physicians were consulted. This is likely a result of Roman attitudes towards women and sex, and the high valuation that was placed on feminine modesty.

In his *De Officiis*, after he praises Nature's plan for the body and states that it is important to keep the face visible, Cicero presents the more conservative Roman view of nudity. He emphasizes how important it is for humans to keep certain parts of their body concealed, as these areas have an 'unsightly and unpleasant' appearance:

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[149] Celsus, *Med.* pr.50: 'Quos ego nihil temptasse iudico, quia nemo in splendida persona periclitari coniectura sua voluerit, ne occidisse, nisi servasset, videretur: veri tamen simile est potuisse aliquid cogitare, detracta tali verecundia, et fortasse responsurum fuisse id, quod aliquis esset expertus' (trans. Spencer 1935 [Loeb]).

> 'Man's modesty had followed this careful contrivance of Nature's; all right-minded people keep out of sight what Nature has hidden and take pains to respond to Nature's demands as privately as possible; and in the case of those parts of the body which only serve Nature's needs, neither the parts nor the functions are called by their real names. To perform these functions – if only to be done in private – is nothing immoral; but to speak of them is indecent'.[150]

Cicero clearly alludes to the male and female genitalia in this passage, whose functions as sexual organs, however natural, ought to be kept from view. It was important for the Romans to maintain a sense of decency and the need for this was tied to the emotion of shame (*verecundia*). For women in particular, *verecundia* was closely linked to *pudicitia*, the Roman virtue of sexual modesty that was considered a highly prized asset. This concept, as Langlands observes, was certainly displayed through a woman's gestures, dress, and speech; however, it was really marked by the individual '*not* participating in prohibited sexual activity'. This meant that it was only appropriate for Roman women to engage in sexual intercourse with their husbands.[151] If this was how a woman was to maintain her *pudicitia*, it is not surprising that there was some unease about female nudity, especially when a woman was in the presence of a man who was not her husband, as it brought the woman's chastity into question and also that of the man who saw her body.[152] Considering the importance of *pudicitia,* and modesty in general, in Roman society, it is understandable why *obstetrices* were authoritative figures during a woman's pregnancy, delivery, and post-natal period.

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[150] Cic. *Off.* 1.35: 'Hanc naturae tam diligentem fabricam imitata est hominum verecundia. Quae enim natura occultavit, eadem omnes, qui sana mente sunt, removent ab oculis ipsique necessitati dant operam ut quam occultissime pareant; quarumque partium corporis usus sunt necessarii, eas neque partes neque earum usus suis nominibus appellant; quodque facere turpe non est, modo occulte, id dicere obscenum est' (trans. Miller 1990 [Loeb]).

[151] Kaster 2005: 25; Langlands 2006: 5.

(ii) The pre-natal regimen

Prior to investigating the responsibilities of the *obstetrix* throughout a Roman woman's pregnancy, it is important to understand the modern and ancient ideas concerning the division of the gestation period. Modern obstetricians have determined that the modal length for a pregnancy is either 280 days (around 40 weeks) from the first day of the last menstrual period, or 266 days (approximately 38 weeks) from the date of conception.[153] The gestation period is divided into three trimesters, which last three months (between 12 and 13 weeks) each.[154] As for ancient medical thought, physicians, such as Soranus, likewise divide pregnancy into three separate stages, which are categorized by the different care required during each period: the first focuses on the preservation of the seed, the second surrounds the treatment of the discomfort associated with pregnancy, and the last stage of care is concerned with the preservation of the embryo and preparing the endurance of the parturient.[155]

The midwife's involvement in a woman's pregnancy began with her role in the pre-natal care of the soon-to-be mother. At the very beginning of the pregnancy, the prevention of miscarriage is an evident priority, and thus in his *Gynaikeia* Soranus strongly advises that the woman be mindful of any stress, whether physical or mental. As a result, she was to avoid strong sudden emotions, such as fright and excessive joy, and physical labour, specifically lifting heavy objects and sitting on hard chairs. Moreover, the pregnant woman ought to abstain from bathing for fear that it would 'enfeeble' the embryo, as well as excessive consumption of wine and sexual intercourse for brief periods of time immediately after conception had occurred. The physician also describes for the *obstetrix* how to recognize if a miscarriage has ended a pregnancy, namely she should take note that there is extreme moisture present in the patient's vagina.[156]

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[152] Kaster 2005: 25-26.

[153] Gardosi 2012: 26.

[154] The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists 2010.

[155] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.46.

What is of particular interest in this section of Soranus' advice to the midwife on the first stage of a woman's pregnancy is the fact that he acknowledges that even if a woman, for whatever reason, does not heed his advice and does not suffer from a miscarriage, her actions will nevertheless have a profound effect on the infant. The physician states the following:

> 'Even if a woman transgresses some or all of the rules mentioned and yet miscarriage of the fetus does not take place, let no one therefore assume that the fetus has not been injured at all. For it has been harmed: it is weakened, becomes retarded in growth, less well nourished, and, in general, more easily injured and susceptible to harmful agents; it becomes misshapen and of an ignoble soul.'[157]

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[156] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.46-47.

[157] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.47: 'Μηδεὶς δὲ ὑπολαμβανέτω διότι, κἂν παραζαινούσης τινὸς ἔνια τῶν εἰρημένων ἢ πάντα μὴ γίνηται τοῦ συλληφθέντος ἔκτρωσις, οὐχὶ πάντως ἠδίκηται τὸ συλληφθέν · βέβλαπται γὰρ ὥστε καὶ ἀτονώτερον γίνεσθαι καὶ ἀναυξητότερον καὶ δυστροφώτερον καὶ <κατὰ> τὸ κοινὸν εὐαδίκητον εὐάλωτόν τε τοῖς βλάπτουσιν καὶ κακόμορφον καὶ κατὰ ψυχὴν ἀγενές' (trans. Temkin 1991).

The health of the mother, evidently, was the primary concern not only for the medical writer himself, but for the midwife who attended her. As she was the one responsible for supervising the mother throughout the gestation period, it is clear that the *obstetrix* was expected to be aware of the activities that the pregnant woman needed to avoid, as well as the detrimental effect that they could potentially have on the outcome of her pregnancy.

The next phase of the gestation period that required its own specialized treatment is referred to as pica (or *kissa*) by Soranus. This stage of pregnancy begins in the average woman around the 40th day and lasts for approximately four months. It is marked by the mother's unusual cravings and consumption of odd, non-food items, such as earth, charcoal, and unripe fruit. During this time, the individual might also suffer from an upset stomach, nausea, and a lack of appetite. In more serious cases of pica, the woman is prone to vomiting after meals, dizziness, constipation, a rather pale appearance that resembles someone who is severely undernourished, pain in her torso, swollen breasts, and jaundice.[158] After providing detailed descriptions of what the physician believes are the best remedies for this period of the pregnancy, Soranus stresses how important it is for the midwife not to indulge the mother's often peculiar cravings, due to the potentially harmful effects that these substances could have on her stomach and on the growing fetus.[159] Once again, the effect of the pregnant woman's actions on her child is at the forefront of Soranus' instructions to the midwife, which further emphasizes the concern that both the physician and the *obstetrix* had for their patient and also the primacy of the midwife in this regimen of care.

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[158] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.48; Young 2011: 3-4. For a detailed examination of pica and the psychology behind it, consult Young 2011, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-19).

[159] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.53. See Sor. *Gyn.* 1.49-52 for descriptions of the physician's remedies for the afflictions associated with pica.

It has been acknowledged by contemporary obstetricians that pregnant women can be susceptible to two different types of cravings. The first sort is classified as food cravings and it currently affects approximately 50 to 90% of pregnant women in the United States. This type typically occurs towards the end of the first trimester, with 'a peak in frequency and intensity during the second trimester, followed by a subsequent decline as the pregnancy progresses to term'. The women who fall under this category experience cravings for savoury carbohydrates with a high caloric content (e.g., potato chips), animal proteins, fruits, and sweets (especially chocolate).[160] The second sort is pica, which is defined as a condition that is marked by 'the craving and purposive consumption of substances that the consumer does not define as food for more than one month'.[161] Orloff and Hormes state that pica is characterized by:

> '…(1) persistent eating of non-nutritive substances such as soils and clay (geophagia), ice (pagophagia), and laundry or corn starch (amylophagia) for a period of at least one month, (2) consumption of non-nutritive substances in a manner that is inappropriate to the developmental level of the individual, and (3) eating of non-nutritive substances that is not part of a culturally supported or socially normative practice'.[162]

Moreover, the modern obstetric and psychiatric communities observe that pica is more prevalent among women whose pregnancies are considered high-risk (about 20%), as well women who are a part of certain demographics are particularly vulnerable to pica, such as African-Americans, females living in rural communities, and those who have a family history of pica. It is also worth mentioning that although pregnant women are the demographic group that is typically affected by it, young children are also prone to the condition.[163] It is clear that in a Roman context pica was considered a separate stage of a woman's pregnancy. Although there are certainly similarities between the ancient and modern notions of pica (namely, the craving of non-food substances), modern medicine categorizes pica as more of a condition that occurs for some women during pregnancy.

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[160] Orloff and Hormes (citing the American Psychiatric Association) 2014: 2-3.

[161] Young 2010: 405.

[162] Orloff and Hormes 2014: 3.

The guidance suggested for the third stage of a Roman woman's pregnancy, that is the time leading up to the parturition, resembles that which Soranus provided for the previous two phases: namely, practicing moderation and engaging in passive exercises. However, he stresses the importance of adequate sleep and mental diversion in order that the woman be mentally and physically prepared for her approaching delivery.[164] Within this section Soranus also explores the problems that were associated with the eighth month of pregnancy, the time of gestation that was considered particularly notorious for its difficulties, a view that was held by the medical community since the time of the Hippocratic writers. While this stage of pregnancy is burdensome for the mother, it is especially dangerous for the baby: the compression of the organs surrounding the uterus causes the mother to become prone to fevers, ultimately creating an unhealthy environment for the fetus which could potentially result in physical deformations.[165] Soranus acknowledges the problematic nature of the eighth month, and thus prescribes the typical remedies of abstaining from vigorous activity, including sexual intercourse, as well as providing recommendations for how the soon-to-be parturient should carry her swollen abdomen in a more comfortable manner.[166] Evidently, the pre-natal health and care of the mother was considered an important aspect of the whole pregnancy and delivery process, since the midwives who provided the care understood that the health of the mother during her pregnancy had a significant impact on the viability of the child.

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[163] Young 2010: 406; Orloff and Hormes 2014: 3.

[164] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.54.

(iii) The labour and delivery

As the woman approached the end of her pregnancy (either during the seventh, ninth, or tenth month, according to Soranus), the *obstetrix* had to prepare for the imminent parturition. Before considering the procedures associated with labour, Soranus presents his midwife with a list of the items that were required in order to ensure a safe, and to some degree comfortable, delivery. She ought to provide a proper room for the confinement, and she should also have on hand substances such as olive oil for lubrication, reviving agents for the mother (for example, lemon, melon, pennyroyal (a species of mint)), and warm water, as well as the midwife's stool (i.e., the birthing chair) and two beds. The *obstetrix* was also expected to supply pieces of wool so that the woman's genitals were appropriately covered,[167] indicating that the midwife was responsible for preserving her patient's modesty during the delivery process. Soranus elaborates on the importance of this later in Book 2, in his discussion of 'What must one do in delivery?' (*Τίνα δεῖ ποιεῖν ἐν τῇ ἀποκυήσει*). While he instructs the *obstetrix* on how to dilate the cervix, the physician stresses that, 'the midwife should beware of fixing her gaze steadfastly on the genitals of the labouring woman, lest being ashamed, her body become contracted'.[168] The fact that the woman's modesty was a top priority for the midwife must have had a positive impact on her delivery, as it is evident that, if the parturient was in a negative mental state, it caused her body to react and thus impede her delivery.

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[165] Hippoc. *Oct.* 9; Hanson 1987: 595.

[166] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.56.

[167] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.2.

The physician Galen also alludes to a preoccupation with the preservation of feminine modesty during childbirth. In his discussion comparing the retentive properties of the uterus with those of the stomach, Galen provides a glimpse into the typical delivery process. He mentions that while the *μαῖα* is dilating the parturient's cervix, she is responsible for announcing the progress of dilation. He describes the following scene:

> 'The midwife, however, does not make the parturient woman get up at once and sit down on the [obstetric] chair, but she begins by palpating the os as it gradually dilates, and the first thing she says is that it has dilated "enough to admit the little finger," then that "it is bigger now," and as we [the physicians] make enquiries from time to time, she answers that the size of the dilation is increasing.'[169]

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[168] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.6: 'Φυλασσέσθω δὲ ἡ μαῖα τὸ εἰς τοὺς γυναικείους κόλπους τῆς τικτούσης τὸ πρόσωπον ἐνατενίζειν, ὅπως μὴ αἰδουμένης συσταλῇ τὸ σῶμα' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[169] Gal. *Nat. Fac*. 3.3: 'Καὶ μέντοι καὶ αἱ μαῖαι τὰς τικτούσας οὐκ εὐθὺς ἀνιστᾶσιν οὐδ᾽ἐπὶ τὸν δίφρον καθίζουσιν, ἀλλ᾽ἅπτονται πρότερον ἀνοιγομένου τοῦ στόματος || κατὰβραχὺ καὶ πρῶτον μέν, ὥστε τὸν μικρὸν δάκτυλον καθιέναι, διεστηκέναι φασίν, ἔπειτ᾽ἤδη καὶ μεῖζον καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ δὴ πυνθανιμένοις ἡμῖν ἀποκρίνονται τὸ μέγεθος τῆς διαστάσεως ἐπαυξανόμενον᾽ (trans. Brock 2006 [Loeb]).

This brief passage is particularly insightful because it suggests that male physicians must have been present in the household of the pregnant woman, in case the delivery turned into a problematic one and required his knowledge of surgery: however, it also demonstrates the fact that the midwife was in charge of the delivery process. The *obstetrix* had to describe her patient's progress to the *medici* and other male members of the woman's family because they were not able to enter the room of confinement during the course of a regular delivery. The result of this was that the midwife had a high degree of autonomy in making decisions moment to moment in this crucial event. This reinforces the notion that *pudicitia* and the cultural attitudes of both Roman men and women towards sex had a significant influence within the medical realm.

There were certain circumstances, however, that required the midwife to become a secondary figure in the delivery room and for her to transfer the patient to the care of the physician. In the chapter, 'How in general to treat difficult labour, and the detailed care of difficult labour' (*Πῶς θεϱαπεύσομεν δυστοϰίαν ϰοινότεϱον ϰαὶ ἐπιμέλεια δυστοϰίας*), Soranus advises the physician to question the midwife about the cause of the difficult labour, whether it was a pre-existing condition of the mother, an unfavourable fetal positioning, or the health of the fetus that brought about the complications, before he determined the most suitable treatment. Moreover, it appears that while the *medicus* was consulted in cases of dystocia (difficult childbirth), it appears that the *obstetrix* was considered capable enough to perform the non-surgical procedures that were used in the event of abnormal positioning, such as non-vertex cephalic, breeched, or transverse presentation of the newborn. In these situations, the midwife would rotate the fetus by pushing on the parturient’s abdomen, insert her hand into the opening of the uterus, and gently align the fetus into the optimal position for delivery.[170]

However, if the fetus was unresponsive to the midwife’s attempts at rotation, if it was of an unusually large size, or if it was dead, then the embryotomy, a procedure that was considered a last resort among practitioners of the Methodist school of medicine, was the necessary option. In Soranus’ discussion of extraction by hooks and embryotomy (*Περὶ ἐμβρυουλκίας καὶ ἐμβρυοτομίας*), the male *ἰατρὸς*, who had training in and experience with surgery, appears to take over the central role from the midwife. Despite the fact that she was no longer the one in control of the delivery, it is likely that the *obstetrix* was still in the confinement room as an assistant to the physician. Her presence, as well as that of the female assistants, is alluded to when Soranus mentions that two attendants (*ὑπηρετῶν*) part the parturient’s labia, while the doctor reaches into the uterus in order to maneuver the fetus.[171] Although the *obstetrix* became an assistant to the *medicus* in certain cases of dystocia, it is clear that she still maintained an important role in the delivery process.

The encyclopaedist Celsus, on the other hand, provides a slightly different picture. As is the case with Soranus’ description of the embryotomy, Celsus’ surgeon is identified as a male *medicus* who is in direct contact with the parturient’s body. For example, the surgeon had first to dilate sufficiently the woman's cervix, so that he was able to insert both his hands and begin the extraction process.[172] Celsus suggests that a headfirst delivery is the best course of action, but his comments on what the surgeon should do if the fetus' head slips back into the womb are of particular interest:

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[170] Sor. *Gyn*. 4.7-8. The ideal position for delivery is vertex (crown) cephalic presentation with the hands ‘stretched alongside the thighs, the fetus presenting in a straight line’ (Sor. *Gyn*. 4.3). Breeched position refers to feet first presentation and transverse position occurs when the fetus is positioned on its side (also known as shoulder presentation) (Sor. *Gyn*. 4.3).

[171] Sor. *Gyn*. 4.9-10.

> 'Should this [head slip back into the womb], however, happen, a folded pad [or 'little garment' – my translation] is placed upon the woman's hypogastrium (the part of the central abdomen located below the stomach), and then a man strong, but not untrained, must stand on her left side, and place his two hands over the hypogastrium and press one over the other so that the head is forced to the mouth of the womb, when it must be extracted by the hook as described above'.[173]

It is unusual, as Spencer observes in a note on his translation, that there is no mention whatsoever of a midwife or other female attendants being present for the surgery to act as assistants.[174] Their absence notwithstanding, it is evident that the patient's modesty was still protected. The little garment (*panniculus*) that was placed on the woman's abdomen essentially served as a barrier between the parturient and the strong male assistant, who was not only required to place his hands on her belly, but was also entrusted with applying some force to her body, which was, evidently, in a vulnerable state. Although no *obstetrices* feature in Celsus' recommendations, it is clear that the preservation of modesty was nevertheless a concern during this procedure.

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[172] Celsus, *Med.* 7.29.2.

[173] Celsus, *Med.* 7.29.8: 'Si tamen id incidit, super ventrem mulieris duplici panniculo iniecto, valens homo non inperitus a sinistro latere eius debet adsistere et super imum ventrem eius duas manus inponere alteraque alteram premere; quo fit, ut illud caput ad os volvae conpellatur; idque eadem ratione, quae supra posita est, unco extrahere…' (trans. Spencer 1938 [Loeb]).

[174] Spencer 1938: 460 (fn. *a*.).

It also appears that reducing the anxiety of her patient was a priority for the midwife and her assistants. Soranus recommends that the *obstetrix* should have three female helpers for the duration of the delivery, two to support the parturient at the sides and the third to stand behind her. While these women are present to ensure that the mother does not shift in pain, it is revealed that the assistants are expected to be able to allay the fears of the parturient, even if they have not endured childbirth before. Unfortunately, Soranus does not elaborate any further on how the attendants are supposed to accomplish this difficult task.[175] As for the midwife, Soranus instructs her to cover herself with an apron and sit opposite and below the woman. In addition to describing the benefits of this receiving position, which makes it far easier for the extraction to occur from a higher to a lower plane, the physician stresses that the midwife needs to see the face of the parturient clearly, so that she can calm her anxieties and assure 'her that there is nothing to fear and that delivery will be easy.'[176] It is clear that the *obstetrix* played a crucial role during the mother's pregnancy and confinement that was not limited to medical knowledge, but that also required her to acknowledge and accommodate the comfort and modesty of the mother.

The mental state of the parturient is revisited by Soranus in Book 4 in his examination of the causes of dystocia on the part of the mother and infant. The majority of this section is dedicated to an exploration of how the physical condition of the mother prior to conception and during her pregnancy, as well as that of the fetus, could bring about a difficult labour. However, Soranus does provide some insightful observations about the profound effect of the mother's mental state:

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[175] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.5.

[176] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.5 (trans. Temkin 1991).

> 'Now difficult labour is occasioned by the parturient, when the cause is <either> in the psychic faculty or in the vital faculty, that is to say in the body. And it lies <in> the psychic faculty, when there is grief, joy, fear, timidity, lack of energy, and <or> extreme indulgence, (for some women are spoiled and do not exert themselves). Moreover, it occurs because of ignorance of childbearing, <so that they do not> co-operate with the pains of labour. Furthermore, it happens when reason is suspended or at least when pain is dimmed.'[177]

While the physical health of the mother and of the fetus contributed to dystocia, the parturient's mental capacity certainly had an impact on her labour and delivery. If the health of the mother and fetus were already causing difficulties, it is likely that a troubled state of mind would either exacerbate current problems or add further complications. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *obstetrix* was required to maintain a calm demeanour during unproblematic deliveries, but even more so in challenging circumstances where the assistance of a *medicus* was required.

Rawson observes that, due to the intimate and painful nature of childbirth, there are few visual representations of midwives performing their duties in material culture of the Roman period.[178] The meagre evidence that does exist, however, complements the image that is provided by the medical writers. The prime example is the terra cotta relief from Tomb 100 in the Isola Sacra Necropolis that depicts an *obstetrix* named Scribonia Attice (Figure 1).[179] Three female figures, who all gaze towards the viewer, are presented in this small scene: the midwife, the parturient, and an assistant. The midwife, who is sitting on her stool, reaches between her patient's legs. Her attire is simple, as she wears a short-sleeved tunic, the length of which reaches to just above her ankles, and her hair is fashioned in a cap-like style.[180] Alternatively, Calza suggests that the midwife's sleeves are rolled up so that her forearms are exposed; however, both options are appropriate for the midwife's tasks.[181] Her assistant is depicted in a similar manner, complete with an identical hairstyle and long tunic. The assistant figure stands behind the parturient, holding her in a secure position by grasping her around her chest, notably avoiding her swollen abdomen. As for the parturient, she sits in the obstetric chair, gripping the handles on either side. Her hair is loosened, appearing to fall beneath her shoulders, and, unlike the midwife and her assistant, she is nude. Wood suggests that the parturient in this scene wears a veil, which would serve as a symbol of her status as a *matrona*;[182] however, it would be considered unusual for a woman to have her hair covered by a veil, or tightly bound, during childbirth as it would be constrictive and uncomfortable. Moreover, Soranus recommends that the parturient loosen her hair, as well as her girdles and breast bands, as it possibly had an effect on the tension of the mother's head.[183] Therefore, it is more probable that the mother is depicted with loosened hair, as opposed to with a veil on her head.

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[177] Sor. *Gyn*. 4.2: 'Καὶ δὴ παρὰ τὴν τίκτουσαν δυστοκία γίνεται, ὅταν <ἢ> ἐν ψυχικῇ δυνάμει ᾗ τὸ αἴτιον ἤ ἐν τῇ ζωτικῇ, ἤγουν τοῖς σώμασι. Καὶ <ἐν> ψυχικῇ μὲν δυνάμει γίνεται, ὅταν λύπη, χαρά, φόβος, δειλία, ἔκλυσις, ὀργη γένηται <ἢ> τρυφὴ ὑπερτεταμένη (ἔνιαι) γάρ εἰσιν σπαταλώδεις καὶ οὐκ ἐντείνονται) · καὶ παρὰ ἀπειρίαν δὲ τοῦ τίκτειν γίνεται <ὡς μὴ> συνεργεῖν τῇ ὠδῖνι · καὶ δι᾽ἐποχὴν δὲ διανοίας γίνεται, ἀμαυρᾶς γοῦν γινομένης | τῆς ἀλγηδόνος᾽ (trans. Temkin 1991).

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[178] Rawson 2003: 102. By contrast, scenes of childbirth appear more frequently in a Greek context. See Demand 1995 for a detailed discussion of Greek *lekythoi* and *stelai* that depict childbirth scenes and Kosmopoulou 2001 for an analysis of Attic female professionals on gravestones.

[179] For the first description and brief discussion of this relief, consult Calza 1940: 248-249 (cat. no. 38).

[180] I have adopted Kampen's term for the midwife's (and assistant's) hairstyle from her description of the relief (1981: 71).

[181] Calza 1940: 249.

[182] Wood 2001: 34.

This relief is more of an abbreviation of the childbirth scene that is described in the medical texts, since there is only one assistant present instead of the ideal number of three women. Nevertheless, this small terra cotta helps to illustrate the recommended stance for the midwife: she is placed below the parturient, which helps to ensure a more comfortable delivery. Calza also observes that the midwife's seated position helps prevent the baby from falling onto the floor headfirst, which could have resulted in cranial injuries.[184] A more noteworthy feature of this relief is that the mother's face is clearly visible to the *obstetrix*. Despite the rather flat and crude carving style of the relief, it is clear that the parturient is, understandably, grimacing on account of birthing pains. The midwife and her assistant, on the other hand, appear to have calm and neutral facial expressions. Wood suggests that the midwife looks away from the mother's genitals and towards the viewer in order to preserve the mother's modesty.[185] It is possible that these two elements are meant to represent the midwife's efforts to comfort her patient, by remaining calm and by having a constant view of the parturient's face, in case the midwife had to reassure her.

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[183] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.6.

[184] Calza 1940: 249: 'L'ostetrica, seduta su di un basso sgabello avanti alla paziente, modifica con la destra le forze espulsive della donna, per impedire una violenta fuoruscita della testa del feto.'

[185] Wood 2001: 34-35.

There are two additional components of Tomb 100 which can help us understand the context of this funerary monument. The first feature is the companion terra cotta relief that depicts a *medicus* in action, along with the tools of his trade, which is unfortunately rather damaged, but still decipherable (Figure 2).[186] On the left hand side are two male figures, a physician and his patient. The *medicus*, who is seated on the left, appears to be wearing a short-sleeved garment, reaching to just above his knees. Kampen suggests that this practical article of clothing is a Greek *himation*.[187] The physician has his arms extended towards his patient and holds a sponge in his right hand, as he is clearly treating a leg wound. Although the top half of his head is missing, it is clear that the doctor is facing downwards, focussing on his task. Unlike the companion pendant with the childbirth scene, neither figure has a distinguishable facial expression. The seated patient, whose head is completely missing from the scene, wears the same short garment as the *medicus* and holds the hem in one hand, presumably so that the doctor can get access to the wound easily. It is evident that the patient is receiving treatment for a wound on his left leg, resting his left foot in a basin while the physician places the sponge on the left shin. On the right side of the terra cotta panel is a set of surgical equipment (namely, scalpels and hooks) in an opened rectangular container, with the box hinge running down the middle.

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[186] For the first description and brief discussion of this relief, consult Calza 1940: 250-251 (cat. no. 39).

[187] Kampen 1981: 143.

The second element of particular significance is the inscription, which is set above the entrance of the tomb and flanked by the two terra cotta panels (Figure 3). It is a rather well preserved marble plaque with minimal damage to the upper border and top left hand corner (Figure 4); fortunately, the entire text of the inscription remains intact. The stone reveals the identity of the commemorator, her husband, and her mother, as well as information about the other members of the household (in particular the slave and freed members of her *familia*). The epitaph reads as follows:

> *H(uic) · m(onumento) · d(olus) · m(alus) · a(besto) | D(is) M(anibus) | Scribonia · Attice | fecit · sibi · et · M(arco) · Ulpio · Amerimno | coniugi · et · Scriboniae · Calli | tyche · matri · et · Diocli · et · suis | et · libertis · libertabusque · poste | risque · eorum · praeter · Panara | tum · et · Prosdocia · h(oc) · m(onumentum) · h(eredem) · e(xterum) · n(on) · s(equetur)*
>
> Let evil harm be absent from this monument. To the spirits of the dead. Scribonia Attice made (this monument) for herself and for M. Ulpius Amerimnus, her husband, and for Scribonia Callityche, her mother, and for Diocles and her own (slaves) and freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants except for Panaratus and Prosdocia. This monument will not pass to an external heir.[188]

The dedicator of the monument is identified as a woman named Scribonia Attice, who erected the monument for herself and her husband, M. Ulpius Amerimnus, her mother,

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[188] *IPOstie* A 222; Inscription Appendix – *Obstetrices*, p. 252, Cat. No. 32. Thylander's French translation of the inscription (1952: 162-163) does not include the *suis* in line 6, which I interpret as representing the slaves of Attice's *familia*. Thylander's translation is as follows: 'Puisse ce monument être préservé de toute ruse maligne. Aux Dieux Mânes. Scribonia Attice a fait (ce monument) pour elle-même et Marcus Ulpius Amerimnus, sou époux, et Scribonia Callityche, sa mère, et Diocles et ses affranchies et leurs descendants, excepté Panaratus et Prosdocia. Ce monument ne suivra pas l'héritier étranger'.

Scribonia Callityche, and a certain Diocles, who was possibly one of Attice's slaves. Attice also indicates that she permits the burial of members of her *familia*, her slaves and freedmen (along with their families), within the tomb; however, she excludes two slaves, Panaratus and Prosdocia, for reasons that are not made known in the epitaph.

As for the social status of Attice, Amerimnus, and Callityche, it is difficult to determine with certainty whether they were freedmen or freeborn, due to the absence of *libertus*/*liberta* or filiation from their nomenclature. Hanson, however, suggests that the family's Greek *cognomina* allude to their servile origins and that their Latin *nomina* were a latter addition after manumission. Furthermore, she argues that Amerimnus' *praenomen* (Marcus) and *nomen* (Ulpius) indicate that he was probably a *libertus* of Trajan. While it is possible that Amerimnus was an imperial freedman, it is important to acknowledge the trend of newly enfranchised citizens adopting the nomenclature of the reigning emperor who brokered their manumission.[189] It is also interesting to note that this possible freed couple owned slaves themselves, as well as had freedmen dependants, which implies that they must have accumulated a sufficient amount of wealth, perhaps through their medical practices.

The husband and wife were also able to display the pride that they took in their occupations, another significant aspect of their social identity. Unlike many of the epitaphs that commemorate midwives and physicians, Attice did not include the title *obstetrix* after her name, nor does the term *medicus* follow that of her husband. The absence of these terms is likely due to the presence of the two terra cotta panels depicting both an *obstetrix* and a *medicus* in action, and which probably represent the husband and wife engaging in their respective occupations. Thylander suggests the possibility that the relief of the midwife represented both Attice and her mother Callityche,[190] which might also imply that the mother passed down the knowledge and skills of midwifery to her daughter. As for the positioning of the terra cotta plaques on the tomb, Kampen argues that the equal space that was accorded to the reliefs confirms the 'equal rates of pay and respect' that were granted to *obstetrices* and *medici* in the legal sources.[191] While this is a plausible interpretation, it is perhaps more likely that Attice and her husband simply wanted both of their occupations to be commemorated on a monument that honoured both of their lives.

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[189] Hanson 2006: 503; *OCD*^{4} (names, personal, Roman, section (9)).

A relatively well preserved example of a sculptural relief depicting childbirth from a non-funerary context is presented on an ivory plaque that was part of a papyrus-roll winder found in Regio I, Insula 2 of Pompeii (Figure 5).[192] While the identities of the figures have been the subject of debate, it is most likely that this is an episode from mythology and that it depicts the birth of Meleager, the hero of the Calydonian boar hunt and the ill-fated son of Althaea.[193] Despite its mythological setting, the scene closely resembles that which appears on the Ostian terra cotta. The *obstetrix* is seated on a stool, which places her in the optimal position for receiving the baby, and also provides her with the ideal view of the parturient's face. She holds a sponge in her right hand, while she reaches between the mother's legs with her left, and her gaze is not directed at Althaea's genitalia, but rather at the actions of her hands. As for the midwife's dress and appearance, she wears a long tunic that extends to just above her ankles, with the sleeves pushed up to her elbows, and her hair is styled in the cap-like fashion seen on the Ostian relief.

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[190] Thylander 1952: 162-163.

[191] Kampen 1981: 70; *Cod. Iust.* 6.43.3; the correspondence between Justinian and John the praetorian prefect outlines that servile midwives and physicians were both worth 60 *solidi*.

[192] Sogliano 1874: 12; Wood 2001: 23. This relief was originally thought to be a decorative attachment from a cupboard, the inlay for a door, or a vertical handle (Wood 2000: 84); however, Wood (2001) persuasively argues that this plaque is part of a papyrus roll winder. Although Sogliano did not specifically state the plaque's exact find spot, Wood (2001: 26) suggests that it is possible that it belonged to the professional scribes who operated out of I.2.24 (Officina libraria of Acilius Cedrus, L. Aelius Cydinus, Appuleius Adiutor, P. Instuleius Nedymus, C. Nonius Lorica).

In addition to the midwife and the mother, there are two other female figures present in this scene. One of the women, who is likely meant to represent a midwife's assistant, stands behind Althaea and holds her side. She also wears a short-sleeved tunic and seems to have a cropped hairstyle. The second woman stands behind the midwife, with her arms extended towards the midwife's head, almost resting her hands on her shoulders. This figure wears a long-sleeved tunic, as well as a long veil that drapes over her arms and falls down below her waist. On account of her dress, the fact that she does not seem to be actively engaged with the delivery, as are the midwife and the assistant, as well as the scene's mythological subject matter, it is possible that this individual represents a divinity who is overseeing the birth. Wood provides a similar suggestion: if the scene depicts the birth of Meleager, then the figure looking on is one of the Fates and serves as a sign of the portentous birth of the hero.[194]

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[193] Wood 2001: 36-38. Lehmann (1953: 57-58) identifies the seated figure in this scene as Adonis, attended to by two other figures caring for his wound from the boar, while Aphrodite looks on with her arms extended. However, I agree with Wood (2000: 84 and 2001: 33-35) and Sogliano (1874: 15), who observe that the seated figure is unmistakably female with breasts (the midwife figure also appears to have visible breasts). Moreover, their garments suggest that they are female, as they are of modest length, extending to just above their ankles, a feature that is quite noticeable on the midwife figure.

As for the parturient, she is seated on a birthing chair, with her legs spread slightly open. Although it is difficult to determine if her hair is loosened or veiled, it is evident from the drapery folds visible on her torso and thighs that she is indeed clothed. Moreover, her garment is rather modest, as it covers her breasts and also extends to just above her knee, which brings to mind Soranus' advice to the midwife to cover the patient's sexual organs in order to preserve her modesty.[195]

The facial expressions of the women on this ivory plaque also reflect the ideal behaviour that the *obstetrix* and her assistants ought to exhibit in the presence of their patient, who appears to be frowning slightly. Unlike the midwife in the Ostian terra cotta, the one in this scene focuses on the actions of her hands, while she avoids staring at the mother's groin, and her expression reflects her concentration on the event and her concern for her patient. The midwife's assistant, as well as the divinity in the background, appears neutral and almost expressionless, which represents the calm demeanour that these women were expected to have for the duration of the delivery.

(iv) Post-natal care

Once she had successfully delivered the neonate, the *obstetrix* continued to play an important role in the post-natal care of the mother and infant. Unfortunately, Soranus' work containing advice on the care of the woman after labour (*Τίς ἡ τῆς ἀποκεκυίας*

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[194] Wood 2001: 37.

[195] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.2.

ἐπιμέλεια) does not survive; however, an intact, albeit brief, discussion of how to properly treat the intumescence of the new mother's breasts (*Πεϱὶ σπαϱγήσεως μαστῶν*) is extant.[196] Therefore, this surviving section provides insight into his treatment of women immediately after they have given birth. According to Soranus, the mother undergoes two stages associated with the influx of milk: the first stage, which is referred to as *χόνδϱωσις* (lumpiness), is characterized by the swelling of the breasts and the resulting heaviness, and the second, which is called *σπάϱγησις* (intumescence), is the later tense and inflamed state.[197] Once more, the comfort of the mother is the focus, as the physician instructs the midwife to treat the inflammation with mildly contracting remedies (such as diluted vinegar, applied with a sea sponge). However, if her patient's condition has surpassed the common discomfort associated with this post-natal stage and if suppuration (formation of pus) has begun, the midwife is no longer capable of treating the patient, since surgical intervention is needed to drain the fluid, and thus the services of a *medicus* are required.[198]

In the second half of this section, Soranus outlines how the *obstetrix* should treat mothers who have chosen not to nurse their own children, which would have been the majority of her clients. Most of this section comprises the physician's criticism directed towards some of the techniques that have been used to prevent the production of milk: Soranus argues that the ingredients used in the remedies (such as brine, vinegar, and sea water) are far too pungent for the mother in her post-natal state. Instead of these harsh methods, he advises the midwife to apply ground pyrite to her patient's breasts and then gradually tighten her chest with a breast binder, which helps to hinder the influx of milk.[199] It is clearly the goal of the *obstetrix* to prevent the mother from experiencing not just pungent odours from unpleasant remedies, but also from the bruising and irritation that would result if the midwife allowed her client to nurse the baby as a means to relieve discomfort.[200]

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[196] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.7-8: 'Μέϱος τι τῆς ἀποκεκυηκυιῶν ἐπιμελείας καὶ τὸ πεϱὶ τοῦ πϱοκειμένου διαλαβεῖν'- 'A discussion of the proposed subject also falls under care of the woman after labour' (trans. Temkin 1991). The physician remarks that this portion of the text is also featured in his chapter on the post-natal care of the woman. Soranus' fifth century Latin adaptor, Caelius Aurelianus, provides a similar discussion in Book 1 of his *Genecia*. Although his advice is divided differently (the sections are presented as follows: 108. *De spargesi*, 109. *Ad stringendum lac*, 110. *Ad fervorem et tumorem mamillarum*, and 111. *Ad pondus mamillarum*), Aurelianus appears to describe the discomfort associated with the intumescence of the breasts and suggests treatment that is similar to that provided in the earlier work of Soranus.

[197] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.7.

[198] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.7.

Perhaps the most important responsibility that the *obstetrix* had after the birth of the infant was to decide upon the child's viability. After she determined the sex of the newborn, the midwife considered the health of the mother throughout her pregnancy and the length of the gestation period. As well, the *obstetrix* tested the vigour of the baby's cry by placing him on the ground, and if the baby did not cry 'properly', it was possible that he had an 'unfavourable condition'. She also conducted a physical examination of the neonate, during which she inspected the child's parts and senses and ensured the following:

> '…that its [the child's] ducts, namely of the ears, nose, pharynx, urethra, anus are free from obstruction; that the natural functions of every

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[199] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.8. In his *Materia Medica* of Soranus' text, Temkin identifies pyrite stone as *lithos pyrites* (with the chemical formula FeS_2 or $Cu FeS_2$), which is commonly referred to as 'fool's gold' (Temkin 1991: 237-238).

[200] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.8.

> <member> are neither sluggish nor weak; that the joints bend and stretch; that it has due size and shape and is properly sensitive in every respect. This we may recognize from pressing the fingers against the surface of the body, for it is natural to suffer pain from everything that pricks or squeezes.'[201]

If the infant satisfied all of these requirements, the midwife was able to offer a favourable opinion of the infant's viability to the *paterfamilias*, who ultimately decided whether he would accept the child as his own. The midwife was required to sever the navel cord carefully, in a procedure referred to as the omphalotomy (*ἡ ὀμφαλοτομία*), after the newborn had rested for some time after the birth.[202] Upon the removal of the umbilical cord, the midwife provided the child with his first bath, a task that was later taken up by the *nutrix* (wet-nurse) once the infant was transferred to her care. The *obstetrix* was concerned with gently cleansing the delicate skin of the newborn and so she sprinkled the baby with an emulsion of fine, powdery salt, honey (or olive oil), and barley juice (or fenugreek), which was then rinsed off with lukewarm water. The midwife performed this bathing process twice, in order to ensure that any uterine residue was removed and that the area of the child's navel, and other parts, were unhindered.[203]

The child's first bath is a common motif that appears on biographical sarcophagi, as this scene is frequently used to represent the first stage in the life course. The bath of the newborn was considered a more pleasant scene than the actual delivery, and thus serves as an iconographic reference to the child's birth.[204] Although she is more of a supplementary figure in the scene, with the mother and infant being the primary focus, the *obstetrix* does appear here, engaged in her duty of washing the infant in the presence of the mother. A life course sarcophagus from Rome, which dates to approximately the beginning of the 3rd century AD, contains a scene that serves as an excellent example (Figure 6).[205] The midwife is hunched over, holding the naked newborn in her arms, while she looks out towards the viewer, as opposed to in the direction of the mother, with a neutral facial expression. Her attire is simple and modest, as she wears a short-sleeved tunic that extends to just above her bare feet, with her hair fashioned into a practical, cropped hairstyle.

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[201] Dasen 2009: 200; Sor. *Gyn*. 2.10: 'ἔκ τε τοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς μέρεσι καὶ μορίοις καὶ ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν ἄρτιον ὑπάρχειν καὶ τοὺς πόρους ἔχειν ἀπαρεμποδίστους, οἷον ὤτων, ῥινῶν, φάρυγγος, οὐρήθρας, δακτυλίου, καὶ τὰς ἑκάστου <μορίου> φυσικὰς κινήσεις μὴ νωθρὰς (καὶ) μηδὲ ἐκλυτους καὶ τὰς τῶν ἄρθρων κάμψεις τε καὶ ἐκτάσεις μεγέθη τε καὶ σχήματα καὶ τὴν πᾶσαν ἐμβάλλουσαν εὐαισθησίαν, ἣν γνωρίζομεν κἀκ τῆς ἐπιφανείας ἐπερείδοντες τοὺς δακτύλους · κατὰ φύσιν γάρ ἐστιν τὸ πρὸς ἕκαστον ἀλγεῖν τῶν νυσσόντων ἢ θλιβόντων' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[202] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.11; Dasen 2009: 200.

[203] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.13; Garnsey 1991: 56-59.

The mother is seated on a stool, watching over the midwife and newborn, and she holds her left hand towards her face, while she uses her right hand to support herself. This relaxed stance suggests that the mother is in a state of recovery after having given birth.[206] The mother figure is modestly dressed in a long garment and wears a veil over her hair; the veil distinguishes her from the rest of the figures in the scene and signifies her status as a respectable Roman *matrona*. In the background, one of the female attendants is stationed behind the mother, while the other stands prepared to receive the bathed infant in a towel.

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[204] Amedick 1991: 60; Huskinson 1996: 11; George 2000: 195.

[205] See Amedick 1991: 140 for the dating of the sarcophagus. For another version of the first bath scene, which depicts a young midwife performing the bath before an old nurse, consult Amedick 1991: 63, 165 (Kat. 273, tafel 64.1).

[206] Dasen 2009: 204.

There is also a supernatural component to this scene, as there are two female figures present, standing behind the midwife and the infant, who do not appear to be engaged directly with the first bath. These women have been identified as the *Parcae*, or Fates, who set out the destiny of the child as soon as he is born. One of the women inscribes the newborn's fate on a globe, which sits on top of a pillar before her, while the other looks over the former's shoulder and writes on a scroll.[207] It has been argued that the presence of the *Parcae* in the first bath scene is meant to symbolize the highly cultured background of the deceased individual, as well as the happy beginning of the child's life.[208] While this is a plausible interpretation, their inclusion could also represent the untimely death of the deceased, which is fitting due to the object's funerary context. Moreover, it serves as an allusion to the power of the midwife, as she played a role similar to that of the *Parcae*: she was the one who ultimately determined the fate of the infant at birth.[209]

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[207] Amedick 1991: 140; Dasen 2009: 204.

[208] Wegner 1966: 130; Kampen 1981: 37.

[209] Another possible interpretation is that the *Parcae* are meant to be an allusion to the notions of destiny presented in Stoicism, the philosophical school of thought which stresses the importance of accepting one's fate. This ideology is presented in *consolatio* literature which demonstrates how the Romans were expected to respond to sudden death. I would like to warmly thank Dr. Michele George for her suggestions concerning this sarcophagus.

The *obstetrix* was also responsible for swaddling the infant for the first time.[210] Roman doctors and midwives considered this practice beneficial, since they believed that it helped to strengthen the child's nerves, stop him from twisting himself into undesirable positions, as well as prevent the newborn from potentially scratching his eyes with his fingernails. Swaddling also contributed to the creation of the infant's 'ideal form', as the midwife wrapped the soft, woolen bandages around the torso of male babies with an even pressure, while she bound females around 'the breasts more tightly, yet keeping the region of the loins loose, for in women this form is more becoming.' Furthermore, midwives used swaddling as a means to 'correct' any part of the infant that became twisted during the delivery back into its natural shape.[211] This responsibility for correcting the infant's body further emphasizes the authoritative position that the *obstetrix* had over the life of the child. In addition to determining the viability of the infant, the midwife was also the figure who ensured the proper physical development of the newborn.

It appears that, after the midwife swaddled the infant for the first time, she transferred the responsibility of the child's welfare to the *nutrix*, who served as the primary care giver throughout the period of early childhood.[212] While it is clear that her most significant role in the life of the mother and child had come to an end, it is likely that she remained an important figure in the early infancy and childhood of her patient. The final six sections of Book 2 of the *Gynaikeia* are concerned with the treatment of common childhood ailments, primarily inflamed tonsils, thrush (a superficial ulcer in the mouth), exanthemata (skin rash), wheezing and coughing, siriasis (heatstroke), and flux of the bowels (diarrhoea).[213] Since the midwife was expected to administer medical care to women, beyond the realm of pregnancy and childbirth, it is possible that she was likewise summoned to provide basic medical care for the infant.

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[210] For a discussion of the detrimental effects of swaddling, especially for infant girls, consult Chapter 1: The Social Context of Roman Maternity, pp. 45-46.

[211] Rawson 2003: 121; Sor. *Gyn*. 2.14; 2.15: '...μᾶλλον δὲ τὰ κατὰ τοὺς μαστοὺς σφίγγουσα τῶν θηλειῶν, ἀνιεῖσα δὲ τὸ πεϱὶ τὴν ὀσφύν, εὐπϱεπέστεϱον γάϱ ἐστιν ἐπὶ γυναικῶν τοῦτο τὸ σχῆμα' (trans. Temkin 1991). Consult Rousselle 1988: 53-54 and Holman 1997: 81 for discussions of the 'oppressive' nature of swaddling.

[212] The responsibilities of the *nutrix* are discussed fully in Chapter 3: The Role of the *Nutrix* in Post-Natal Care.

The Negative Perception of *Obstetrices* in Rome

Despite the fact that *medici* were brought into the room of confinement in the event of difficult labour that required surgical intervention, childbirth and early infant care in Rome was primarily a female concern. Moreover, it has been suggested that the skills associated with midwifery and the understanding of gynaecological matters were passed down from one generation of women to the next, which emphasizes the importance of pregnancy, childbirth, and other female health issues within the 'realm of women'.[214] While it is clear that a great part of this knowledge of obstetrics and gynaecology was divulged to male medical writers, such as Soranus, Galen, and Caelius Aurelianus, some considered *obstetrices,* together with their skills and influence, mysterious and somewhat sinister figures.

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[213] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.50-57.

[214] Rousselle 1988: 40; Bradley 1991b: 92-95; Laes 2010: 267 and 2011: 57.

An *obstetrix* who adhered to the childbirth procedures, treatments for gynaecological disorders, and paediatrics outlined in Soranus' *Gynaikeia* was certainly the ideal, and was sought by wealthy Roman households; however, there is evidence which suggests that some Roman midwives used traditional folk medicine to treat their patients. These methods, which were rooted in superstition and magic, required odd, and frequently unsanitary and hazardous, ingredients. For example, Pliny the Elder, who was critical of these folk remedies, and yet endorsed them, suggests that the parturient drink a concoction of powdered sow's dung, or sow's milk mixed with honey wine, in order to alleviate labour pains. In his *De Medicina*, Celsus provides an equally odd recommendation for difficult labour: the woman ought to drink hedge mustard that has been mixed into tepid wine.[215] French observes, however, that the midwives who employed these remedies, despite their questionable efficacy and potentially hazardous effects, demonstrate that the parturient was giving birth in a supportive environment, surrounded by women who were concerned with her well-being.[216]

Roman medical practitioners, on the other hand, preferred to denounce superstition and thus were highly sceptical of folk medicine. While Soranus acknowledges that the use of folk treatments such as amulets could provide some comfort to the patient, he claims outright that the use of these remedies had no merit and that the physician should eliminate superstition completely from his medical practice.[217] Perhaps the best illustration of Soranus' negative attitude towards superstitious midwives occurs in his remark about those who refuse to perform the omphalotomy procedure with an iron blade because it 'is of ill omen. This is absolutely ridiculous, <for> crying itself is of ill omen, and yet it is with this that the child begins its life.'[218] Evidently, members of the educated medical community classified folk remedies as ineffective and the result of superstition.

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[215] Plin. *HN* 28.77.250; Celsus, *Med*. 5.25.14; French 1987: 70.

[216] French 1987: 70-71.

[217] Sor. *Gyn*. 3.42; Jackson 1988: 88.

The authority that an *obstetrix* had over the fate of a Roman couple's child might have also caused a sense of unease. As discussed in Chapter 1, the primary function of marriage in Rome was to produce legitimate children who would serve as heirs of their parents' property and continue the family's *nomen*. The midwives' authority over the viability of newborns was a genuine concern for free Roman families: these women could potentially be bribed with a substantial amount of money to deprive couples of their heirs. This possible outcome likely conjured up fear in some couples and perhaps contributed to the characterization of *obstetrices* as dishonourable and greedy figures who do make an appearance in the historical record. Ammianus Marcellinus, for example, provides in his history of the events of AD 357 a rather disturbing account of the empress Eusebia's plots against Constantius' sister Helena, the wife of Julian Caesar. He describes the following:

> 'She herself [Eusebia] had been childless all her life, and by her wiles she coaxed Helena to drink a rare potion, so that as often as she was with child she should have a miscarriage. For once before, in Gaul, when she had borne a baby boy, she lost it through this machination: a midwife had been bribed with a sum of money, and as soon as the child was born cut

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[218] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.11: 'ὅπεϱ παντελῶς ϰαταγέλαστόν ἐστιν · ϰαὶ <γὰϱ> τὸ ϰλαίειν αὐτὸ δυσοιώνιστόν ἐστιν, ἀπὸ δὲ τούτου τὸ γεννηθὲν ἄϱχεται τοῦ ζῆν' (trans. Temkin 1991).

> the umbilical cord more than was right, and so killed it; such great pains were taken that this most valiant man might have no heir.'[219]

In addition to providing insight into the motives behind Eusebia's actions, namely depriving Helena and Julian of an heir and the fact that she was childless, Ammianus Marcellinus reveals how midwives could be bribed into abusing their authority and their medical knowledge, as they were aware of the appropriate methods for the omphalotomy and how to induce an abortion in an unsuspecting patient.

Ammianus Marcellinus' narrative of Eusebia's schemes helps to illustrate the fear surrounding the authority of the midwife, but it is difficult to determine with certainty the degree of embellishment in his account. However, there is juridical evidence which proposes that this negative perception of *obstetrices* as easily corrupted was, in fact, common among Romans from social strata outside of the imperial family and the elite. In an entry concerning the provisions of the *Lex Aquilia*, the law which provided compensation for unlawful damage, Ulpian quotes the opinion of the jurist Labeo, who was active during the reign of Augustus, concerning negligence and the misuse of drugs. The jurist states that it is important to make a distinction in cases involving midwives who provided drugs to women: in his opinion, which Ulpian deems correct, if an *obstetrix* herself administered a fatal drug, she was the one to blame; however, if she gave the drug to the woman, who proceeded to take it herself, an *actio in factum* had to be granted.[220] The fact that this law was introduced and codified suggests that there might have been cases where a Roman midwife was suspected of poisoning her patient; as well, it reinforces the notion that there was some anxiety surrounding the authority of the midwife.

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[219] Amm. Marc. 31.16.10.18-19: '…ipsa quoad vixerat sterilis, quaesitumque venenum bibere per fraudem illexit, ut quotienscumque concepisset, immaturum abiceret partum. Nam et pridem in Galliis, cum marem genuisset infantem, hoc perdidit dolo, quod obstetrix corrupta mercede, mox natum, praesecto plus quam convenerat umbilico, necavit; tanta tamque diligens opera navabatur, ne fortissimi viri soboles appareret' (trans. Rolfe 1950 [Loeb]).

The Roman legal sources also explore cases where a mother and midwife worked together either to substitute a husband's rightful child with an illegitimate one or to supply an infant for a pregnancy that did not, in fact, occur, both of which resulted in concerns over legitimacy and inheritance. In a praetorian edict concerning the examination of pregnant women and the observation of delivery (*De inspiciendo uentre custodiendoque partu*), the urban praetor Valerius Priscianus delivered a rescript in response to a certain Rutilius Severus,[221] who had requested that a person observe his wife Domitia (whom he had divorced). Severus insisted that Domitia was pregnant, a claim which she denied, and thus he sought help from the authorities. For this case, as well as others that revolved around women who denied that they were pregnant, the supposed mother was required to go to the house of a very respectable woman, where three skilled and trustworthy midwives (*tres obstetrices probatae et artis et fidei*) would examine her.

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[220] *Dig*. 9.2.9.1 (Ulpian): 'Item si obstetrix medicamentum dederit et inde mulier perierit, Labeo distinguit, ut, si quidem suis minibus supposuit, uideatur occidisse: sin uero dedit, ut sibi mulier offerret, in factum actionem dandam, quae sententia uera est: magis enim causam mortis praestitit quam occidit.' An *actio in factum* is required when the plaintiff is not covered by the *ius*, but claims that a set of facts will justify a remedy. However, the *actio* must be approved by the praetor in his formula (Berger 1953: 475, see the entry for *formula in ius concepta*).

[221] This rescripts dates to the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (AD 161-169).

The rescript states that, if at least two of the three midwives believed that Domitia was pregnant, she was asked to allow an observer appointed by Severus into the room of confinement. If Domitia was telling the truth and did not give birth, her former husband would be found guilty of injuring his wife.[222]

The rescript also outlines the proper legal procedure for cases involving pregnant widows. In order to ensure that no substituted babies were brought into the room of confinement, the room had to have only one entrance, as well as three freeborn men and three freeborn women, with two companions serving as guards, present. Moreover, when the pregnant woman entered or left the room, the individuals observing her were permitted to examine the room and anyone who entered it. As for the supervision of the two midwives who were required to conduct the delivery, up to five freeborn women could be sent to monitor the birth, and these women had to be searched in case they were pregnant. Priscianus provides one final precaution: he recommends that, 'there must be at least three lights in the room. For darkness is better suited to substitution of a child.'[223]

Since the mother is at the centre of these conflicts, the penalties that are laid out in the praetorian edict are chiefly concerned with her actions. For example, if the praetor (who is acting on behalf of her husband) asks that a woman be interrogated as to whether she is pregnant and she refuses to appear in court for the interrogation, her property is either seized or she is fined.[224] Although the rescript does not comment on the punishment of *obstetrices* who are found guilty of substituting babies, the later Paul, in his guidelines concerning the birth of children, explicitly states that the only suitable punishment for midwives who commit this crime is death.[225] In addition to revealing how conflicts concerning legitimacy were handled, the regulations established by the jurists provide significant insight into the negative perception of Roman midwives as women who were suspected of substituting babies in the delivery room, as a service to the mother, in order to trick unwitting husbands. As well, the image of the mother and the midwife working together to the detriment of the unsuspecting father contributes to the notion that childbirth was viewed as falling within the realm of women and was considered mysterious by men.

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[222] *Dig*. 25.4.1.Pr. (Ulpian).

[223] *Dig*. 25.4.1.10 (Ulpian): 'tria lumina ne minus ibi sint, scilicet quia tenebrae ad subiciendum aptiores sunt.'

[224] *Dig*. 25.4.1.3 (Ulpian).

The midwife is also represented as a devious figure in the works of comedic writers and her ability to provide changelings, a source of anxiety for Roman fathers, is employed as a means to poke fun at the male ignorance of childbirth.[226] The authors portray the midwife as a drunken and untrustworthy woman who is rather mischievous. In Terence's *Andria*, for example, the *ancilla*, Mysis, is reluctant to entrust the *obstetrix*, Lesbia, with her *domina*'s confinement, since she is an unreliable and suspicious woman who also happens to be the drinking partner of Archylis, the housekeeper.[227] The slave Davus provides a similar critical attitude towards the midwife, as he observed how the

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[225] Paul, *Sent*. 2.24.9.

[226] Laes 2010: 268.

[227] Ter. *An*. 228-233.

domina had Lesbia summoned in order to bring in a baby to trick her husband Pamphilus into thinking that she was pregnant.[228] Despite the Greek origins of this play and the exaggerated characteristics associated with the *topos* of the comical *obstetrix*, the depiction of the midwife in this genre remains significant, as it serves as a reflection of what might have been considered part of the stereotypical image of these women in Roman society.

The social status of the midwife was also likely the driving factor in their negative image. Some of these *obstetrices* had to endure the social disgrace that was associated with their servile status, which was also the case for the rest of the slave population. Since slaves were deemed by nature to be morally inferior, prone to irrational behaviour, and ultimately corruptible, the freeborn population believed that their enslavement was justified.[229] Even though freedwomen had acquired freed status and Roman citizenship, they still had to endure similar prejudicial attitudes because of their servile origins. The stigma that was attached to the social status of some *obstetrices* who practiced in Rome corresponds to the untrustworthy image of the midwife that appears in the legal sources, as well as in the historical writers and comic genre. The undesirable characteristics associated with their low social status likely fueled the anxiety that freeborn Romans felt about the authority that enslaved, or freed, women had over the welfare of their wives and children.

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[228] Ter. *An*. 511-516. See also Ter. *Eun*. 35-40 for the prologue's discussion of the use of common characters in comedy, which included the midwife who provides changeling babies in the delivery room.

[229] Treggiari 1969: 209; George 2005a: 42.

The Dignified *Obstetrix*

If we consider Soranus' criticism of the superstitious practice of some midwives, the fear of these women abusing their authority and skills, their reputation for substituting infants, and their inferior social status, the negative perception of midwives in a Roman context is not at all surprising. Despite her unscrupulous reputation, the *obstetrix* was nevertheless a highly valued figure who played a crucial role in the life of the mother and baby. Her duties during the pregnancy, labour, and delivery, as well as the post-natal care of mother and infant, required the midwife to conduct herself in a respectable manner, as she was always mindful of the comfort and modesty of the parturient. Furthermore, the *paterfamilias* took her opinion on the viability of the newborn into serious consideration and she functioned as a knowledgeable assistant to the *medicus* during difficult deliveries that needed surgical intervention. The evident mixed perceptions of the *obstetrix* suggest that she was indeed a multifaceted figure.

Soranus' description of 'what persons are fit to become midwives' (*Τίς ἐστιν ἐπιτήδειος πρὸς τὸ γενέσθαι μαῖα*) and 'who are the best midwives' (*Τίς ἀρίστη μαῖα*) contributes further to the positive characterization of the midwife. Soranus observes that women who possess the following attributes are fit to become midwives:

> 'A suitable person will be literate, with her wits about her, possessed of a good memory, loving work, respectable and generally not unduly handicapped as regards her senses, sound of limb, robust, and, according to some people, endowed with long slim fingers and short nails at her fingertips.'[230]

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[230] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.3: 'ἐπιτήδειος δέ ἐστιν ἡ γραμμάτων ἐντός, ἀγχίνους, μνήμων, φιλόπονος, κόσμιος καὶ κατὰ τὸ κοινὸν ἀπαρεμπόδιστος ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν, ἀρτιμελής, εὔτονος, ὡς δ'<ἔνιοι> λέγουσιν καὶ μακροὺς καὶ λεπτοὺς ἔχουσα καὶ τοὺς τῶν χειρῶν δακτύλους καὶ ὑπεσταλκότας ταῖς ῥαξὶν τοὺς ὄνυχας' (trans. Temkin 1991).

The rationale behind these desired character traits is evident since the *obstetrix* had to be physically and mentally capable enough to endure delivering a baby and also had to have a substantial knowledge of medical theory, which she could rely on during standard deliveries as well as those in which complications arise.[231]

Moreover, in Soranus' overview of the basic characteristics that a midwife ought to have, he insists that she must be a respectable woman, 'since people will have to trust their household and the secrets of their lives to her and because to women of bad character the semblance of medical instruction is a cover for evil scheming.'[232] It was essential for these women to be trustworthy and discreet and it is clear why this was the case. Since the majority of *obstetrices* were of low social status, persons who were typically characterized as being dishonest and untrustworthy by nature, it seems that the *obstetrix* had to somehow convince her patients that she was a respectable figure through her character, natural skill, and training. Lastly, Soranus states that the best midwife 'will be well disciplined and always sober, since it is uncertain when she may be summoned to those in danger. She will have a quiet disposition, for she will have to share many secrets of life.'[233] This description of the ideal midwife and her responsibilities suggest that some dignity must have been assigned to Roman midwives who displayed these attributes. The negative characterization of the midwife coupled with her high valuation has caused a complex dual image of the *obstetrix* to emerge.

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[231] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.3; Hanson and Green 1994: 1002.

[232] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.3: 'κόσμιος δὲ διὰ τὸ μέλλειν οἰκίας πιστεύεσθαι καὶ μυστήρια βίου, καὶ ὅτι ταῖς φαύλαις τὸ ἦθος εἰς τὸ ἐπιβουλεύειν ἐφόδιόν ἐστι τὸ δοκεῖν ἰατρικὰς ἔχειν κατηχήσεις' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[233] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.4: 'σώφρονα δὲ καὶ νήφουσαν ἀεὶ διὰ τὸ ἄδηλον τῶν πρὸς τὰς κινδυνευούσας μετακλήσεων · ἥσυχον δὲ ἔχουσαν θυμὸν ὡς πολλῶν τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ μυστηρίων μετέχειν μέλλουσαν' (trans. Temkin 1991).

Both Laes and Flemming provide interpretations of the dual image of the *obstetrix*. In his article on the educated midwife in the Roman Empire, Laes approaches the topic by focussing primarily on her negative portrayal as the drunk, unreliable old woman in comedy and Soranus' highly idealized image of the midwife in the *Gynaikeia*. He argues that the midwife receives a social 'upgrade' in the *Gynaikeia*, but that it was not without a distinct purpose. There was certainly concern among the elite Romans surrounding the fact that their children were cared for by persons whom they considered 'social outsiders'. Laes concludes that Soranus 'masked' the lower social status of midwives and placed them on a more esteemed level in an attempt to allay the fears of the elite who entrusted the welfare of their wives and children to these 'outsiders'.[234]

Flemming suggests that there was a practical purpose behind the ideal portrayal, which is that the figure helps to convey a definition and force to the work. She highlights the fact that Soranus approaches his subject from a sociological perspective as opposed to a philosophical one, and that the midwife he describes is, in fact, the best midwife and 'it is to a more general, concomitant, optimization that the text is dedicated'.[235] Although these arguments are persuasive, and I agree that part of Soranus' goal was to help alleviate the anxiety of his patients, it is difficult to conclude that the physician is 'masking' completely the low status of *obstetrices*. There are other aspects that must be examined.

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[234] Laes 2010: 276-279.

[235] Flemming 2000: 232.

It is important to consider the fact that *obstetrices* did not comprise Soranus' entire audience. The procedures that are outlined in the *Gynaikeia*, especially in Book 2, are evidently aimed at the midwife who is supervising the childbirth; however, as Hanson observes, Soranus' work also functioned as a means for the *paterfamilias* to determine whether or not the midwives who worked in his household were competent. Flemming provides a similar interpretation, as she suggests that an additional purpose of the *Gynaikeia* was that it advised elite Roman men on how to obtain the best service from the best midwives available.[236]

If we accept the arguments put forth by Hanson and Flemming, the ideal qualities that are outlined by Soranus in his descriptions of the women who are fit to become midwives and those who are the best midwives are likely directed towards the *paterfamilias*, in order to help him select a suitable slave, or other woman of low social status, to serve as an *obstetrix*. While it is understandable for a medical professional to display discipline, a clear mind, and the ability to be silent, it is worth noting that these attributes were also considered desirable characteristics to have in a slave who served a crucial function in the master's household. As well, the room in which the intimate act of childbirth and the bodily functions that accompanied it required the silent assistance of slaves, as opposed to the presence of a dignified, freeborn Roman.

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[236] Hanson 1994: 170; Flemming 2000: 232.

The ideal midwife described in the *Gynaikeia* shares some striking similarities with another servile, or low status, figure: the *vilicus* (male overseer) who supervised the *villa rustica*. The agricultural treatises of Cato, Varro, and Columella identify the *vilicus* as being a vital animate instrument that is needed in order for the rural estate to function properly. Cato, for example, in his descriptions of the proper equipment for an olive yard of 240 *iugera* and a vineyard of 100 *iugera* lists the *vilicus* as the very first required item.[237] The importance placed on the *vilicus* is alluded to in Varro's later *De re rustica*, an agricultural handbook that he had written for his wife Fundania. In a discussion concerning the number of slaves required for an olive yard and vineyard, the aforementioned recommendations of Cato are compared with those put forth by the Saserna, a father and son agricultural authority whose work no longer survives. In his contribution to this debate, Varro argues the following:

> 'Further, he [Cato] should have named the overseer and the housekeeper outside of the number of slaves; for if you cultivate less than 240 *iugera* of olives you cannot get along with less than one overseer, nor if you cultivate twice as large a place or more will you have to keep two or three overseers.'[238]

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[237] Cato, *Agr*. 10-11.

[238] Varro, *Rust*. 1.18: 'Praeterea extra familiam debuit dicere vilicum et vilicam. Neque enim, si minus CCXL iugera oliveti colas, non possis minus uno vilico habere, nec, si bis tanto ampliorem fundum aut eo plus colas, ideo duo vilici aut tres habendi' (trans. Hooper 1934 [Loeb]). In this same section (1.18) Varro provides a full summary of the opinions of Cato, the Saserna family, and Varro. A *iugerum* is an area of 28, 800 square feet, approximately 2/3 acre. See the glossary of terms in Hooper's translation].

Although counting the *vilicus* among equipment alludes to their inferior social status, it is also evident that these experts of agriculture deemed these slaves a necessity. Furthermore, Varro's insistence on the *dominus* counting the *vilicus* separately from the rest of the slaves suggests that, despite his slave status, the overseer was not only considered an essential part of the *villa rustica*, regardless of the size of the land, but also that it was important to differentiate the *vilicus* from the rest of the slave *familia* on account of the necessity of his role.

The slave status of the overseer is made clear by Columella, who, in his recommendations for which persons make the best overseers, suggests to the *dominus* that he not pick a slave who is physically attractive nor accustomed to the 'voluptuous occupations of the city', since these sorts of slaves are prone to laziness.[239] Instead, these authors recommend that the *dominus* appoint a *vilicus* who 'has been hardened by farm work from his infancy, one who has been tested by experience', he should be middle-aged, of strong physique, be skilled in farm operations, and the individual ought to be literate, or, at the very least, possess a 'retentive mind'.[240]

The physical and character descriptions of the *vilicus* and the *obstetrix* mirror each other, as they are both identified as slaves who are very much distinguished from the rest of the household. Despite their inferior social status, the *vilicus* and the *obstetrix* were nevertheless entrusted with significant responsibilities that had a substantial impact on their owners' households. While the *vilicus* ensured that the master's rural estate was run smoothly, provided successful yields, and thus was an important financial resource for the *dominus* and his family, the *obstetrix* held the fate of the master's children and the welfare of his wife in her hands. Furthermore, this interesting situation also occurs once the child becomes older and their welfare is transferred to the *nutrix*.

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[239] Columella, *Rust*. 1.8.

[240] Columella, *Rust*. 1.8.2-4; Varro, *Rust*. 1.17.

The high valuation that was placed on *obstetrices* is also manifested in the monetary worth that was assigned to enslaved male and female medical practitioners. In the correspondence between the Emperor Justinian and John the Praetorian Prefect, that was concerned with the appropriate division of property and slaves among heirs, the cost of certain types of slaves are outlined, with a particular focus on the worth of skilled slaves. Non-trained slaves were assigned a lower price of 20 *solidi,* while artisans were worth a higher value of 30 *solidi,* and slaves who functioned in a more professional capacity, such as notaries, were more expensive at 50 *solidi*; however, *medici* and *obstetrices* were considered even more prized, as they were sold for 60 *solidi*.[241] Their high cost appears to have been factored into the amount of training that they received. Treggiari argues that enslaved *obstetrices* must have received some form of training outside of the household, unlike slaves who served as readers and secretaries, who probably were trained by more experienced household staff.[242]

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[241] *Cod. Iust*. 6.43.3.

[242] Treggiari 1976: 87 and 1979: 191.

The close relationship that the *obstetrix* had with her *domina* also helped to distinguish her from the rest of the *familia*. Since the midwife aided the mother throughout her pregnancy, labour, and delivery, as well as assisted in her post-natal care and paediatrics, it is probable that a positive bond often arose between the two women. It is possible that through this relationship, the *domina* became inclined to place these women in a more favourable position within the household, which would otherwise have not been feasible due to the fact that they rarely interacted with the male master. This ideal position, as Weaver argues, likely caused these midwives to experience a higher manumission rate in comparison to the male slaves.[243] Another suggestion is that, as these women and their function within the household were considered essential, they might have received a substantial *peculium* (allowance). If this was the case, they were then also in a position to accumulate enough funds to purchase their own freedom. Evidently, the tasks that the midwife performed for the household, and especially for her *domina*, children, and other members of the household, were highly valued.

In addition to the elite perception of *obstetrices*, it is important to consider the way these women viewed themselves and their attitude towards their work. As is often the case with members of the slave population and the lower social strata, funerary inscriptions provide the best glimpse into the lives and perspectives of Roman midwives. *Obstetrices* are represented in the epigraphic record, with a total of 32 Latin epitaphs from throughout the Empire.[244] While the number appears small, it is significant when contrasted with the quantity of Greek epitaphs dedicated to *μαῖαι,* of which there are only 13 extant examples.[245]

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[243] Weaver 1972: 70; Treggiari 1979: 191-192. The epigraphic evidence also appears to support this notion, as 34% of the extant inscriptions (n = 32) commemorate *libertae*, who were likely manumitted out of gratitude for their services (Laes 2010: 271).

Geographical Region	**Inscriptions**
Dalmatia (n=1)	*CIL* III 8820
Rome (n=18)	*CIL* VI 4458; *CIL* VI 6325; *CIL* VI 6647; *CIL* VI 6832; *CIL* VI 8192; *CIL* VI 8207; *CIL* VI 8947; *CIL* VI 8948; *CIL* VI 8949; *CIL* VI 9720; *CIL* VI 9721; *CIL* VI 9722; *CIL* VI 9723; *CIL* VI 9724; *CIL* VI 9725; *CIL* VI 37810; *AE* 1926, 52; *AE* 1991, 126
Africa (n=5)	*CIL* VIII 4896; *CIL* VIII 5155; *CIL* VIII 15593; *CIL* VIII 25394; *AE* 1980, 936
Southern Italy (n=3)	*CIL* X 1933; *CIL* X 3972; *AE* 2005, 328
Central Italy (n=2)	*CIL* XI 3391; *CIL* XI 4128
Gallia Narbonensis (n=1)	*AE* 1979, 396
Belgica (n=1)	*CIL* XIII 3706
Isola Sacra (n=1)	*IPOstie* A 222

Table 2.1: The geographical regions of inscriptions that commemorate *obstetrices* (information provided by Laes 2010: 280-284).

From the epigraphic dossier, 11 of the 32 inscriptions commemorate midwives who were explicitly identified as women of freed status, or *libertae*, which is made clear through the standard *l.* abbreviation (for *liberta*) in their nomenclature, as well as the presence of their *nomen* and *cognomen*.[246] As for the representation of the slave population, it is certain that 6 of the women were enslaved at the time of death.[247] As for the remaining 15 women in the inscriptions, whom we are only able to label as *incertae*, 12 of these midwives were possibly *libertae,* while 3 might have been *servae*.[248] Therefore, slaves and women of servile origin comprise at least 53% of the *obstetrices* represented in the epigraphic record.

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[244] See Funerary Inscription Appendix – *Obstetrices,* pp. 240-252, which is a modified version of Laes 2010: 280-284 (Latin Inscriptions for Midwives in the Imperium Romanum). I have also included Scribonia Attice's epitaph from the Isola Sacra necropolis in the appendix (*IPOstie* A 222, Cat. No. 32). Scribonia's epitaph does not explicitly state her occupation, but the terra cotta childbirth scene on her tomb implies that she was a midwife.

[245] For the catalogue of Greek inscriptions commemorating *μαῖαι*, consult Laes 2011a: 158-162.

[246] With the exception of one inscription (Cat. No. 15, *CIL* VI 9724), the names of the commemorated midwives are clearly indicated. While only 11 of the women display their *liberta* status clearly, a total of 21 of the inscriptions feature a *nomen* and a *cognomen*, which suggests that there might have been even more freedwomen midwives.

As for the epigraphic features themselves, there appears to be some variation in what exactly appears on the epitaphs of Roman midwives. For example, the inscription that commemorates the freed midwife, Aelia Sotera, from Dalmatia (Cat. No. 1) reads as follows:

> *D(is) M(anibus) | Aeliae Soter(a)e op | stetrici def(unctae) an(norum) XXXV | Ael(ius) Antonianus | Themistocles | libertae b(ene) m(erenti)*
>
> To the Spirits of the Dead. Aelius Antonianus Themistocles (set this up) for his well-deserving freedwoman, Aelia Sotera, midwife, having died at 35 years of age.[249]

The inscription begins with an invocation of the dead, which is signified by the abbreviated form of *Dis Manibus*, an epigraphic feature that appears on 10 out of the 32 inscriptions.[250] The two names of the deceased woman in line two and the presence of the word *libertae* in the sixth line of the inscription indicate that Sotera was of freed status. Her occupational title of *opstetrix* is given a prominent position, appearing immediately after her name. Sotera's age is provided, as well as the name of the dedicator of her monument, a certain Aelius Antonianus Themistocles, who might have been her patron, her husband, or both.

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[247] Confirmed *libertae*: Catalogue Number 1 (*CIL* III 8820), 2 (*CIL* VI 4458), 6 (*CIL* VI 8192), 7 (*CIL* VI 8207), 8 (*CIL* VI 8947), 10 (*CIL* VI 8949), 12 (*CIL* VI 9721), 14 (*CIL* VI 9723), 17 (*CIL* VI 37810), 26 (*CIL* X 3972), and 27 (*AE* 2005, 328). Confirmed *servae*: Cat. Nos. 3 (*CIL* VI 6325), 4 (*CIL* VI 6647), 5 (*CIL* VI 6832), 9 (*CIL* VI 8948), 18 (*AE* 1991, 127 [1926, 52]), and 19 (*AE* 1991, 126).

[248] Possible *libertae*: Catalogue Number 11 (*CIL* VI 9720), 13 (*CIL* VI 9722), 15 (*CIL* VI 9724), 16 (*CIL* VI 9725), 21 (*CIL* VIII 5155), 22 (*CIL* VIII 15593), 23 (*CIL* VIII 25394), 24 (*AE* 1980, 936), 25 (*CIL* X 1933), 29 (*CIL* XI 4128), 31 (*CIL* XIII 3706), and 32 (*IPOstie* A 222). Possible *servae*: Cat. Nos. 20 (*CIL* VIII 4896), 28 (*CIL* XI 3391), and 30 (*AE* 1979, 396).

[249] *CIL* III 8820.

An epitaph that was set up to commemorate an enslaved *obstetrix* is that of a certain Secunda, who was a member of the *familia* of the Statilii, helps to illustrate the simple composition of some of the inscriptions (Cat. No. 3). The stone, which was found in the *columbarium* of the Statilii near the Porta Maggiore in Rome, simply mentions the following information:

Secunda | opstetrix | Statiliae · Maioris

Secunda, midwife, (slave of) Statilia Maior.[251]

The name of the deceased, which is in the nominative case, is the first element that appears, and since she, Secunda, possessed only one name at the time of her death, it is likely that she died while enslaved. The only other information that is provided about Secunda is her occupation, *opstetrix*, which is placed right after her name, and the name of her owner in the genitive case.

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[250] Cat. Nos. 13 (*CIL* VI 9722), 16 (*CIL* VI 9725), 20 (*CIL* VIII 4896), 21 (*CIL* VIII 5155), 22 (*CIL* VIII 15593), 23 (*CIL* VIII 25394), 24 (*AE* 1980, 936), 25 (*CIL* X 1933), and 32 (*IPOstie* A 222).

[251] *CIL* VI 6325.

The common feature of these two inscriptions, as well as 29 other examples in the epigraphic dossier, is the presence of some form of the term *obstetrix* in the nominative, dative, or genitive case. Concerning the mention of the occupational title, Treggiari argues that if a female slave had an important and specialized role in the household which caused her to have a high value, it is more likely that the woman would keep her title and have it memorialized, even if she had been manumitted.[252] It is logical to suggest that this applied to the Roman midwife.

Moreover, the inclusion of the word *obstetrix* at all, whether the midwife was enslaved or freed, suggests that the deceased had a sense of pride in her work. Many slaves and freedmen in Rome adopted the practice of mentioning their occupational title in their inscriptions, which represented their dignity and commitment to the services that they provided throughout their lifetime. Furthermore, as George and Joshel observe in their studies on social identity, the work of Roman freedmen, and the significance of occupational inscriptions, slaves and freedmen were essentially defined by their vocations, and displaying their job title in a permanent manner served as a counter to the inhumane nature of slavery.[253] The extant inscriptions that commemorate *obstetrices* certainly fall into the category of slaves and freedmen who considered their work an important part of their social identity.

The epitaphs also reveal that some midwives, regardless of their slave or freed status, enjoyed a somewhat advantaged position in Roman society. 11 of the inscriptions

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[252] Treggiari 1976: 96.

[253] Joshel 1992; George 2006: 27.

(Cat. Nos. 2 – 10, 18, and 27) commemorate women who served either one of the elite families of Rome, such as the Statilii and the Marcellae, or belonged to the *familia Caesaris*, the household of the emperor. If a slave or a freedwoman was associated with the imperial household, it was often presented on their epitaph in a conspicuous manner, as these slaves were considered the most privileged. For example, the freedwoman Antonia Thallusa (Cat. No. 8, *CIL* VI 8947) was an *obstetrix* who served the women of the imperial family, which is made evident by means of the inclusion of *Aug(ustae) l(ibertae)* in her inscription.

These inscriptions indicate that both the imperial and other elite families had *obstetrices* as part of their *familia*, and it is possible, as Treggiari and Kampen suggest, that these women not only served their *dominae*, but also provided medical care to and supervised the pregnancies of the household slaves.[254] Furthermore, the social position of the midwife within the imperial household might have been a fortunate one, as there is evidence which suggests that some *obstetrices* were served by slaves (*vicarii*) themselves. For example, Taxis Ionis (Cat. No. 18, *AE* 1926, 52; 1991, 127), an imperial midwife, was honoured by her *vicarii*, Hesper and Epitynchanus, who are named as the ones who financed her commemoration.[255]

Some of the inscriptions in the catalogue allude to the marital unions and family life of *obstetrices*. In epitaphs that were set up by husbands to their wives, the commemorator adhered to certain epigraphic conventions. In most cases, the husband praises his wife for her excellent management of the household, as well as for other desirable personal qualities that she might have had. As for women involved in trade and commercial business, it is rare that a husband would praise his wife's efforts directly, although the respect for his spouse is certainly implied by the presence of her occupation in the epitaph. It appears that Roman midwives are included in this category as well.[256] The epigraphic evidence shows that 12 midwives, whether they were freedwomen or slaves, were involved in some form of a union, either a legitimate Roman marriage or an informal slave marriage, *contubernium*. Moreover, in the examples that provide the name of the midwife's husband or partner, the husband is most often the one responsible for the commemoration. For example, the epitaph set up to Coelia Hagne from Puteoli (Cat. No. 25, *CIL* X 1933) reads:

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[254] Treggiari 1976: 87; Kampen 1981: 116.

[255] For more information on *vicarii*, consult Laes 2011: 62.

> *D(is) · M(anibus) | Coelia Hagne | obs(t)etrici | M(arcus) · Ulpius · Zosimus · | coniugi · sanctissim(ae).*
>
> To the spirits of the dead. Coelia Hagne, midwife. Marcus Ulpius Zosimus (made this) for his most venerable wife.

In addition to the mention of Hagne's occupation, her husband Zosimus refers to her as his most chaste wife, emphasizing their loving relationship and the female attribute, chastity, that was considered the most admirable.

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[256] Treggiari 1991: 244.

As for a dedication to a *contubernalis*,[257] the epitaph commemorating Hygia (Cat. No. 4, *CIL* VI 6647) is an interesting case. Her *contubernalis* and two of her fellow slaves stated the following:

> *Hygiae | Flaviae · Sabinae | opstetr(icis) · vixit · ann(os) XXX | Marius · Orthrus · et | Apollonius · contubernali | carissimae.*
>
> To Hygia, midwife of Flavia Sabina. She lived thirty years. Marius, Orthrus, and Apollonius (made this) for a most dear spouse.

The 30-year-old Hygia was enslaved at the time of her death and her spouse's name, Apollonius, is placed in a prominent position in her epitaph, beside the phrase '*contubernali carissimae*'. Once again, the standard epigraphic conventions governing spousal dedications are present, as Hygia is described as 'most dear' by her grieving partner. It is also noteworthy that Apollonius was not the sole dedicator of this monument, since his and Hygia's *conservi* Marius and Orthrus also helped pay for the commemoration. Such inscriptions are revealing about the social relations of Roman midwives, as they demonstrate that these women had a significant relationship with their *dominae* or *patronae* and also with their *conservi*, and even their *vicarii*. What is more, the inscriptions show that there were some *obstetrices* who were either part of an informal slave union or were legitimately married.

Furthermore, a few of the inscriptions indicate that, in addition to having a spouse, some of these *obstetrices* had children. The epitaph of Claudia Trophime (Cat. No. 11, *CIL* VI 9720), for example, mentions that her son, T. Cassius Trophimus, and her grandson, Ti. Cassius Trophimianus are the ones responsible for her monument. Another excellent case is the epitaph of Hygia Autronia Fortunata from Narnia (Cat. No. 29, *CIL* XI 4128), whose inscription clearly indicates that her son, Fidus, was her commemorator, as is indicated by the inclusion of the word *filius* after his name. The social and legal advantages of having children, as well as the stability and security associated with the institution of the Roman family, were certainly attractive to *obstetrices,* as well as to other slaves and freedmen, and epigraphic evidence demonstrates that some midwives were able to achieve this form of social advancement through having families of their own.

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[257] In the context of informal slave marriage (*contubernium*), the term *contubernalis* refers to the enslaved husband or wife. *Contubernalis* originally meant 'tent-companion' and was used frequently in the epitaphs of soldiers in reference to fellow soldiers and slave messmates (Treggiari 1981: 44).

Conclusion

The *obstetrix* held an extraordinary position in Roman society that resulted in a complex dual image. On the one hand, there was anxiety, primarily among members of the male elite, about the midwife due to her authoritative position over the freeborn children of her master and her significant involvement in the well-being of her *domina*. Furthermore, the midwife's close relationship with the mother could also prove detrimental to the father, as there were some instances where the pair worked together to substitute babies in the delivery room, which caused issues of illegitimacy to arise. This anxiety was likely enhanced by the fact that the majority of the women who were *obstetrices* were indeed either slaves or of servile origin, as these statuses had highly negative connotations.

On the other hand, the *obstetrix* was the medical practitioner who, through her knowledge of gynaecology and obstetrics, was responsible for providing treatment to Roman women. In addition to caring for the expectant mother throughout the gestation period, the midwife was expected to provide a sense of calm to her patient during her labour and delivery, as she recognized the significant impact that mental stress had on the process of childbirth. Even if complications arose during the birth and the services of a male *medicus* were deemed essential, the midwife nevertheless remained present, serving as a knowledgeable assistant and source of comfort for the parturient. Once the baby was born, the midwife had the important task of determining the newborn's viability, an authoritative role that evidently had a significant impact on a Roman household. These women, who were most often freedwomen or slaves, also exhibited a sense of pride in their skills and considered their occupation an important part of their social identity, which is evident from their epitaphs. Despite their social status, *obstetrices* were nevertheless considered highly valued women, who played a crucial role in Roman maternity. Lastly, the life of the *obstetrix* clearly extended beyond the medical realm. The funerary inscriptions that commemorate these women also reveal that some of them were concerned with having families of their own and that they sought the security and social advancement that was associated with the Roman family.

CHAPTER 3

The Role of the *Nutrix* in Roman Post-Natal Care and Early Childhood Development

Introduction

When the Roman midwife had completed her tasks of supervising the pregnancy and delivery, determining the newborn's viability, and performing the first bath and swaddle, the wet-nurse entered the life of new mother and infant. The wet-nurse, who is referred to as a *nutrix* in Latin and either *τίτθη* or *τροφός* in Greek, was ultimately responsible for the baby's welfare, education, and socialization throughout the period of early childhood. A papyrus fragment in the British Museum dating to the late third century AD indicates that the wet-nurse was considered by some to be an essential expense. In the concluding portion of the letter, a concerned set of in-laws, whose names are unknown, expresses disappointment to their son-in-law upon learning that he has forced their daughter to nurse her newborn. Before offering their affectionate greetings to their daughter and other friends and family members, the author states: 'if you wish, let the baby have a wet-nurse. I do not want my daughter to breast-feed'.[258] This preference for a *nutrix* was not at all exclusive to this family, as the use of wet-nurses appears to have been the norm in many Roman households throughout the Empire.[259]

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[258] London Papyrus 951 *verso*: 'αυτην [. . .] ουτ [. . .]κης αποθανουσης κατεπλευσαν ηκουσ[α] ο[τ]ι θηλαζειν αυτην αναγκαζεις ει θελ[εις τ]ο βρεφος εχετω τροφον εγω γαρ ουκ επιτ[ρε]πω τη θυγατρι μου θηλαζειν' (Greek text: Kenyon and Bell 1907: 213; trans. Lefkowitz and Fant 2005: 188).

[259] Bradley 1986: 201-202 and 1991a: 13-14; Laes 2011: 69.

There are two fundamental categories of reasoning surrounding the use of *nutrices* in a Roman context. If we consider the severe ramifications associated with births that occurred at a young age, as well as other demographic circumstances, it is clear that maternal mortality was a reality in many cases. Moreover, through their use of the Coale and Demeny model life tables, Parkin and Saller have suggested that it was probable that approximately 10% of all newborns in a Roman context did not have a mother when they turned 5-years-old, since the mother likely died in childbirth or as a result of complications from delivery.[260] In addition to maternal mortality, other factors, such as 'bodily weakness' (i.e., illness or emotional instability) and the desire for pregnancies to occur in relatively quick succession, likely caused some Roman couples to use a *nutrix*.[261]

High infant mortality rates also likely contributed to the prevalence of *nutrices* in Rome. Modern demographic studies suggest that approximately 28-30% of all newborn babies in ancient Rome did not survive to the age of one year and that roughly 50% of children did not survive past age 10. According to Sparreboom, these demographic realities increased the availability in Rome of wet-nurses, many of whom were probably able to continue lactating. Furthermore, the income from wet-nursing must have been an incentive for childless mothers from the lower economic strata. It is also possible that some Roman families preferred to employ these women because safe, alternative feeding methods for infants were scarce.[262]

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[260] Parkin 1992: 147; Saller 1997: 52 (Table 3.1.e: Male, 'ordinary,' Level 3 West: proportion having living kin); Sparreboom 2014: 146.

[261] Pseudo-Plut. *Lib. educ.* 5 (trans. Babbitt 1960 [Loeb]); Fildes 1988: 16; Laes 2011: 70; Sparreboom 2014: 148.

There were also certain social factors associated with the use of wet-nurses in a Roman context that included aesthetic concerns, status distinctions, and demographically influenced psychological dynamics. Certainly, vanity played a key role in the decision of some mothers. Ogulnia, in Juvenal's *Satire* 6, for example, refuses to let nursing get in the way of her social activities, and so she hires a *nutrix*, as well as companions and a blonde messenger, in order that she might attend the games instead of being confined to her home.[263] However, the desire to maintain a social life was not the only reason behind the employment of *nutrices*, and there are more psychological elements that must be considered. In his seminal work exploring the social history of childhood and family life, Ariès introduced the 'indifference hypothesis' through which he argued that, due to certain demographic realities (that is, high infant and child mortality rates), callousness and indifference towards children in pre-industrial societies, including ancient Rome, were the norm.[264] This hypothesis was applied by DeMause, a psycho-historian, in his attempt to address the question of why wet-nurses were used in antiquity. In addition to attributing the Romans' indifference to high mortality rates, he also suggests that parents lacked emotional maturity when it came to their children. Both of these elements contributed to the Romans' employment of *nutrices*, which DeMause refers to as a form of 'institutionalized abandonment'.[265] While this might have been the case in some households, Bradley categorizes this distance between parent and young child as more of a means to help protect the parent from the ever-present high mortality of infants in Rome by limiting their emotional investment.[266]

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[262] Hopkins 1983: 225; Parkin 1992: 92; Sparreboom 2014: 147.

[263] Juv. *Sat*. 6.352-354; Bradley 1986: 215. See also Gell. *NA* 12.1.8: in this passage, the philosopher Favorinus rebukes women who refuse to breastfeed their own children because they fear that 'it disfigures the charms of their beauty' (trans. Rolfe 1927 [Loeb]).

[264] Ariès 1962: 38-40.

The justification behind the use of *nutrices* that is of most interest to this study is related to the social status of these women, who were, for the most part, either slaves or of servile origin. Bradley rightly states that wet-nursing was a result of Rome's inherent hierarchical structure that enabled those from the elite social stratum to take advantage of the members of the lower social statuses and their labour. One of the primary functions of the *familia* in a wealthy household was to carry out the physically demanding tasks associated with child rearing, including the feeding of infants and young children. The delegation of child rearing to slaves helped to ensure that the mother was unaffected by the physical and emotional strain associated with this type of care.[267] Since these duties were considered a slave's responsibility and the *domina* of a household would not have to engage in these strenuous activities, owning a wet-nurse also served as a reflection of the wealth of a *domus*. If a Roman couple could afford to either hire or purchase a slave *nutrix* of their own, it was a sign of their affluent socio-economic status.[268] Evidently,

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[265] DeMause 1974: 32-35.

[266] Bradley 1986: 216-220 and 1994a: 143-144. See also Golden 1988: 158-159 and Garnsey 1991: 50 for further discussions of the emotional feelings towards infant death.

[267] Bradley 1986: 216 and 1994a: 139, 143.

[268] Sparreboom 2014: 149.

nutrices maintained a significant presence in many Roman households and could even be considered, as Dixon observes, 'part of the normal background of childhood'.[269]

Throughout this chapter I will explore the social and cultural identity of the *nutrix* in Rome and the factors that make her an essential element to our understanding of Roman maternity. I begin my investigation with an analysis of the wet-nurse's tasks in the post-natal care of the newborn. Next, I consider the affective relationship between the wet-nurse and her charge, as well as the problems that came to be associated with their bond. Lastly, I examine the funerary epigraphy that featured *nutrices* and what these inscriptions reveal about their family life that existed apart from their relationships with their nurslings.

The Duties of the Wet-Nurse

(i) Ancient physicians' 'favourable neutrality' towards nutrices

In his treatise dedicated to the exploration of human hygiene, *De Sanitate Tuenda*, the physician Galen provides a brief, yet telling, anecdote about a frustrated wet-nurse and her newborn charge. The nurse attempted to calm the restless infant, who had been crying all day, by feeding, cradling, and then trying in vain to put him to bed, but nothing worked. Upon his inspection of the baby's crib and swaddling bands, Galen noticed that the infant was soiled. The physician instructed the wet-nurse to bathe the infant as well as to change his bedding and clothing; as soon as the *nutrix* completed these tasks, the baby immediately fell asleep.[270]

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[269] Dixon 1988: 128.

As was seen in his account of the wife of Flavius Boethus, the boastful *ἰατρός* once again provides the correct diagnosis and cure; however, through this episode Galen also sheds light on the fact that maternity and childcare was a female-centric domain. While the physician conducts the examination, it is clear that the *nutrix* is present throughout the episode and, perhaps more importantly, she is the one who carries out Galen's prescribed remedy: 'I saw that his bed and its coverings, as well as his clothes, were rather soiled, and the baby himself was dirty and unwashed. I directed her to wash and clean him thoroughly, change the bed, and make all the clothing cleaner'.[271] Although Galen describes the wet-nurse as 'being at a loss', he is not overly critical of her or her actions, but is indifferent towards her.

The other ancient physicians who discuss *nutrices* in their works also appear to adopt a neutral attitude towards them, one that is rather similar to their stance on *obstetrices*. Soranus adopts an impartial tone in his overview of the wet-nurse's tasks in his *Gynaikeia*. However, in his guidelines for selecting a wet-nurse, Soranus does caution against the use of women who are incapable of practicing self-control (namely, those who have difficulties abstaining from sexual intercourse and drinking wine) and who lack sympathy and are ill tempered. Soranus is also concerned with *nutrices* who are superstitious, as he fears that such women are easily 'led astray by fallacious reasoning'.[272] The physician's criticism of the relationship between superstition and medicine is a recurring theme in Books 1 and 2 of the *Gynaikeia*: Soranus rebukes *obstetrices* who insist on overlooking certain remedies because of an omen or a dream.[273] While Soranus would not mention these problematic *nutrices* if they did not exist in at least some households, it is clear that he addresses this issue in general terms and that the physician's opinion of wet-nurses is, overall, neutral.

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[270] Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.8.

[271] Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.8: '...ἐθεασάμην δ᾽ἐγὼ τὴν στρωμνὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ περιβλήματά τε καὶ ἀμφιέσματα ῥυπαρώτερα καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ παιδίον ἤδη ῥυπῶν τε καὶ ἄλουτον, ἐκέλευσα λοῦσαί τε καὶ ἀπορρύψαι καὶ τὴν στρωμνὴν ὑπαλλάξαι, καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ἐσθῆτα καθαρωτέραν ἐργάσασθαι' (trans. Johnston 2018 [Loeb]).

The *nutrix* also plays an important role in Celsus' *De Medicina*, but it is evident that the encyclopaedist considered her to be more of a tool, as she functioned as a component of his prescriptions. In the section of his work that explores ulcers and inflammations, Celsus uses the *nutrix* as a means for curing mouth ulcers (*aphthae*) in young children who are still nursing.[274] Throughout the breakdown of his treatment, Celsus does not reveal any positive or negative perceptions of wet-nurses since he is preoccupied with the welfare of his patient: the suckling infant, for whom *aphthae* are particularly dangerous.

It is possible that the reason behind the ancient medical writers' overall neutral attitude towards wet-nurses is revealed in their guidelines for infant feeding. Perhaps the most obvious indication is in Soranus' section on the nourishment of the infant (*Περὶ τροφῆς*). After the newborn has been swaddled and put to bed, the physician advises that he should not be fed for up to two days, as this will upset the baby's stomach, which is still continuing to digest the food that it received from the mother in utero.[275] Once this period has passed, Soranus suggests that a wet-nurse ought to be used on account of the following:

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[272] Sor. *Gyn*. 2. 19 (trans. Temkin 1991).

[273] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.4.

[274] Celsus, *Med*. 6.11. 3-6; Bradley 1994a: 144-145, 153. This condition is also referred to as thrush.

> '…for twenty days the maternal milk is in most cases unwholesome, being thick, too caseous, and therefore hard to digest, raw, and not prepared to perfection. Furthermore, it is produced by bodies which are in a bad state, agitated and changed to the extent that we see the body altered after delivery when, from having suffered a great discharge of blood, it is dried up, toneless, discoloured, and in the majority of cases feverish as well. For all these reasons, it is absurd to prescribe the maternal milk until the body enjoys stable health'.[276]

However misguided, Soranus recommends the use of a wet-nurse almost immediately after childbirth for the benefit of both mother and baby and criticizes other physicians, namely a certain Damastes, who argues that the baby ought to be brought to the mother's breast after he is born. After this twenty-day period, he states that maternal milk is the best choice for the infant, as it enables the mother to become sympathetic towards her child and it is 'more natural'. The physician is careful to mention, however, that, if the option is available, the best woman must be chosen to be the wet-nurse: this does not necessarily mean that the mother is the prime choice, unless she also happens to have the essential attributes of the best wet-nurse.[277] Furthermore, the physician advises that the infant be provided with multiple *nutrices*, if financially possible. This practice, he argues, helps protect the newborn from becoming accustomed to one wet-nurse, who might succumb to an illness, and be immediately handed over to another. Such a change could potentially cause the child to become either distressed or completely reject the new wet-nurse and suffer from hunger.[278] During the post-natal period Soranus is clearly insistent on the use of a *nutrix* because he is concerned with the welfare of the new mother and her infant. It appears that the physician views the wet-nurse as more of a part of a prescribed remedy, in a manner similar to that presented by Celsus, which causes Soranus to view the *nutrix* with a neutral attitude.

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[275] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.17.

[276] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.18: '…τὸ γὰρ μητρῷον ἕως ἡμερῶν <τριῶν> εἰκότως ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον φαῦλόν ἐστιν ὡς ἂν παχὺ καὶ τυρῶδες ἄγαν καὶ διὰ | τοῦτο δύσπεπτον καὶ ἀργὸν καὶ ἀκατέργαστον καὶ ἀπὸ σωμάτων κεκακοπαθηκότων καὶ ἐκτεταραγμένων φερόμενον καὶ τοσαύτην μετακόσμησιν εἰληφότων, ὅσην ὁρῶμεν συμβαίνουσαν μετὰ τὴν ἀποκύησιν, ἰσχνουμένου καὶ ἀτονοῦντος καὶ ἀχροοῦντος τοῦ σώματος ὡς πολλὴν αἵματος ἀπόκρισιν ὑπομένοντος, τὰ πολλὰ δὲ καὶ πυρέττοντος · ὧν χάριν πάντων τὸ μητρῷον γάλα, μέχρις ἂν εὐσταθήσῃ τὸ σῶμα, συντάσσειν ἄτοπόν ἐστιν' (trans. Temkin 1991).

Galen presents a similar sentiment in an equally direct fashion. In Book 1 of his *De Sanitate Tuenda*, where Galen briefly discusses the hygiene of breast-feeding, he states that any woman who is nursing ought to abstain from sexual relations because intercourse provokes menstruation, which, in turn, causes milk to lose its sweetness.[279] However, the physician's remarks on nursing mothers and wet-nurses who become pregnant again are of particular interest: he argues that since the blood of a pregnant woman becomes inferior, she produces less, as well as substandard, milk. In cases such as this, Galen strongly recommends using another wet-nurse, as her milk would be of a better quality. He concludes by stating: ‘Whenever either pregnancy or some disease is present involving the nurse and it is necessary to go on to another nurse, make the decision and choice on this’.[280] Once again, the *nutrix* is categorized as a necessity and, perhaps more importantly, a benefit to the health of the mother and her newborn, which caused this ‘favourably impartial’ view among physicians to arise.

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[277] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.18; Bradley 1994a: 139, 141.

[278] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.20; Rawson 2003: 122.

[279] Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.9; Bradley 1994a: 142-143.

(ii) The selection of a wet-nurse

The *nutrix* was frequently introduced as a necessity for infant feeding shortly after the first bath and swaddle of the newborn, initial tasks that were performed by the *obstetrix* after she had determined the child’s viability. Given the important nature of the wet-nurse’s role, it is important to consider how parents chose a *nutrix* for their infants, whether they were the masters’ own children, *vernae* (house-born slave children), or *conlactanei* (foundlings). Joshel suggests that there was a coercive element to the selection of a wet-nurse, as the masters considered it important to maintain control over the biology of their female slaves. In addition, the women who served this function ultimately did not have a choice, primarily due to either their slave status or their financial needs, and it was often the case that a *nutrix* was a slave who happened to be lactating.[281]

Some ancient authors share a similar sentiment concerning the supposedly nonchalant designation of wet-nurses. Perhaps the most vocal of these writers is the historian Tacitus, who laments the fact that, during his own time, parents pass their children off to any 'little Greek slave girl' and other equally inept slaves who are incapable of performing any other tasks.[282] While convenience and availability might have played a key role in the selection of a wet-nurse, it is clear that the physicians had set out certain standards that suggested which women were best suited to serve as *nutrices* and that these women were the most sought after.

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[280] Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.9: ‘ὅταν ᾗ διὰ κύησιν ἢ καὶ νόσημά τι περὶ τὴν μαῖαν γενόμενον ἐφ᾽ἑτέραν ἀνάγκη τροφὸν ἰέναι, τὴν κρίσιν τε καὶ τὴν αἵρεσιν αὐτῆς ποιεῖσθαι’ (trans. Johnston 2018 [Loeb]).

[281] Joshel 1986: 5.

As was seen in his discussions concerning which persons are fit to become midwives and who are the best midwives, on account of their very nature, Soranus provides a similar deliberation on the selection of a wet-nurse (*Περὶ ἐκλογῆς τιτθῆς*). He begins by outlining the crucial physical attributes that the ideal wet-nurse ought to have. Unlike the *obstetrix*, Soranus places strict age restrictions on the wet-nurse, suggesting that the woman be somewhere between twenty and forty years of age, as younger women are still careless and childish themselves and as a result are ignorant of proper child-rearing practices, and older women produce unsatisfactory milk.[283] The physician advises that the *paterfamilias* select a woman who has given birth two or three times, justifying his reasoning with the claim that women who have only given birth once are still inexperienced with child-rearing and that, since they are most likely quite young when they give birth for the first time, their breasts are still too small, and therefore inadequate, in size.[284]

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[282] Tac. *Dial*. 29: 'Graeculae alicui ancillae'; Sparreboom 2014: 145.

[283] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19; Rawson 2003: 122.

[284] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19.

In addition to being in good health, possessing a sturdy frame, and of good complexion, Soranus dedicates a substantial amount of his discussion to the characteristics and physiology of the ideal wet-nurse's breasts, perhaps her most important physical attribute. He states that, 'her breasts should be of medium size, lax, soft and unwrinkled, the nipples neither big nor too small and neither too compact nor too porous and discharging milk over abundantly'.[285] If the wet-nurse's breasts are not up to the physician's standards, they pose a variety of risks to the infant's welfare. For example, large breasts are far too heavy and run the risk of crushing the nursling, and large nipples can potentially damage the child's gums and make swallowing difficult. On the other hand, small nipples are equally undesirable, as the charge might not be able to grasp them and they produce milk in small amounts. Both of these issues cause the newborn to suffer problems with suckling, which often results in *aphthae* (mouth ulcers).

The final concern with 'imperfect' breasts is that, if they are too porous, the amount of milk might suffocate the infant, while those with narrow ducts are an obstacle for the newborn, who, consequently, is not getting enough sustenance. It is recommended that the *nutrix* should have already produced milk for two or three months, at the most. This is because of the belief that the initial breast milk is difficult for the infant to digest and that which is produced later on is too thin and not nutritious.[286] Through his remarks, Soranus provides insight into ancient medical thought concerning the physiology of breasts, but he also reveals that there was a transfer in the focus of care from the parturient to the infant once the birth had been completed, as well as a preoccupation with the comfort and welfare of the infant. Moreover, Soranus' detailed and specific description of the wet-nurse's breasts demonstrates that there was a concern among members of the medical community with presenting correct medical facts that helped to ensure that their patients received the correct care that they required.

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[285] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19: 'μαστοὺς ἔχουσαν συμμέτρους, χαύνους μαλακοὺς | ἀρρυσώτους, καὶ θηλὰς μήτε μεγάλας μήτε μικροτέρας καὶ μήτε πυκνοτέρας μήτε ἄγαν σηραγγώδεις καὶ ἀθροῦν ἀφιείσας τὸ γάλα' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[286] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19-20.

In a manner similar to his description of the respectable midwife, Soranus details the personality traits that his ideal *nutrix* would possess. Just as the essential characteristics of the midwife helped ensure that she was mentally and physically capable of delivering her patient's baby, since she had to maintain a calm environment for her patient and protect the modesty of the mother, those of the wet-nurse had a profound impact on the welfare of her newborn charge. The most important quality for a wet-nurse to have was a sense of self-control so that she was able to refrain from sexual intercourse and drinking wine, both of which were considered harmful to the baby that she was responsible for feeding. Soranus states that it is crucial for *nutrices* to abstain from intercourse for two key reasons. The first issue is that intercourse could either reduce the supply of milk or completely sever it with the onset of menstruation or conception. Secondly, there is the possibility that the *nutrix* will become emotionally detached from her nursling, since she would be more inclined to focus her affections on her sexual partner instead.[287]

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[287] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.19.

Sexual abstinence appears to have been considered an important condition even outside of the medical realm, as it is a stipulation that frequently appears in the extant wet-nursing contracts from Roman Egypt.[288] For example, in a relatively well-preserved contract from Alexandria that dates to sometime between March and April of 13 BC, a certain Eutychides, acting on behalf of his sister Isidora, sets out the regulations that a wet-nurse named Didyma is expected to adhere to while she is nursing Isidora's foundling slave child. In addition to providing the details of Didyma's monthly wages of 10 silver drachmae and two *cotylae* (1/4 litre) of oil and that she is to nurse the infant for a period of 16 months, Eutychides and Isidora explicitly state that Didyma is prohibited from having relations with a man and becoming pregnant.[289] The existence of a sexual regulation clause in the contract, the promise of financial compensation for fulfilling this abstinence request, and the substantial monetary punishment that would have been inflicted if Didyma had broken the agreement in any way,[290] suggests that a wet-nurse's self-control was not just considered an advantageous attribute, but rather an absolute necessity because she was the one responsible for the welfare of the child. In the case of freeborn charges, these children were entrusted with the continuation of the family line and therefore their *nutrices* had to ensure that they were fed and reared properly, while the same care was required for slave children, who were an investment and contributed to the functioning of the *domus*.

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[288] In his 1980 study that explores the social implications of sexual regulations that were imposed on wet-nurses, Bradley examines 25 total contracts from Roman Egypt. See fn. 3 on page 321 for a list of the papyri that he examines.

[289] Manca Masciadri and Montevecchi 1984: 66 (*Contratto* 6); *Select Papyri* 1.16.

[290] If she broke the contract, Didyma would have been expected to hand over to her employer the wages that she had already been paid, increased by 50%, along with damages and other expenses. Moreover, Didyma would have had to pay Isidora and Eutychides 500 drachmae and an additional fine (Manca Masciadri and Montevecchi 1984: 67).

A respectable *nutrix* was also expected to exercise restraint when consuming wine. Soranus observes that alcohol harms the wet-nurse's mind and body, which results in her milk being spoiled. In addition, the baby might suffer from the diminished attention of the inebriated *nutrix*, who might cause unintentional physical harm to her charge. For example, an intoxicated *nutrix* might stumble and either fall on the baby or even drop him.[291] These are legitimate concerns and they help to demonstrate how the newborn's welfare was a priority for both the physician and the wet-nurse; however, Soranus' third reason for why it was important for nurses to abstain from alcohol is of particular interest. He states the following:

> 'Thirdly, too much wine passes its quality to the milk and therefore the nursling becomes sluggish and comatose and sometimes even afflicted with tremor, apoplexy, and convulsions, just as suckling pigs become comatose and stupefied when the sow has eaten dregs'.[292]

While this observation, as well as its accompanying simile, contributes to the notion that physicians and wet-nurses who were employed in Rome placed the well-being of the newborn at the forefront of their care, these remarks also reveal that these medical professionals recognized that the diet, and alcohol consumption, of the *nutrix* affected her lactation and, perhaps more importantly, that what she ingested, whether it was nutritious or harmful, could be passed on to her charge.

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[291] Sor. *Gyn*. 2. 19.

[292] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19: 'τρίτον ἡ τοῦ πλείονος οἴνου ποιότης συναναδίδοται τῷ γάλακτι, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο νωθρὰ καὶ καρώδη, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ ἔντρομα καὶ ἀπόπληκτα καὶ σπασμώδη τὰ τρεφόμενα γίνονται βρέφη, καθάπερ συὸς τρύγα προσενεγκαμένης καροῦται καὶ σκοτοῦται τὰ γαλουχούμενα' (trans. Temkin 1991). Apoplexy is a term used to describe unconsciousness that is a result of a cerebral haemorrhage or stroke.

The effect that alcohol has on lactation has been an area of interest for modern physicians and health care researchers. Historically, hospitals encouraged new mothers to drink wine and beer as a means to support lactation and breastfeeding, as it was believed that alcohol helped to 'increase milk yield, facilitate milk release and relax the mother and infant'.[293] However, modern scientific studies show that alcohol has a significant effect on the release of oxytocin, the hormone that is released into the blood stream by the posterior pituitary gland, which controls the 'milk ejection reflex': this form of alcohol, when the dose is within the range of 0.5 to 2 grams per kilogram of body weight, blocks the body's release of oxytocin.[294] In addition to the inhibiting effect that alcohol has on the posterior pituitary gland, high amounts of it can cause potentially harmful symptoms in the infant. Drowsiness, general weakness, and diaphoresis (sweating of an unusual degree) can occur, as well as a 'decrease in linear growth [and] abnormal weight gain'.[295] Since there are little to no physiological differences between modern women and those of ancient Rome, it is clear that alcohol would have had an impact on the Roman wet-nurse's lactation, as well as cause certain issues for her nursling.

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[293] Best Start Resource Centre 2012: 2.

[294] Giglia and Binns 2006: 105-106.

[295] American Academy of Pediatrics 2001: 780. See Table 6: Maternal Medication Usually Compatible with Breastfeeding.

The perfect wet-nurse, at least by Soranus' standards, also needed to be sympathetic and affectionate, as well as eager to do her work without any complaint. It is essential that she not be ill-tempered, 'since by nature the nursling becomes similar to the nurse and accordingly grows sullen if the nurse is ill-tempered, but of mild disposition if she is even-tempered'.[296] The physician recognized that the wet-nurse's mental state influenced that of her nursling and therefore it was considered important to ensure that the wet-nurse served as a positive example for her charge. Soranus' strong recommendation that the *nutrix* must not be superstitious is a related factor, as her superstition and 'ecstatic states', both of which are closely linked with her mental capacity, could become a real danger to the infant.[297]

The wet-nurse was also expected to be tidy, which would have had a positive impact on the newborn's hygiene. The importance of this attribute is commented on in other medical treatises, including Galen's aforementioned anecdote from his *De Sanitate Tuenda*. An unhygienic environment contributed to the discomfort of the infant: Galen, for example, realized that soiled bedding and swaddling bands were the prime cause of the excessive restlessness and crying of his young patient. Likewise, Soranus cautions against such surroundings since the foul odours could cause the infant to have an upset stomach, become itchy, or even develop ulcers.[298]

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[296] Bradley 1994a: 148; Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19: 'ἀόργιστον δέ, ὅτι φύσει συνεξομοιοῦται τὰ τρεφόμενα ταῖς τρεφούσαις καὶ διὰ τοῦτο βαρύθυμα μὲν ἐξ ὀργίλων, ἐπιεικῆ δὲ ἐκ μετρίων γίγνεται' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[297] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19.

[298] Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.8; Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19.

Lastly, Soranus explicitly states that the ideal *nutrix* 'should be a Greek so that the infant nursed by her may become accustomed to the best speech'. Bradley argues that the preference for Greek ethnicity suggests that the wet-nurse had control over the way her charge began to speak and thus that she was a principal figure in the child's education and socialization.[299] While it is possible that Greek *nutrices* were selected by Roman parents because of the positive effect that they might have on their charges during their formative years, as they were believed to have been optimal first educators on account of their speech patterns, another factor was Roman attitudes towards slavery in a broader sense.

It is possible that the preference for Greek wet-nurses was a symptom of the Romans' rationalization of slavery, and, in this particular case, the use of Greek slaves. Soranus puts forth the notion that Greek women are naturally better than Roman women when it comes to matters of child rearing not only in his description of his ideal *nutrix*, but also in his instructions on how to help the child take his first steps. In addition to his claims that Roman *nutrices* are inclined to have sex frequently, including after becoming intoxicated, he firmly states that they do not educate themselves in appropriate child-rearing practices. Soranus observes that Roman *nutrices* simply are not devoted to their charges in the same way that Greek *nutrices* are.[300] This *nutrix* that the physician presents is indeed a cultural ideal: the Romans wanted Greek slave women to care for their children because they were deemed superior with respect to child rearing practices and they were well-educated. In addition to these cultural ideals, the preference for Greek *nutrices* could also be a symptom of, as Joshel observes, Rome's dominance over foreigners, with the use of foreign *nutrices* serving as a small symbol of imperial power.[301] Although Joshel discusses foreign wet-nurses in a more general sense, this mentality was likely applicable to wet-nurses who were of Greek origin.

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[299] Bradley 1994a: 147; Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19: '῾Ελληνίδα δέ, χάριν τοῦ τῇ καλλίστῃ διαλέκτῳ ἐθισθῆναι τὸ τρεφόμενον ὑπ᾽αὐτῆς' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[300] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.44; Bradley 1994a: 140-141, 147.

These descriptions of the qualities associated with the ideal *nutrix* are reminiscent of those assigned to Soranus' good *obstetrix* in another significant way. Personality and physical characteristics such as self-control, tidiness, an even temper, as well as having a specific type of body, and being of a certain age and ethnicity are all traits that could have been beneficial to a *nutrix* when she carried out her duties; however, they are also factors that are considered when purchasing a slave in a Roman context. Much like childbirth, the activities involved in early child rearing fell within the realm of female slaves.[302] Although the *nutrix*, despite her inferior social status, potentially had an impact on the welfare and socialization of the young Roman child (similar to the influence that the *obstetrix* wielded), her situation differed from that of the midwife in a significant way.

(iii) The supervision of and treatments for the wet-nurse

Soranus' description of the physical characteristics and personality of the ideal *nutrix* suggests that, like the physician and the midwife, the Roman wet-nurse showed a preoccupation with the welfare of her infant charge. There is, however, a notable difference in status and responsibility between the wet-nurse and the midwife: the *nutrix* is viewed more as an instrument who requires not only supervision, but also treatments that were exclusive to her. As Hanson and Flemming both argue, the intended audiences of the *Gynaikeia* were the midwife and the *paterfamilias*: the didactic text was meant to serve as a point of reference for *obstetrices* who were aiding the mother throughout the gestation period and pregnancy, as well as for other facets of gynaecology and paediatrics. However, it also helped the *paterfamilias* determine the competency of the midwives in his household and how to achieve optimal results from them.[303]

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[301] Joshel 1986: 7.

[302] Bradley 1986: 216 and 1994a: 143.

By contrast, the *nutrix* was not considered a member of the physician's audience and there is no extant handbook similar to the *Gynaikeia* for wet-nurses. Although Soranus presents the duties of the *nutrix* in a similar fashion as he does for those of the *obstetrix*, his treatise includes three sections on how to conduct the activities of the wet-nurse: 1) On testing the milk (*Περὶ δοκιμασίας γάλακτος*), 2) How to conduct the regimen of the nurse (*Πῶς διαιτητέον τὴν τροφόν*), and 3) What one should do if the milk stops, or becomes spoiled or thick or thin (*Τί ποιητέον σβεννυμένου τοῦ γάλακτος*).[304] These three sections of the *Gynaikeia* are concerned with the quality, quantity, and production of the wet-nurse's breast milk and do not appear to be directed to the wet-nurse herself; rather, the instructions seem to address an authoritative figure supervising her.

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[303] Hanson 1994: 170; Flemming 2000: 232.

[304] Sor. *Gyn*. 2. 21-23 (On testing the milk); 2.24-27 (How to conduct the regimen of the nurse); 2.28-29 (What one should do if the milk stops, or becomes spoiled or thick or thin).

In order to maintain the quality of the breast milk that was being fed to the infant, the Roman midwife or *paterfamilias* had to ensure that there was no error in the regimen of the wet-nurse. If the daily routine of the *nutrix* is governed properly, that is, if she had good digestion, proper sleeping patterns, and was not ingesting drugs, her charge will receive sufficient and healthy sustenance.[305] Thus, the physician suggests that either the midwife or the *paterfamilias* order the *nutrix* to avoid idleness and engage in light to moderate exercise, such as walking, playing with a ball, grinding grain, making beds, and other such activities. He also recommends that the wet-nurse's breasts should not be bound, as this hinders milk production, and that she should also take baths in intervals, alternating between warm and cold water.[306]

Furthermore, Soranus advises that the wet-nurse's diet be controlled and that she moderately ingest mild foods that are nutritious and easy to digest, avoiding pungent ones (for example, preserved meat and onions) and vegetables (on account of their 'watery' nature and 'lack of nutrition'). Soranus even dedicates a section of his treatise to a suggested diet plan for the wet-nurse to follow, since the nutrients from the food that she ingests are transferred to the infant, and therefore they needed to be monitored.[307]

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[305] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.23. For the physician's guidelines on how to test the milk, including a detailed description of what has been termed the 'fingernail test', consult Sor. *Gyn.* 2.21-22. For Galen's test of the milk, consult *San. tuenda* 1.9.

[306] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.24.

[307] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.26.

These recommendations all allude to the functionality of the *nutrix* and how, at least according to the medical writers, she was a figure who required more maintenance and supervision than the *obstetrix*; however, the section that best illustrates the wet-nurse's different status from the *obstetrix* and degree of responsibility is Soranus' prescriptions for what one should do if the milk stops producing or is of an undesirable condition. In addition to providing diagnostic observations as to what might be causing the cessation of the milk or its objectionable consistency, the physician suggests adjusting the wet-nurse's exercises and massages, with a primary focus on her upper body, as well as modifying her diet, until the problem is corrected. For example, if the *nutrix* is producing too much milk, then she is required to do more vigorous exercises and if the milk is too thick for the infant to ingest, the *nutrix* should drink water and consume food with a gruel-like consistency, the physician asserts that doing so will dilute it and make it easier for the newborn to digest.[308] Furthermore, Soranus does not provide such prescriptions concerning the welfare and regimen of the *obstetrix* in his text. Although the well-being of the young charge is the primary concern for the ideal *nutrix*, it is evident that the *nutrix*, on account of her status and function, is subject to a very different treatment from the *obstetrix* in the *Gynaikeia*.

As for the supervision of the wet-nurse in the *De Sanitate Tuenda*, Galen does not provide as greatly detailed a regimen for his *nutrix* as Soranus does in his gynaecological and obstetric handbook. The physician limits his comments on her daily regimen to the following:

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[308] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.29.

> '… the nurse should give no little forethought to her own food and drink, her sleep, sexual activity and exercises, so that her milk is the best in terms of quality. Such a thing would occur if her blood were at its very best – that is, neither picrocholic, melancholic, phlegmatic, whey-like, nor mixed with some other watery fluid. Such blood is produced by moderate exercises, nutriments that are well-flavoured and taken at the appropriate time and in the necessary amount, just as also by drinks that are timely and moderate'.[309]

Although he does not elaborate on the supervision and regimen of the wet-nurse, Galen is concerned with providing the newborn the best possible sustenance and he realizes that the activities and diet of the *nutrix* have an impact on milk production and quality. Moreover, his remarks, much like those of Soranus, do not seem to be directed towards the wet-nurse herself, but rather to a figure, such as an *obstetrix*, who is responsible for supervising her behaviour and activities, as well as monitoring her body and ensuring that her actions have a positive impact on her milk production. It is also worth mentioning that in his work *On the Natural Faculties*, where Galen describes the tasks of the *μαῖα* during childbirth, as well as in his account of the illness of Boethus' wife, the physician does not provide regulations or prescriptions for the *obstetrix* as he does for the *nutrix*.[310] Once again, the *nutrix* is differentiated from the *obstetrix* because she herself requires treatment and supervision, while the *obstetrix* is a figure who is capable of supervising the *nutrix* and providing her with treatment.

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[309] Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.9: 'καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ἔτι τῆς τρεφούσης αὐτὸ οὐ σμικρὰν ποιεῖσθαι πρόνοιαν ἐδεσμάτων τε πέρι καὶ πομάτων, ὕπνων τε καὶ ἀφροδισίων καὶ γυμνασίων, ὡς ἂν ἄριστον εἴη τὴν κρᾶσιν τὸ γάλα. γίγνοιτο δ᾽ἂν τοιοῦτον, εἰ τὸ αἷμα χρηστότατον εἴη. ἔστι δὲ χρηστότατον τὸ μήτε πικρόχολον μήτε μελαγχολικὸν μήτε φλεγμαστῶδες μήτ᾽ ὀρρώδει τινὶ μήθ᾽ὑδατώδει συμμιγὲς ὑγρότητι. γεννᾶται δὲ τοιοῦτον ἐπί τε | τοῖς συμμέτροις γυμνάσμασι καὶ τροφαῖς εὐχύμοις τε ἅμα καὶ κατὰ καιρὸν τὸν προσήκοντα καὶ κατὰ μέτρα τὰ δέοντα λαμβανομέναις, ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ ἐπὶ πόμασιν εὐκαίροις τε καὶ μετρίοις' (trans. Johnston 2018 [Loeb]).

[310] Gal. *Praen*. 8. 1-21; Gal. *Nat. Fac*. 3. 3.

(iv) The feeding of the infant

Families who could afford to either purchase or employ a wet-nurse for their children saw her begin her feeding responsibilities after the newborn had undergone a prescribed two day abstinence from food.[311] As for the daily feeding of the newborn, there were certain rules that governed how the *nutrix* should feed her charge. As was seen in the physicians' description of the ideal wet-nurse, there is the ever-present concern with the infant's welfare in these regulations. Soranus addresses two issues in his discussion of how and when to give the newborn the breast (*Πῶς δεῖ καὶ πότε διδόναι τῷ βρέφει τὸν μαστόν*): how to nurse properly, and the appropriate times to feed the child.

The feeding method that is proposed by Soranus places the well-being of the nursling at the centre of his recommendations. For example, the *nutrix* is advised to sit with her head bent forward while giving the breast in order to prevent swallowing difficulties, which could result in suffocation. As well, she ought to encourage the infant's appetite by gently expressing milk, which would help the child avoid any possible straining. In addition to ensuring that the newborn is fed safely, the *nutrix* evidently was expected to be mindful of her charge's comfort. To help keep bright light from shining into the baby's sensitive eyes, as well as to keep anything from falling into his eyes, the wet-nurse was to protect the infant's eyes with some sort of covering (e.g., a blanket, swaddling band, or another type of soft material).[312]

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[311] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.17.

There is a noticeable lack of representations of *nutrices* nursing their charges, which can be attributed to the fact that wet-nurses were women of low status whose funerary commemoration was often a simple epitaph. Moreover, the monuments that feature depictions of wet-nurses commemorate the child or the mother, as opposed to the wet-nurse.[313] There is, however, a small limestone funerary altar from Colonia Agrippina (modern Cologne), which dates to approximately AD 220-250, that shows a wet-nurse identified as Severina in the inscription located above the image feeding her charge (Figure 7).[314] In the scene on the right hand side of the altar Severina sits in a high-backed chair, holding her infant charge to her exposed breast. The wet-nurse appears to be smiling as she looks at her nursling, her hair is neatly tied back behind her head in a low bun, and she wears a draped garment that extends down to her ankles. While the baby's facial features are undistinguishable, it is clear that his arms are extended towards Severina's chest, as if he is reaching for her breast, and that he is suckling. This image is an abbreviation of Soranus' preferred feeding method: although Severina does not shield the infant's face, she is depicted as sitting down with her head bent forward as she feeds her charge, all of which correspond to the physician's instructions.

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[312] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.37; Bradley 1994a: 141.

[313] George 2000: 200-201.

[314] George 2000: 200; Mander 2013: 139, Cat. No. 415. Date of the altar provided by *AE* 2012: 974. Faust (1998: 127, no. 114) and Mander (2013: 248) argue that the date range can be narrowed down further to sometime between AD 225-250, based on the style of the carving. For a detailed discussion of whom the altar is commemorating (a matter that is still subject to debate), consult Mander 2013: 139-140.

(vi) Other responsibilities of the nutrix

The feeding of the infant was the Roman wet-nurse's primary function, but it is important to bear in mind that she served as a child-minder during her charge's early years, up until the time when he was ready to go to school. As a child-minder, the wet-nurse was in charge of the child's daily regime, which included the bathing, massaging, swaddling, and weaning of the infant. Moreover, the *nutrix* ensured that the child received sufficient exercise as well as comfort when needed.[315]

The first bath of the newborn was performed by the *obstetrix* once she had determined the child's viability and severed the umbilical cord, but the *nutrix* was the figure who was in charge of the child's daily bathing routine. Bradley notes that Soranus does not specify when the wet-nurse is supposed to take over the bathing tasks from the midwife, but it is understood that the physician expected the wet-nurse to take over this job when the midwife adopted her solely medical role in the child's life. Galen helps to enforce this notion in his description of the hygiene of bathing and massage of the newborn where he states that it is the *nutrix* who carries out these daily activities for the child.[316] Soranus provides not just his preferred timing for the child's bath, but also rebukes the habits of other women who do not adhere to his methods. He strongly advises against bathing the newborn three times a day and exhausting the child by pouring water on him until he falls asleep, both of which cause the body to become weak and susceptible to diseases and other injuries (he is primarily concerned with the child's head and senses). Therefore, Soranus recommends that the *nutrix* bathe the infant during the day and only give him subsequent baths if it is needed (e.g., if he suffers from a rash or soils himself).[317]

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[315] Bradley 1994a: 141-142.

[316] Bradley 1994a: 139-140; Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.10.

The first section of the *Gynaikeia* that explicitly mentions the wet-nurse carrying out her non-feeding responsibilities is the physician's instructions on how to bathe and massage the newborn. Immediately after the midwife has completed the first bath, the *nutrix* is the one who is in charge of anointing and massaging the baby. Soranus provides a highly detailed technique for how to anoint and massage the baby properly, emphasizing the importance of modeling the body, 'so that imperceptibly that which is as yet not fully formed is shaped into its natural characteristics'.[318] The process includes all parts of the body, from the forehead to the ankles, and specifies whether the body part requires the *nutrix* to clench her fists or spread out her hands and massage, as well as the appropriate amount of pressure she should apply.

What is particularly striking is the physician's fixation on perfecting every single part of the child's body that might be considered undesirable. As an example of a purely aesthetic concern, if the baby was born with an aquiline nose, the wet-nurse ought to press it down around the prominent tip and draw it forward. The massage was also deemed an important practice for legitimate medical issues pertaining to the child's development. For example, to prevent the child from developing a crooked spine, the *nutrix* was responsible for pressing on the spine with her thumb in an upward motion from the child's tailbone up to the back of his head: this helped to perfect the vertebrae and hindered spinal distortion.[319] The preoccupation with the ideal form is first addressed in Soranus' instructions on how the *obstetrix* should swaddle the newborn for the first time. The midwife's role in the initial swaddling helped contribute to her authoritative position over the life of the newborn. Since the *nutrix* was entrusted with anointing and massaging the infant on a daily basis, it is clear that she too played a crucial role in and had a significant impact on the child's physical development.

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[317] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.30.

[318] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.32: 'εἶτα συναλείφειν ἐκτενῶς καὶ τρίβειν μετὰ διαπλασμοῦ μέρος ἕκαστον, ὥστε λεληθότως [ἕκαστον] τὸ ἀκμὴν ἀδιαμόρφωτον εἰς κατὰ φύσιν διατυπωθῆναι χαρακτῆρας' (trans. Temkin 1991). See Sor. *Gyn*. 2.32-35 and Bradley 1994a: 140-141 for a complete description of the massage process.

In his didactic treatise, Soranus recommends that the child be solely breastfed for six months and Galen suggests a similar time frame by stating that this type of feeding should continue until he cuts his first teeth. This roughly corresponds to the modern timeline of when the baby's deciduous mandibular central incisors emerge, between six to ten months.[320] At this time the *nutrix* introduced more solid food into the child's diet, focusing on foods that are soft and easy to digest, such as softened bread, spelt soup, moist porridge (and other cereals), and eggs. To help facilitate the weaning process further, the wet-nurse would offer the thirsty infant either water or diluted wine in feeding bottles (referred to as *tettina* in Latin), which simulated breast-feeding.[321]

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[319] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.33-34.

[320] Sor. *Gyn.* 2.46; Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.10; Prowse *et al.* 2008: 298. Mandibular central incisors are the bottom two front teeth and deciduous are the milk teeth (or baby teeth) that shed when the permanent (adult) teeth start to erupt around age six and seven.

Young Roman children were typically weaned completely by the third year, but it is important to bear in mind that there was no real norm as to when it occurred since there must have been variation throughout the Empire as a result of a variety of circumstances (e.g., local customs and maternal conditions).[322] For example, a receipt of wages for nursing from Oxyrhynchus, which dates to AD 187, describes how a certain Chosion, the owner of the enslaved Sarapias, received 400 drachmae as a payment for Sarapias' nursing and caring for a baby named Helena, the daughter of a woman named Tanenteris. Care for Helena included her weaning, as the letter mentions that when she was returned to her parents, she 'had been weaned and had received every attention' after a period of two years.[323]

In 2008, Prowse, Saunders, Schwarcz, Garnsey, Macchiarelli, and Bondioli conducted a study that combined information gleaned from medical texts of the Roman period with isotopic and palaeopathological evidence in order to investigate the feeding methods that the Romans used on infants and children. They conducted a stable isotope analysis on a bone sample that consisted of 37 ribs from the Isola Sacra necropolis near Rome, as well as an analysis of the dental pathology data from a sample of 78 individuals, specifically the deciduous dentitions of children between 1 and 12 years of age.[324] According to their study, the sample revealed that the weaning period typically started at the end of the child's first year and finished at around two or two and a half years. They observed that there was a notable absence of breast milk in the isotopic data after two years of age, and this data corresponds to Soranus' recommendations of feeding the child the aforementioned weaning food. Moreover, the presence of tartar and cavities on the teeth of individuals in the sample who were two and a half years and older could reflect the impact that a weaning diet consisting primarily of soft food had on young teeth.[325]

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[321] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.46. See Fildes 1986: 36 (Plate 1.12) and Powell *et al*. 2014: 94 (Fig. 2) for images of feeding vessels. Consult Rouquet 2003: 171-177 for reconstructions of the different types of vessels and a detailed discussion of questions surrounding their use.

[322] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.47; Prowse *et al*. 2008: 298.

[323] *P. Oxy*. 91.

Other important tasks of the wet-nurse are alluded to throughout the medical treatises. In Soranus' chapter on infant feeding, for example, it is clear that the *nutrix* comforted the baby when he was distressed, as she would calm the infant by cooing and rocking him to sleep. This observation also reveals that the wet-nurse was engaged in the child's exercise regime, as gentle rocking of the crib was considered a method of mild exercise that was appropriate for the baby.[326] This sentiment is echoed by Galen, who, prior to exploring the different exercises for older children and adults, suggests that the exercise of babies comprises rocking in the cradle, swings, and in the wet-nurse's arms.[327] If there were any concerns about the child's weight, the *nutrix* would not only have to change her own diet (that is, eating less rich meals and drinking more water), but she was expected to supervise the child while he exercised with a little pushcart or other physically engaging games. This activity served as a diversion from food for the gluttonous child and helped him lose weight.[328]

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[324] Prowse *et al*. 2008: 294. The term deciduous refers to the temporary milk teeth (or baby teeth) of mammals which are eventually shed and replaced by permanent teeth.

[325] Prowse *et al*. 2008: 305-306.

[326] Bradley 1994a: 141.

[327] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.40; Gal. *San. tuenda* 1.8.

As for the child's education and socialization, the *nutrix* functioned as the first educator in the child's life. Soranus only briefly mentions her role when he states that the wet-nurse ought to be Greek so that the 'infant nursed by her may become accustomed to the best speech'.[329] It was understood by physicians that the wet-nurse influenced the mannerisms and character of the child, which resulted in her charge adopting some of her characteristics, such as her speech patterns. Educators also took note of this aspect of the wet-nurse and nursling relationship, especially that children tended to imitate the words that they hear when they are learning to speak. Quintilian provides such an observation; however he is not as adamant as Soranus is about the ethnicity of the wet-nurse: he remarks that the *nutrix* should not only be of good character, but she should also know how to speak correctly.[330] These supplementary responsibilities further emphasize the fact that the *nutrix* constantly accompanied the child,[331] and also demonstrate the potentially profound influence that she had on her charge's physical development and socialization.

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[328] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.48.

[329] Bradley 1994a: 147; Sor. *Gyn*. 2.19: '῾Ελληνίδα δέ, χάριν τοῦ τῇ καλλίστῃ διαλέκτῳ ἐθισθῆναι τὸ τρεφόμενον ὑπ' αὐτῆς' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[330] Quint. *Inst*. 1.1.4-5; Bradley 1994a: 147.

[331] Bradley 1994a: 143.

The Relationship between the Wet-Nurse and Her Nursling

The social issue that was a chief concern for the elite, male authors of Rome is the impact that the bond between the *nutrix* and her charge had on the child's relationships with other family members, primarily those with his mother and father, and friends. While Tacitus speaks negatively of the effect that wet-nurses and pedagogues have on freeborn children, primarily that their unformed minds are heavily influenced by the foolish talk of slaves,[332] other authors who voice their opinions on wet-nurses are preoccupied with the belief that the nurse-nursling bond can only ever be a brief one. Cicero is the least critical, as he adopts a neutral tone and states that it is simply the case that, although the bond between child and *nutrix* cannot be ignored, it is in a category all its own, on a level that is not equal to the other friendships in the child's life. The relationship between the nurse and nursling, by its very nature, cannot be as secure as the one that develops between parent and child. Fronto, on the other hand, rebukes wet-nurses who become emotional and angry when their charges become older and leave them for the playground.[333] These observations suggest that some within the elite sphere believed that the relationship which developed between a *nutrix* and her charge, despite the impact that she had on the child's formative years, was meant to be only temporary.

The harshest criticism, however, is reserved for the child's mother who insisted on using a *nutrix*. In his satirical opposition against Roman women, Juvenal discusses the notable difference in the childbirth and child-rearing practices of women of means versus the more humble. Poor women are forced to 'endure the perils of childbirth, and all the troubles of nursing to which their lot condemns them,' while their wealthy counterparts are never seen either in their golden lying-in beds or feeding their children.[334] This image, although satirical in nature, is nevertheless revealing of what must have been a social attitude, in at least some circles, towards elite women who owned *nutrices*. They are categorized here as a luxury item which impoverished women could never afford, and their use perhaps contributed to the notion that wealthy Roman women seem to have employed whatever means they could to avoid what was expected of them as wives (that is, giving birth to legitimate children and nursing them).

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[332] Tac. *Dial.* 29; Sparreboom 2014: 149.

[333] Cic. *Amic.* 20. 74; Fronto, *Ep.* 2.123. 2; Sparreboom 2014: 150.

A similar sentiment is present in a discourse of Favorinus, which sees the philosopher encouraging a wealthy new mother to nurse her baby instead of passing him off to a *nutrix*. In response to the woman's mother, who insisted that the couple hire a wet-nurse in order to avoid inflicting further hardship on her, Favorinus claims that such an act would be unnatural and imperfect: it would result in a sort of half-motherhood (*dimidiatum matris genus*).[335] The philosopher also fears that the affectionate bond of the *nutrix* and charge would infringe upon the parent-child relationship. He states that if the mother pushes the child away by giving him to a wet-nurse, the natural love that a parent has for their child could be severed completely or, at best, weakened. This not only gradually extinguishes the ‘maternal ardour’ (*maternae flagrantiae*), but could also cause the child to have no feeling for his mother, since the baby is inclined to show affection and love towards the one who nurses him. According to Favorinus, this hindrance is particularly harmful in cases where the mother dies, as the child would have ‘no regret for [the] loss’ of the woman who gave birth to him.[336]

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[334] Juv. *Sat*. 6.592-594: 'Hae tamen et partus subeunt discrimen et omnis nutricis tolerant fortuna urguente labores; sed iacet aurato vix ulla puerpera lecto' (trans. Ramsay 1918 [Loeb]).

[335] Gell. *NA* 12.1.5-6; Bradley 1994a: 153-154.

Of course, *nutrices*, especially slaves, are not exempt from his reproach, as he argues that these women (who are often ‘dishonest, ugly, unchaste’ wine drinkers) could infect their children with a harmful disease or instill in them a terrible character. Favorinus believes that since the quality of the milk plays a significant role in the development of the child’s character, the mother should be the one who nurses him.[337] It is interesting to note that this notion of the *nutrix* passing on undesirable characteristics to her charge reflects the physicians’ knowledge of the fact that the food and drink (wine, in particular) which the wet-nurse consumes has a significant impact on her nursling. It is possible that the moralists might have understood this link and applied it to their writings that opposed *nutrices*.

Despite the vocal objections of these moralizing authors, there is evidence which suggests that the affective bond between the wet-nurse and her nursling might endure and had a positive influence on the child. A correspondence between Pliny the Younger and his friend Verus demonstrates that Pliny had a lasting affection for his childhood *nutrix*.

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[336] Gell. *NA* 12.1.21-23 (trans. Rolfe 1927 [Loeb]); Bradley 1994a: 153-154.

[337] Gell. *NA* 12.1.17-18, 20.

The letter indicates that Verus has taken over the management of the farm that Pliny had given as a gift to his nurse, who is not referred to by her name. While the farm was initially worth 100,000 sesterces, it had depreciated in value because the nurse was unable to maintain the property.[338] Pliny is concerned with the preservation of the estate, as well as with increasing 'the social capital that he has gained by his *donationes* and to present himself as a seasoned steward of fiscal and human resources, carrying out his *officia* as protector of the defenseless'; however, the gift to his nurse not only serves as a sign of his financial capabilities, but, more importantly, his desire to show generosity and provide her with support when she reached old age.[339] There is a sense of devotion on the part of Pliny to his nurse and he claims that his 'little gift' (*munusculum*) meant as much to the charge as it did to his wet-nurse. However, it is possible that the nurse's gratitude is an invention of Pliny since we have no direct response from her. As well, it is important to consider the social obligation that was associated with this gift: Pliny wished to be seen to be a generous master. While Pliny's *nutrix* might have appreciated the gift, there is no indication of what the farm truly meant to her.

The bond between the *nutrix* and her charge could have potentially brought about her early manumission if she had been enslaved. The second section of Book 40 of the *Digest* records the laws and rescripts concerning *manumissio vindicta,* one of the three formal forms of manumission which took place before a lictor, who, during this ceremony, would claim that the slave before him was freed and touched him with a ceremonial rod.[340] Although there were regulations established in the *Lex Aelia Sentia* that placed limitations on the ages at which a slave owner could free a slave and the age at which a slave could be manumitted, it is outlined in a quotation from Ulpian's *de Officio Proconsulis* that a slave owner who was a minor could potentially free a slave who was under 30 years of age on account of just cause: the *iustae affectiones* of the master's *nutrices* and *paedagogi* fell into this category. Given the wet-nurse's special position, it is possible that her former charge could manumit her before he turned 20 years old and prior to her turning 30.[341] Although early manumission was a possibility for the *nutrix*, and likely occurred for some fortunate women, it is important to remember that the manumission of a slave in a Roman context was at the discretion of the *dominus*.

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[338] Plin. *Ep*. 6.3; Rawson 2003: 123.

[339] Carlon 2009: 125-126.

The ideal devoted *nutrix* is also present in funerary art, specifically the mourning scene (*conclamatio*). The *conclamatio* on the front of a biographical sarcophagus of a young boy that was found near the Roman necropolis of Agrigento (Figure 8), which dates to between AD 120 to 130, furnishes an excellent example.[342] In this scene the deceased boy is wrapped in a shroud and laid out on a *kline* with his hands lying by his sides. His rather chubby cheeks suggest that he might have died at quite a young age.

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[340] Du Plessis 2010: 96. The other two formal forms were manumission by census (*manumissio censu*) and manumission by will (*manumissio testamento*).

[341] *Dig*. 33.2.34.1 (Scaevola), 40.2.13 (Ulpian); Joshel 1986: 5; Evans Grubbs 2001: 11; Rawson 2003: 123; Sparreboom 2014: 150-151.

[342] Amedick 1991: 121 (Kat. No. 2). The length of the sarcophagus is 96 cm, which suggests that this monument was indeed meant for a child. See George 2000: 203, for the measurement and a discussion of a similar *conclamatio* scene on an urn in the Museo Nazionale Romano (Figure 9, p. 206).

The child's veiled father, who sits in a chair by his son's feet, holds his right hand in a fist beneath his chin and his head is bent down slightly, with his gaze lowered. The boy's mother, who is also veiled, sits in a chair by her son's head with her left hand placed beneath her chin. The dress, posture, and gesture suggest that they are in a state of contemplative sorrow and silently mourning the loss of their child.[343] The *nutrix* has a considerably more active presence in this scene. She wears a kerchief and has her shoulder exposed, with the folds of the drapery hanging over the couch. She stands over her former charge, looking directly at him, and reaches towards the deceased from behind the couch, with her right hand grasping his chin. The *nutrix* is not alone in her emotional expression of grief, as she is accompanied by the child's aged, bearded pedagogue, who has his hands raised in a gesture of lamentation. The image of the distraught wet-nurse serves as a stark contrast to the depiction of the quiet parents. This juxtaposition is a reflection of Roman attitudes towards grieving as well as an illustration of social status differentiation.[344]

In a Roman context, death in childhood was not an uncommon occurrence, due to the reality of high infant and child mortality rates, and excessive parental grief was met with public disapproval. Seneca, for example, ridicules Marullus, a grieving father, for mourning 'a little child of unknown promise', while Cicero states that the death of a child ought to be dealt with in a calm manner and the death of an infant must not be mourned at all.[345] These attitudes coincide with the established mourning practices at Rome that have been attributed to Numa. The precise length of the mourning period depended on the age and social status of the deceased, which saw that parents were not permitted to mourn for their children if they died under the age of three years.[346]

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[343] George 2000: 203.

[344] George 2000: 203-204.

The free, wealthy parents were expected be controlled in their mourning, while wet-nurses, as well as other slave child-minders, were believed to be incapable of restraint and thus they expressed their grief in an open way that would be considered inappropriate if it was done by a free parent. As George observes, this difference in reaction to childhood death 'highlights the status distinctions between them (i.e., the slave child minders and parents) at the same time as it glorifies the deceased'. The overt grief of the wet-nurse is fitting of her social position, since as a slave it was assumed that she could not control her emotions, and the calm demeanor and detachment of the parents adheres to what was expected of their status.[347] It is important to bear in mind that the image of the mourning *nutrix* on this sarcophagus displays social behaviours that were considered ideal by her freeborn owners. Although the wet-nurse might have developed an affectionate attachment to her charge, since it is entirely possible that reality and ideal overlapped in some instances,[348] the highly idealized image that is depicted was likely chosen by the child's parents and not his nurse.

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[345] Sen. *Ep*. 99.2 (trans. Gummere 2006 [Loeb]); Cic. *Tusc*. 1.39.

[346] Plut. *Vit. Num*. 12.2; Hope 2009: 122-124.

[347] George 2000: 202-205.

[348] Bradley 1994a: 151.

As the young child's primary caregiver, the *nutrix* had a special position within the Roman *familia*. In cases of divorce, remarriage, and death, the *nutrix* was a figure of stability in the ever-changeable circumstances of the household. In addition to their basic tasks of feeding and other daily responsibilities surrounding their charges, these women were also tasked with providing affection, care, and love for the child. This provides an additional explanation for the inclusion of an emotional *nutrix* on the Agrigento sarcophagus.[349]

If a *nutrix* was placed in charge of a newborn and spent a great amount of time with him throughout his early childhood, it is entirely possible that an affectionate relationship would develop that, in some cases, extended beyond the required years. However, it is important to bear in mind the origin of the wet-nurse and nursling bond, that is, these women were placed into this relationship with children on account of their slave, or comparably inferior, status. In addition, we must be conscious of the precise nature of the evidence for the affective bond, as the majority of it was either written or commissioned by either the nursling or his family.[350] The evidence presents a key issue that is important to consider: that is, whether the affectionate bond between *nutrix* and charge was one-sided.[351] It is not possible to determine whether this bond was universally reciprocal, nor can we conclude whether the affection that the wet-nurse felt for her charge was genuine, since the circumstances within every Roman household differed greatly.

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[349] George 2000: 197-198.

[350] Bradley 1991c: 144-145.

[351] See Joshel 1986; Bradley 1986. Joshel argues that the coercive beginning of the *nutrix*-nursling relationship caused the wet-nurse to show no resistance to her master for the sake of herself and her family (if she had one). This compliance, Joshel argues, was interpreted by the master as devotion and affection. Bradley cautions that while the affective terminology in the inscriptions and literature does not offer a true representation of the nurse-nursling bond due to its biased nature, there is no commemorative evidence that has been left by uncaring nurses. Thus, it cannot be determined whether or not these relationships were always loving and affectionate.

The Family Life of *Nutrices*: The Epigraphic Evidence

(i) The presence of nutrices in Latin inscriptions

Although *nutrices* remain silent in the extant literary sources and funerary sculpture, their funerary inscriptions reveal more information and contribute to a fuller understanding of this complex figure. As Joshel observes, the voices of wet-nurses can be heard in epitaphs that were erected by their peers.[352] Roman *nutrices* have a presence in the Latin epigraphic record: there are 127 extant examples of funerary inscriptions that feature a woman who is a *nutrix*, naming her either as sole dedicator, placing her among a group of dedicators, or as the commemorated deceased. The inscriptions come from across the Empire, with 31 from Italy and 27 from the provinces; however, the majority of the stones (n= 69) have a Roman origin.[353] As for the social status of these women, an issue that has been explored extensively by previous scholarship,[354] the wet-nurse is often identified as a slave, a freedwoman, or possibly a low status freeborn woman. It can, however, be said with confidence that elite women do not have a presence in the epigraphic record of *nutrices*.[355]

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[352] Joshel 1986: 4.

[353] For the full list of all extant inscriptions that feature *nutrices*, including *CIL* and *AE* references, consult Bradley 1986: 204-206 (Table 8.1: Status of Nurses and Nurslings); Bradley 1991a: 15-16 (Table 2.1: Italian *Nutrices* and Table 2.2: Provincial *Nutrices*) and 35-36 (Inscription References).

[354] Treggiari 1976: 88-89; Joshel 1986; Bradley 1986, 1991a.

There is some variation in the epigraphic features that appear on the inscriptions of Roman *nutrices*, as they range from being simple and straightforward to the considerably more detailed and revealing. For example, an inscription that commemorates a wet-nurse from Barcino (modern Barcelona) reads:

D(is) M(anibus) | Fabiae | Tertullae | nutrici

To the spirits of the dead. Fabia Tertulla, wet-nurse.[356]

This inscription begins with the standard invocation addressing the dead, *Dis Manibus*, and is followed by the name of the wet-nurse, Fabia Tertulla, which appears in the dative case. The deceased possessed two names at the time of her death, which could signify that she was either a freeborn woman, perhaps indigenous to Barcino, or a *liberta*. Unfortunately, her status cannot be determined precisely because of the absence of libertination (the abbreviation *l*., which indicates that she was a *liberta*) and filiation (the abbreviation *f*., which indicates that she was a *filia*, or daughter, of a freeborn man) in her nomenclature. While her epitaph remains silent about the name of the dedicator and the name of her nursling, both of which could have shed light on her social status, Tertulla's title of *nutrix* appears in the dative case in the final line. Although this inscription does not provide us with a significant amount of detail about the life of Tertulla, the inclusion of her occupation in her funerary inscription suggests that this was a key part of her identity and was deemed worthy of permanent commemoration.

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[355] Bradley 1991a: 19. Only one woman can be identified with certainty as a freeborn woman: Cantria Paulla from Aeclanum (*CIL* IX 1154). However, Paulla is an exceptional case since she was not a proper *nutrix*. Her dedicator likely thought it was noteworthy that she nursed her own child and so included it on the epitaph (Bradley 1991a: 16).

[356] *AE* 1966, 197.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, an inscription from Scupi (an archaeological site near modern Skopje in Macedonia) is more telling. The epitaph, which commemorates a freed *nutrix*, provides the following information:

> *[D(is) M(anibus)] / [Flavia Cal]lityche v(ixit) / an(nis) LX Flavi/a Parthe/nope nu/triculae / et libert(a)e / bon(a)e b(ene) / m(erenti) p(osuit)*
>
> To the spirits of the dead. Flavia Callityche lived to 60 years. Flavia Parthenope set (this) up for her good and well-deserving nurse and freedwoman.[357]

Immediately after the common *Dis Manibus* abbreviation, the two names of the deceased appear in the nominative case, Flavia Callityche. The fact that she lived until she was 60 years of age is given a prominent place, as it appears in the same phrase as her name. Her social status is also made explicit here, as she is marked out as a *liberta* in line 6, and, what is more, the name of her former *domina,* who is also the one responsible for her commemoration, Flavia Parthenope, is mentioned in lines 3-5. Callityche's occupation appears in a diminutive form, *nutricula*, and it is set beside her *liberta* title. In addition, she is also assigned two affectionate epithets that describe her as a good wet-nurse who was well-deserving of her commemoration. Indeed, this inscription suggests that Parthenope considered Callityche's job as a *nutrix* to be an important facet of her social identity, but it is also an example of a lasting relationship between a wet-nurse and her nursling. While the age of Parthenope is not given, it is evident that Callityche was not nursing her at the age of 60 and thus it is likely that Parthenope was an adult when she set up this epitaph.

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[357] *AE* 1969/70, 584; *AE* 1964, 274.

(ii) Nutrices and their familial relationships

Familial Role	**Inscriptions**
Spouse (n=12)	*AE* 1960, 190; *CIL* III 2507; *CIL* III 8350; *CIL* V 3710; *CIL* VI 6686; *CIL* VI 8943; *CIL* VI 10554; *CIL* VI 12600; *CIL* VI 16592; *CIL* VI 23458; *CIL* VI 35037; *CIL* X 30
Mother (n=9)	*CIL* III 2507; *CIL* V 3710; *CIL* VI 7393; *CIL* VI 21347; *CIL* VI 28381; *CIL* VI 29550; *CIL* VI 23078; *CIL* IX 4864; *CIL* XIV 1539
Colliberta (n=2)	*CIL* VI 6686; *CIL* VI 8943
Conserva (n=2)	*CIL* VI 10554; *CIL* VI 12600
'Adopter' (n=2)	*CIL* VI 25728; *CIL* VI 28120
Aunt (n=1)	*CIL* III 10038
Grandmother (n=1)	*CIL* V 3710
Daughter (n=1)	*CIL* VI 9245

Table 3.1: Familial relationships indicated in the inscriptions of *nutrices* (information provided by Table 8.1 in Bradley 1986 (pp. 204-206) and Tables 2.1 and 2.2 in Bradley 1991a (pp. 15-16).

This category of evidence also provides insight into the family life of *nutrices*. The chief concern of previous scholarship in this area has been the separation of the slave family unit. Enslaved wet-nurses helped the *dominus* ensure that the infants, both *vernae* and free, within his household were cared for, even if the mother had died. The likelihood of separation from their own children, both physical and emotional, was a reality for many *nutrices* and it is highly probable that the wet-nurse had no say in the matter when it came to nursing a child that was not her own. The *dominus* had the freedom to use the fertility of his female slaves and their capacity to nurse to his own advantage, which caused the family of the *nutrix* to not be a top priority.[358]

Although this separation risk likely affected many *nutrices*, the epigraphic evidence suggests that some of them were able to achieve stability and maintain a family life and other important relationships. From the 127 extant inscriptions, there are 23 which show that the wet-nurse had relations that extended beyond the confines of the bond that she shared with her nursling.[359] While the sample is quite meager (18% of the total), it is nevertheless useful since it provides a picture for what might have been the familial circumstances for at least a portion of this group.

The most commonly attested relationship attested is spousal (a total of 12), with the *nutrix* being identified as *uxor*, *coniunx*, or *contubernalis* in the inscription. The stones are quite conventional, as they categorize wives as being the most deserving (*bene merenti*), devoted (*pientissima*), and illustrious (*clarissima*).[360] An interesting example, which comes from the Roman province of Lusitania (Valhelhas, Guarda, Portugal), reads as follows:

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[358] Bradley 1986: 213.

[359] *AE* 1960, 190 (Amabilis); *CIL* III 2507 (Claudia Epitaris); *CIL* III 8350 (Flavia Tatta); *CIL* III 10038 (Diana Anadre); *CIL* V 3710 (Postumia Paulina); *CIL* VI 6686 (Cacia Restituta); *CIL* VI 7393 (Volusia Stratonice); *CIL* VI 8943 (Valeria Hilaria); *CIL* VI 9245 (Rubria Ichmas); *CIL* VI 10554 (Restituta); *CIL* VI 12600 (Hilara); *CIL* VI 16592 (Crispina); *CIL* VI 21347 (Licinnia Processa); *CIL* VI 23458 (Paullina and Fabia Eutychis); *CIL* VI 25728 (Sabina); *CIL* VI 28120 (Mellitissima); *CIL* VI 28381 (Vatronia Arbuscula); *CIL* VI 29550 (Volussia Felicula); *CIL* VI 23078 (Novellia Atticilla); *CIL* VI 35037 (Pumidia Attica); *CIL* IX 4864 (Halicia Severa); *CIL* X 30 (Ediste); *CIL* XIV 1539 (Ragonia Eutychia).

[360] See, for example, *CIL* III 8350 (Flavia Tatta); *CIL* III 10038 (Diana Anadra); *CIL* VI 35037 (Pumidia Attica).

> *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Proculinus / Proculi (filius) sibi / et uxoribus / piiss<i=V>mis / Valeri(a)e et / Amabili / nutrici / filiorum / meorum / f(aciendum) c(uravit)*
>
> Sacred to the spirits of the dead. Proculinus (son) of Proculus arranged that (this) would be made for himself and his most devoted wives, Valeria and Amabilis, the nurse of my sons.[361]

The inscription indicates that it was set up to commemorate the memory of three individuals: Proculinus, Valeria, and Amabilis. Proculinus is identified as being the son of Proculus: his nomenclature reveals a naming practice of the indigenous population of Lusitania, wherein a son receives a single name related to that of his father, in either a diminutive or adjectival form, as well as his patronymic.[362] The epitaph also suggests that Proculinus had been married twice and was likely a widower. Valeria and Amabilis are referred to as Proculinus' 'most devoted wives' (*uxoribus piissimis*); however, only Amabilis is labeled as a *nutrix*. It is possible that Amabilis nursed all of Proculinus' children, including the ones that she did not give birth to, and that she was a *nutrix* for the children that Proculinus had from his first marriage to the presumably deceased Valeria. If we consider the reality of high maternal mortality rates, it is unlikely that this situation was unique to Amabilis and there must have been other women who functioned as *nutrices* in a similar manner.

The second most common relationship that appears is that between mother and child, with a total number of 9. The link between the wet-nurse and her nursling is attested to in six of the inscriptions, but the parent-child bond is not diminished. For example, an epitaph from Rome that commemorates a mother who happened to be a *nutrix* states:

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[361] *AE* 1960, 190; *ILER* 4461. I would like to warmly thank Dr. Evan Haley for his help in deciphering and understanding this particularly challenging inscription.

[362] For information on the importance of onomastics and family relations in Roman Lusitania, consult Edmondson 2005: 220-226.

> *D(is) M(anibus) / Volus{s}iae / Feliclae / Torquataes nutri<ci=X>(?) / fecit / Verecundus / filius matri / bene merenti / f(ecit)*
>
> To the spirits of the dead. Verecundus made (this) for Volussia Felicla, the nurse of Torquata. The son made (this) for his well-deserving mother.[363]

This epitaph indicates that Felicla was the *nutrix* of a girl named Torquata and that her commemorator was Verecundus, her natural son. Felicla's relationships with her charge and with her own son are memorialized in this inscription: both individuals are named as well as the type of bond that they shared with Felicla. In the case of Verecundus, he is identified as her *filius* in line 7 and Torquata's name in the genitive is placed beside Felicla's occupational title, *nutrix,* in line 4. It appears that Felicla's relationship with her charge was deemed important and worthy of commemoration, but this inscription suggests that her occupation did not overshadow her bond with her son since both appear in her epitaph.

Apart from being mothers and wives, the epigraphic evidence alludes to the existence of other types of relationships that Roman *nutrices* had which did not revolve around their nurslings. Dianadre (*CIL* III 10038), for example is commemorated by her nephew C. Iulius Certus, while the epitaph of the imperial freedwoman Valeria Hilaria (who was the wet-nurse of Octavia Caesar Augustus) and her husband Ti. Claudius Fructus (*CIL* VI 8943) was financed by their *colliberti*, Ti. Claudius Primus and Ti.

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[363] *CIL* VI 29550.

Claudius Aster. It is clear that in addition to the expectations surrounding their occupation and its ensuing associations with their charges and their *familiae*, some wet-nurses were able to maintain relationships that existed outside of this realm. Furthermore, the sense of security that having a family afforded in Rome was probably appealing to these women and some of them were capable of creating their own family unit, even if it was an informal one that was not protected by Roman law.

Conclusion

Childcare at Rome was considered a female-centric domain that was dominated by slaves, in particular the *nutrix*. In addition to feeding her charge, the wet-nurse was responsible for bathing, swaddling, weaning, and generally providing daily care for the young child. As a result, these women were viewed as being a part of the normal background of Roman childhood. Furthermore, the physicians who practiced in Rome displayed a neutral attitude towards *nutrices*, as they employed them as functional tools that were necessary for ensuring the welfare of their infant patients. The ideal wet-nurse that is described in the prescriptive medical texts was held to the same high standards as the perfect midwife, but she is treated differently in these treatises, as she required treatment that was unique to her and supervision by an authoritative figure. Nevertheless, the impact that she had on the health and socialization of her charge was, to the medical writers, a positive one: she continued the midwife's task of 'perfecting' the infant's body and served as a means for treating the child's illnesses.

The considerable amount of time that the *nutrix* spent with her nursling, however, caused some to express concern about the apparent disconnect between mother and child and the lack of the mother's involvement in the child's life during these formative years. It was believed by some male, elite authors that the *nutrix*-charge bond was detrimental to the naturally occurring parent-child affection, as it could either diminish it or damage it completely. Moreover, some Romans had a fear that the wet-nurse would pass on her undesirable, slave characteristics to the charge. Despite these reservations, *nutrices* were still used in Roman households and the relationship with their charge seems to have, in at least some cases, extended to the charge's teenage and adult years. Their presence in funerary commemoration and inscriptions suggest that there was much affection felt for them by their nurslings and their families; however, given the rather one-sided nature of this evidence, it is difficult to determine whether this affection was reciprocal. Although there were negative attitudes surrounding the wet-nurse and questions about the authenticity of her emotional attachment to her charge and his family, it is clear that she not only had a crucial role in the household and an influence on the development and socialization of the Roman child, but also on the mother, as the use of a wet-nurse served as a method of encouraging reproduction.

CHAPTER 4

Unwanted Pregnancies at Rome

Introduction

In his attempt to help encourage members of the senatorial and equestrian orders to marry and reproduce, the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus emphatically praises the lawmakers who sought to increase the Roman population.[364] At the beginning of his fifteenth treatise, he claims that, ‘all considered the increase of the homes of the citizens the most fortunate thing for the cities and the decrease of them the most shameful thing’.[365] The philosopher was not alone in his desire for Rome to be filled with families, and by extension an abundance of promising citizens, since this ideology is reflected not only in the Augustan legislation on the family, but in other areas of Roman law.[366] A manifestation of this was that girls were permitted to marry legally at age 12, an age which roughly coincided with the onset of menstruation. It appears that Roman girls were marrying typically in their mid to late teens, with some marrying before they had reached puberty. Despite the severe ramifications associated with sexual intercourse and childbirth at a young age, the link between the legal age at marriage, the age at menarche, and the median age at first marriage demonstrates that there was a conscious effort to maximize the number of reproductive years that a woman had, and thus increase the number of children that she bore. More children would provide security to their parents, ensure the continuation of their fathers' *nomina* and family *sacra*, and also serve as citizens of the Roman state.

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[364] Harrill 1995: 40; Carroll 2018: 175.

[365] Muson. 15: ‘οὐχὶ δὲ ϰαὶ οὗτοι πάντες συμφοϱώτατον μὲν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἐνόμισαν τὸ πληθύνεσθαι τοὺς τῶν πολιτῶν οἴϰους, βλαβεϱώτατον δὲ τὸ μειοῦσθαι;’ (trans. Lutz 1947).

[366] It is possible that Musonius is referring to the efforts of Augustus and the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *Lex Papia Poppaea*; however, he might have been engaged simply in a general philosophical discourse on the advantages of having children and on brotherhood (Hopkins 1965a: 73-74). Kapparis provides a slightly different interpretation of Musonius’ vagueness regarding the identity of the lawmakers. He argues that the philosopher was unable to cite any specific law against family limitation or any lawgiver who introduced legislation that prohibited it; thus, Musonius only refers to the ‘legislators of the past’ (Kapparis 2002: 181).

Musonius elaborates further on his opinion of those who decided to limit the number of children they had. While he considers the image of a man or a woman being surrounded by their children a fine sight, he refers to wealthy parents who want to have small families in order to avoid the Roman practice of partible inheritance as 'monstrous'. He views such planning as a 'deed of wickedness' because they are depriving their children of brothers, whom Musonius views as valuable, since, unlike money, these brothers are 'greater assurances of blessings'.[367] The philosopher also rebukes impoverished families and deems their excuse of destitution unjustifiable, since birds without any means whatsoever, and who also lack the intelligence, strength, and endurance of humans, are able to provide for their young.[368]

The philosopher is not alone in his condemnation of family limitation. Authors such as Cicero, Seneca, Tacitus, and Juvenal likewise express hostile attitudes towards the methods of family planning, which during the Roman period consisted of abortion, contraception, infanticide, and exposure. However, the brunt of their anger is reserved for the women who resort to these practices. The opposition of these elite, male writers appears to have arisen from two concerns. The first is the anxiety felt by men surrounding family limitation, which was rooted in the fear that women deprived husbands of rightful heirs and the Roman state of citizens. If, however, the father was involved in the decision, the action was regarded as suitable. The second issue that emerges from the sources is that of female autonomy. Family limitation methods gave women a means to control the issue of illegitimate children. Contraception, abortion, infanticide, and exposure enabled women to deviate from what was the well-established and expected social norm of becoming a mother. This is the chief reason why attitudes towards these practices and the women who use them are overwhelmingly negative; the reaction that is found in the sources is an extension of the Roman preoccupation with controlling female sexual desires and preserving the unformed character and untouched body of the Roman woman.

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[367] Muson. 15: 'διὸ καὶ νομίζω δεῖν ἕκαστον ἡμῶν τοῖς αὑτοῦ παισὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρημάτων μᾶλλον ἀπολείπειν ἀδελφούς, ὡς ἀφορμὰς ἀγαθῶν ἀπολείψοντα μείζονας' (trans. Lutz 1947).

[368] Muson. 15 borrows this image of a bird providing for her young from Hom. *Il*. 9.323 f.

Maternal and paternal intent is another important concept that contributes to our understanding of Roman attitudes towards family limitation. Ariès suggests that populations that preceded the demographic revolution,[369] including the Romans, were emotionally indifferent and callous towards neonatal and infant death, as well as accepting of practices like infanticide and exposure, because they were afflicted by high mortality rates, especially among the infant population.[370] Ariès' indifference hypothesis, when applied to Roman society, has received some criticism. Garnsey rightfully cautions against inferring the attitudes of Roman parents solely from their behaviours. In order to achieve a meaningful interpretation, it is important to consider such behaviours in their proper social, cultural, and economic context. Moreover, it is equally important to consider the complexities of maternal and paternal feelings, since they are not at all uniform.[371] While the intent of some mothers and fathers might reflect some level of indifference, Roman motivations were complex.

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[369] The phrase ‘demographic revolution’ or ‘demographic transition’ is used to describe the change from a high fertility and high mortality demographic regime to a low fertility and low mortality demographic regime. This type of demographic shift occurred in the West from the 18th to the 20th centuries. ‘Demographic revolution’ was the phrase that was introduced and preferred by the French demographic theorist Adolphe Landry, which was then adopted by Ariès in his work on children and childhood. (Ariès 1962: 9-10; Landry 1987). See also Frier 1994: 319-323; Saller 1997: Chapter 2, ‘Roman patterns of death, marriage and birth’.

Throughout this chapter I investigate attitudes towards the family limitation methods that were employed in Rome, and the women who used contraception, abortion, infanticide, and exposure. I explore three central themes: male anxiety surrounding family limitation, the control that these practices afforded Roman women, and parental intent. I begin with the concept of *patria potestas* and the controversial *ius vitae necisque*, the Roman father's power of life and death over his children. I consider the birth control methods themselves, starting with an examination of contraception and abortion, focussing on what caused them to be viewed with the harshest criticism in the sources. I then consider the practices of infanticide and exposure, with an emphasis on the circumstances and the motivations that caused them to be considered the more 'sensible' and compassionate options for Roman parents.

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[370] Ariès 1962: 38-39.

[371] Garnsey 1991: 50. In addition to Garnsey, see the influential article of Golden 1988 (especially pp. 158-159), who demonstrates how a myriad of factors, including cultural practices and social relations, must have had an impact on a parent's emotional feelings towards infant death, abortion, and exposure.

Patria Potestas, *Tollere Liberum*, and *Ius Vitae Necisque*

Patria potestas plays an important role in our understanding of Roman attitudes toward family planning and parental intent. This authority is defined by law as the absolute power that a *paterfamilias* had over the children who were born to him within a legitimate marriage (*iustae nuptiae*) with either a Roman citizen woman or a foreigner (*peregrina*) who had the capacity (*conubium*) to enter into a Roman marriage.[372] While other societies had similar paternal powers,[373] *patria potestas* was viewed by Romans themselves as a unique phenomenon, a sentiment that is captured in the jurist Gaius' commentary on state and natural law, in which he observes the following:

> 'Again, we have in our power our children, the offspring of a Roman law marriage. This right is one which only Roman citizens have; there are virtually no other people who have such power over their sons as we have over ours'.[374]

Although it is clear that *iustae nuptiae* created *patria potestas*, there has been debate as to when a newborn entered into his father's *potestas*. It has been suggested that *patria*

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[372] Treggiari 1991: 15-16; Watson 1967: 77; Gai. *Inst*. 1.55-56. Children who were adopted were also in their fathers' *potestas*; however, it is important to bear in mind that adoption in Rome typically occurred when the adoptee was an adult. For more information on *patria potestas* and adoption (*adrogatio* and *adoptio*), consult Watson 1967: 82-98.

[373] For example, Gaius states that the Galatians believe that children are in the power of their parents (*Inst*. 1.55).

[374] Saller 1997: 114; Gai. *Inst*. 1.55: 'Item in potestate nostra sunt liberi nostri, quos iustis nuptis procreauimus. Quod ius proprium ciuium Romanorum est (fere enim nulli alii sunt homines, qui talem in filios suos habent potestatem, qualemnos habemus)' (trans. Gordon and Robinson 1988).

potestas did not come into effect until the child was formally recognized by his father in a ceremony that is referred to as *tollere liberum* or *suscipere liberum*. Initially, it was thought that after the newborn had been inspected by the *obstetrix* and was declared viable, the father would lift him up from the ground, a symbolic gesture which served as a sign that he accepted the newborn into his family and his *potestas*.[375] What is perplexing, however, is that, despite this ritual's apparent social and legal significance, it does not appear anywhere in the juridical sources.

Shaw convincingly argues that the *tollere liberum* ritual is more of a modern invention and that the frequently cited evidence that is used to prove its existence has been misinterpreted. The phrase first appears in two accounts of Livy, with the first episode revolving around the first election of plebeians to the quaestorship in 409 BC, which caused the patricians to become angry about sharing such offices with plebeians. The patricians believed that, if matters continued to regress in this manner, their descendants would be excluded from their ancestral honours and offices and so they were less inclined to rear more children.[376] The second occurs in Livy's description of the year 393 BC, which saw a senatorial decree issued in order to avoid a population stasis at Rome under the dictator Furius Camillus after the fall of Veii. Fearing a shortage of manpower, the Senate decreed that they would apportion the Veientine land among all the plebeians, including both *patresfamilias* and freeborn men who had yet to have families in the hopes that they might be willing to rear children.[377] In both of these accounts Livy refers to the raising of children in the more mundane sense of rearing them, as opposed to literally raising them up from the ground. Furthermore, a passage from Seneca reveals that both father and mother were involved in *tollere liberum*, since they both received powers from the state as compensation for the 'uncertain hazard' of having children.[378]

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[375] Shaw 2001: 33-34 outlines the established position presented by J. Declareuil in *Rome et l'organisation du droit* (Paris 1924:126) [= *Legitimate Children Born in Wedlock*, in: *Rome the Law-Giver*, trans. Parker (London: 1927: 114-117)]. See also Dixon 1988: 237-240. The appendix, 'Appendix 1. *Tollere Liberos*: the birth of a Roman child', provides a summary of the key sources that are often used as evidence for the existence of the *tollere/suscipere liberum* ritual.

[376] Livy 4.54.7: 'Patres contra non pro communicatis sed pro amissis honoribus fremere; negare, si ea ita sint, liberos tollendos esse, qui pulsi maiorum loco cernentesque alios in possessio dignitatis suae, salii flaminesque nusquam alio quam ad sacrificandum pro populo sine imperiis ac potestatibus relinquantur'.

As for the legal evidence, variants of the phrase *tollere*/*suscipere liberum* appear in the juridical sources, but the jurists do not use it to discuss the ritual lifting of the infant from the ground; rather, the phrase is used to refer to reproducing and parenting in general. For example, in his entry on the rights of the patron concerning oaths with his freedmen in the *lex Aelia Sentia*, Paul states that patrons are forbidden from forcing freedwomen to swear off marriage and freedmen to abstain from having children, but he does not comment on patrons banning freedmen from raising infants from the ground.[379] The idea that there was a ceremony called the *tollere*/*suscipere liberum* is therefore a result of the misinterpretation of the sources concerned with the rearing of children.

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[377] Livy 5.30.8: 'Adeoque ea victoria laeta patribus fuit ut postero die referentibus consulibus senatus consultum fieret ut agri Veientani septena iugera plebe dividerentur, nec patribus familiae tantum, sed ut omnium in domo liberorum capitum ratio haberetur, vellentque in eam spem liberos tollere'.

[378] Shaw 2001: 39-40, 46-47; Sen. *Ben*. 3.11: '"Quaedam," inquit, "privilegia parentibus data sunt; quomodo horum extra ordinem habita ratio est, sic aliorum quoque beneficorum haberi debet." Parentium condicionem sacravimus, quia expediebat liberos tolli; sollicitandi ad hunc labrem erant incertam adituri fortunam'.

[379] *Dig*. 37.14.6 (Paul): 'Adigere iureiurando, ne nubat liberta uel liberos tollat, intellegitur etiam is, qui libertum iurare patitur'; Shaw 2001: 45. See also *Dig*. 23.4.27 (Papinian), 29.2.92 (Paulus), 34.4.24 (Papinian), 37.4.14 (Africanus).

Even though Roman fathers did not engage in a ritual that symbolized formal recognition, they still held *patria potestas* over their children and it appears that the authority came into effect once the baby was born. The chief source for this is a *Digest* entry by Scaevola which documents the following case: a divorced woman exposed a male infant who was found and reared by someone else, yet he was always referred to by his biological father's name. The child's father, who was not aware that his child was alive, made a will in which he did not explicitly name the child as an heir nor disinherit him. The child's mother and paternal grandmother recognized him and he was named as a *legitimus heres*, succeeding on intestacy. A question surrounding the validity of the manumissions in the will was raised and it was determined that the will was invalid because the son was within the power of the father (*in potestate*), even if the father was unaware of his existence.[380] This particular case has been used to demonstrate persuasively that children were considered *in potestate* at birth, since it is specifically mentioned that the son, despite being exposed at birth, was still under his father's *potestas*.

Children who lived under the authority of a *paterfamilias* experienced several restrictions. In addition to his immediate children, a *paterfamilias* could have his grandchildren and great grandchildren in his *potestas*. While living in *patria potestas*, children did not have the ability to control property of their own and they lacked the legal capacity to create a will. Instead, it was customary for fathers to give *filiifamilias* access to a *peculium*, or allowance, but even this was considered the property of the father and its use was subject to his discretion. The *paterfamilias* could manipulate the marriages of his dependents to serve his benefit, choosing whom they were to marry and divorce, and he also had the right to sell his children.[381] *Patria potestas* came to an end in one of two ways: either through *emancipatio*, a legal procedure initiated by the father in which he freed his child, or through the death of the *paterfamilias*. Once released from *patria potestas*, the father's children and any fatherless grandchildren were considered *sui iuris*, or legally independent. His sons with families became *patresfamilias* themselves and his grandchildren were now in the *potestas* of their own fathers.[382]

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[380] *Dig*. 40.4.29 (Scaevola); Watson 1967: 81-82.

In addition to legal and social dependencies, *filiifamilias* were subject to what is often interpreted as the father's legal right to kill his children, *vitae necisque potestas*. This controversial element of *patria potestas* has been the object of much contention, especially the extraordinary historical cases that involve a father putting to death an adult son or daughter. It is argued that many of these instances, such as the episodes of L. Brutus and T. Manlius Torquatus executing their sons, serve as *exempla* for magistrates, who set aside their natural, paternal affection for their children and demonstrate severity as a sign of their commitment to their office and the Roman state.[383]

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[381] Watson 1967: 99; Treggiari 1991: 15-16; Saller 1997: 119.

[382] Treggiari 1991: 15.

[383] Harris 1986: 86; Saller 1997: 114-117.

The meagre evidence among the jurists and the later date of the sources has led to speculation about the legality of the *vitae necisque potestas*.[384] A problematic source that is often used to showcase the ancient legal authority of the *vitae necisque potestas* is Dionysius of Halicarnassus' account of the institutions and laws established by Romulus. In his discussion of the different types of punishments that Roman fathers were allowed to exact on their children, Dionysius claims that the lawgiver granted fathers full power over their sons, including the power to imprison them, to put them to work in the fields, and to put them to death. Within the same account Dionysius outlines the means by which Romulus endeavoured to create a populous state. The first of his regulations required parents to rear all of their male children and the first-born female children under three years of age unless they were deemed unfit by a council of the family's five closest neighbours.[385] While these rules are presented as being part of the ancestral constitution of Rome that was codified in the Twelve Tables, there is no mention of *vitae necisque potestas* for the father in any reconstruction of the Twelve Tables. It is probable that Dionysius of Halicarnassus' narrative is a symptom of the Augustan writers' preoccupation with promoting the ideology of the social relations of early Rome, as opposed to relaying the precise contents of laws themselves and their development.[386]

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[384] Yaron 1962: 245. The first source to mention the *vitae necisque potestas* is Cic. *Dom*. 29.77, in a passing comment in his rebuke of the illegal nature of P. Fonteius' adoption of Clodius. It is also interesting to note that the phrase, *vitae necisque potestas*, is not mentioned anywhere else in Cicero's public speeches (Shaw 2001: 59-60).

[385] Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 2.26.4 (a father's right to put his son to death), 2.15.2 (parents' obligation to raise all male and first-born female).

[386] Shaw 2001: 68.

Another key issue becomes evident when we examine the jurists who were active during the late Republican and early Imperial periods. As a companion statute to the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* of 18 BC, Augustus introduced the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* which had the *ius occidendi* as a core component that allowed a father to kill his daughter if she were caught in the act of adultery.[387] This element of the law caused confusion and led it to be frequently conflated with the *vitae necisque potestas*. Despite this incorrect association, this legislation was completely independent of *patria potestas* and it did not grant a formal legal base for the *vitae necisque potestas*, nor was that ever the intention of the law. The *lex Iulia* gave the father the right to kill both his daughter and her lover; however, there were certain restrictions attached to this right, the key element being that the father had to kill both persons under his authority (*sua manu*). Furthermore, the father could only do this if he caught the pair actively engaged in sexual intercourse and if he discovered them in either his own house or that of his son-in-law.[388] The jurist Papinian outlines a rationale for the father's considerably more severe power:

> 'The reason why it is the father not the husband who is allowed to kill the woman and any adulterer [caught with her] is that, for the most part, the concern for family duty implicit in the title of father takes counsel for his children; but the heat and impetuosity of a husband [too] readily jumping to a decision should be restrained.'[389]

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[387] The *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* was introduced a few months after the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* (McGinn 1998: 140).

[388] Mette-Dittmann 1991: 62-63; Saller 1997: 116; McGinn 1998: 146-147; *Dig*. 48.5.25, 23-24. Unlike the father, the offended husband was not permitted to kill his wife under any circumstance and he was only allowed to kill her lover if he was a pimp, a former performer, a convicted criminal who had yet to be restored to his former status, a freedman of a family member, or a slave.

[389] *Dig*. 48.5.23.4 (Papinian): 'Ideo autem patri, non marito mulierem et omnem adulterum remissum est occidere, quod plerumque pietas paterni nominis consilium pro liberis capit: ceterum mariti calor et impetus facile decernentis fuit refrenandus' (trans. Watson 1985).

A father would be inclined to check his anger and exercise restraint towards his daughter, whereas a cuckolded husband would likely be unable to control his emotions and his wrath would cloud his better judgement in such a case. It seems that Augustus and his fellow lawmakers understood these human reactions and through imposing these regulations they restricted the validity of the *ius occidendi* and ensured that it could not be exercised unless in exceptional circumstances.[390]

Given its questionable historicity and relative lack of formal legal grounds, it is probable that the *vitae necisque potestas* was used more as a cultural metaphor that helped to assert the extensive authority that *patresfamilias* desired in order to preserve their property and families, as opposed to being an established formal power or legal right.[391] As a result, the *vitae necisque potestas* served an important social function as a protection for fathers who made the decision to reject newborns. Infanticide and infant exposure were common practices with healthy, legitimate, and even male children counted among the victims. Since these acts could be a source of shame and were met with some opposition, because they were viewed by some as murder, it is possible that the *vitae necisque potestas* had been used to legitimize infanticide and infant exposure, and protected fathers who chose this fate for their offspring.[392]

The protections offered by the *ius vitae necisque* and the rights that *patria potestas* granted at birth place a considerable amount of control in the hands of the

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[390] Saller 1997: 116; McGinn 1998: 205.

[391] Shaw 2001: 71-72; Saller 1986:18-20 and 1997: 115-117.

[392] *Dig*. 25.3.4 (Paul); Harris 1986: 92-93.

Roman father. It is clear that these measures were implemented, whether they were formal or not, and that they played a critical role in the Romans' social attitudes towards reproductive management. *Patria potestas* and the severe implications that came to be associated with the *ius vitae necisque* helped to ensure that a *paterfamilias* had the ability to exercise control over his family and indicate that the exercise of this authority was sometimes considered a suitable, or even responsible, action. It was only appropriate that the *paterfamilias* should make decisions concerning the welfare of his rightful heirs, including whether they were to be his heirs at all. According to this social construct, the authority that a *paterfamilias* possessed was his alone and, as will become evident in the following sections, if this power was exercised instead by the would-be mother, it was deemed subversive and unacceptable.

A Note on Partible Inheritance

Prior to analyzing the different forms of family limitation and their associated motivations, it is useful to discuss the economic factors that likely encouraged Roman parents to manage the size of their families. Musonius Rufus' criticisms mentioned above demonstrate how financial concerns affected both wealthy and impoverished Romans: while those who were destitute did not want large families because of a lack of resources, members of the elite and those with some measure of property and other types of wealth faced another challenge in the form of partible inheritance.

It was the Roman custom to split inheritance equally among all children, including daughters, and all legitimate children were treated relatively equally in inheritance, regardless of their birth order.[393] This socially accepted practice was also enforced in the rules of intestacy: if a father failed to draft a will, all of his children were recognized as his next of kin and they all received an equal share of his estate. In cases when a father decided to disinherit one of his children, the child had the ability to invalidate the will in court and be successful, if they could prove unjust cause. Ulpian states the following:

> ‘It should be noted that complaints against the undutiful (will) are common; for it is possible for everyone to argue want of duty, parents as well as children. For one’s cognates beyond the degree of brother would do better not to trouble themselves with useless expense since they are not in a position to succeed’.[394]

This suggests that it was customary for Roman fathers to treat their heirs fairly and equally. Partible inheritance presented an issue for senatorial families who were on the margins of this social order, since maintaining one’s position in the senatorial order required not just political influence, but also substantial finances. A senatorial father in this particular circumstance who had more than one child ran the risk of diminishing each child’s social status because he had to sub-divide his estate. However, senatorial fathers were also inclined to want more than one child in order to ensure the continuation of his *nomen* and social status.[395] Many senatorial families were likely faced with this unique dilemma, whether they should reproduce or practice birth control, and must have found it difficult to confront this issue. Evidently, wealth and family limitation were inextricably linked and had an impact on Romans from all social strata.

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[393] Hopkins 1983: 43.

[394] *Dig*. 5.2.1 (Ulpian): ‘Sciendum est frequentes esse inofficiosi querellas : omnibus enim tam parentibus quam liberis de inofficioso licet disputare. Cognati enim proprii qui sunt ultra fratrem melius facerent, si se sumptibus inanibus non uexarent, cum optinere spem non haberent’ (trans. Watson 1985).

[395] Hopkins 1983: 76-78.

Contraception and Abortion

The Romans employed numerous substances and methods which they believed acted as contraceptives and abortives. Soranus, for example, recommends *coitus interruptus* and the use of vaginal suppositories, such as pomegranate peel mixed with water, in order to prevent conception, and for those trying to induce an abortion he recommends violent exercise, including energetic walking and being shaken by draught animals. Pliny the Elder, on the other hand, suggests rubbing the man's penis with cedar gum as an effective spermicide.[396] Indeed, the prescriptions are varied and creative, but the evidence for contraception is considered slight, and although some might have worked, the efficacy of the methods for both contraceptives and abortives is highly questionable. As Parkin states, however, it is probable that contraception was considered the first option for family limitation, but not too many Romans would be surprised if pregnancy quickly followed. As for abortion, in addition to potential ineffectiveness, another problem arose. Despite the fact that certain concoctions and procedures could kill an unwanted fetus, they ultimately had a detrimental effect on the mother's life and her fertility, especially if dangerous, invasive operations were used in unhygienic conditions and without the help of a trained physician.[397] These issues notwithstanding, abortion and contraception are mentioned in medical sources and legal texts, which suggests that they were trusted and used to at least some extent and thus should not be discounted.

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[396] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.61-62, 64; Plin. *HN* 24.11.18. The methods of contraception and abortion have received considerable attention in previous scholarship. See Hopkins 1965b; Nardi 1971; Dickison 1973; Eyben 1980; McLaren 1990; Riddle 1991 and 1992.

[397] Hopkins 1965b: 142; Parkin 1992: 127-128.

Contraception and abortion are grouped together because the distinction between the two seems not to have been generally understood in the Roman era. Many of the prescriptions provided in medical texts are classified as both abortives and contraceptives. Following a list of strictly contraceptive prescriptions, Soranus describes some methods that he claims have a dual function. One obol of rocket seed and a half obol of cow parsnip mixed with oxymel (a mixture of vinegar and honey), for example, could 'not only prevent conception, but also destroy any already existing,' leading Soranus to strongly caution against their use as contraception.[398] In his *De Materia Medica*, Dioscorides observes that pepper is a contraceptive if it is applied after intercourse; if not, then it is considered an abortive. Although he makes a distinction between the two, it is difficult to comprehend his reasoning. It is apparent that even among the medical writers there was a lack of understanding about contraception and abortion.[399] It appears that Soranus is the only source who is unambiguous in his explanation of the two. His comments on the matter are as follows: 'A contraceptive differs from an abortive, for the first does not let conception take place, while the latter destroys what has been conceived. Let us, therefore, call the one "abortive" and the other "contraceptive".'[400]

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[398] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.63: '…οὐ μόνον κωλυτικὰ συλλήψεως ὑπάρχει, ἀλλὰ καὶ φθαρτικὰ τῆς ἤδη συνεστώσης' (trans. Temkin 1991).

[399] Dioscorides, *de materia medica* 2.159.3; Hopkins 1965b: 136-137.

[400] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.60: '<Ἀτόκιον> δὲ <φθορίου> διαφέρει, τὸ μὲν οὐκ ἐᾷ γενέσθαι σύλληψιν, τὸ δὲ φθείρει τὸ συλληφθέν · εἴπωμεν οὖν ἄλλο "φθόριον" καὶ ἄλλο "ἀτόκιον"' (trans. Temkin 1991).

The confusion and ambiguity among writers other than Soranus, however, is not at all surprising because both trained physicians and average Romans alike were unable to determine conception with certainty and there was even disagreement about the length of the gestation period. Once more, Soranus displays an impressive understanding of gestation and the signs of conception, observing that during the first trimester the fetus is unshapen and so must be referred to as the conception of the seed, while after the first trimester, when the fetus has started to take shape, it is called an embryo. In addition to distinguishing between the seed and the embryo, he appears to understand that the gestation period lasts nine months and that care for the mother-to-be differs at every stage. In his discussion of the signs of conception, Soranus also demonstrates that he is aware that some unnamed physicians and laymen wrongly claim that conception cannot be recognized.[401] Aulus Gellius showcases what was likely a commonly held perception of the gestation period. In his attempt to answer the question of whether a child who was born in the eighth month but died immediately after counted towards a couple who sought the benefits of the *ius trium liberorum*, Aulus Gellius claims that a baby can be born in the seventh, ninth, or tenth month, but not in the eighth. He also records that there are some cases of pregnancies that lasted eleven and thirteen months.[402] This confusion surrounding conception and gestation contributed to the lack of distinction between contraception and abortion. Abortion and contraception likewise must have had an impact on the Romans' understanding of conception since abortions that occur early on in the pregnancy can be virtually unnoticeable.[403] Given the general lack of understanding of the difference between the two, they should be examined together.

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[401] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.43-44 (signs of conception), 1.56 (length of the gestation period).

[402] Gell. *NA* 3.16.21 and 3.10.8.

(i) Abortion, contraception, and maternal intent

The intentions of Roman women who employed contraception and abortion instead of infanticide and exposure can be classified into two general categories: those of elite and free women, and those that were associated with female slaves. In addition to these two categories that are based on the woman's social status, circumstances which caused a physician to recommend contraception or abortion are included in this discussion. It is important to bear in mind that some of the intentions were limited to one social group and others were more universal. Furthermore, the attitudes towards them vary considerably, with those of elite, free women receiving the most scorn, while the sources appear to demonstrate more sympathy toward enslaved women and genuine concern for women who have to prevent or abort pregnancies because of medical conditions.

It was established in the first chapter of this study that in the western Empire women of free status married at an early age, either during their mid to late teens or early twenties, with some marrying considerably earlier. The purpose of a relatively young age at marriage was essentially twofold: to encourage an extended period of childbearing for women and to control the supposed lack of sexual control in pubescent girls in order to safeguard their husbands' *nomina* and the legitimacy of their heirs. This resulted in free, primarily elite, women having a substantial reproductive period, especially when compared to their freed and enslaved counterparts. They were also more inclined to use a *nutrix* to feed their children, which prevented the natural contraceptive effect of lactation. These factors might have made other forms of contraception and abortives appealing to women.[404] The ancient sources reveal that elite women used these family limitation methods to help preserve their figures, to conceal adultery, and to prevent themselves from enduring the pains of childbirth and childrearing.

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[403] Hopkins 1965b: 138.

Despite its humorous context, Juvenal's sixth satire provides insight into what might have motivated women to use contraception and abortion. There are two particular instances in which women who use these two methods are subject to Juvenal's invective. In the first case, the satirist claims that there are some who take their attractive male slaves to a surgeon to be castrated so that they can have relations with them without the risk of becoming pregnant. Hopkins states that Juvenal is only possibly referring to the use of eunuchs as contraceptives here, but the beginning of the text is fairly clear about their function: 'There are some women who take a delight in non-combatant eunuchs with their girlish kisses and beardless faces (another advantage: they do not necessitate drugs to procure abortions).'[405] The satirist continues his reproach, but shifts his focus to women who are wealthy enough to purchase abortive drugs. He laments that these women pay abortionists to help them murder their unborn children, and that even if they did not do so, their husbands would be in for a rude awakening: their children would obviously be illegitimate, as they look nothing like their fathers, yet they would have a place in the will.[406] Soranus echoes this sentiment, albeit in a less poignant manner. He agrees with other physicians who refuse to prescribe contraceptives and abortives to women who want to conceal the results of an extramarital affair.[407]

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[404] McLaren 1990: 54.

[405] Juv. *Sat*. 6.366-379; Hopkins 1965b: 136. The Latin text in question reads as follows (366-368): 'sunt quas eunuchi inbelles ac mollia semper oscula delectent et desperatio barbae et quod abortivo non est opus' (trans. Rudd 1991).

These passages reveal that some Roman women wanted to use contraception and abortion as a way to commit adultery without the consequence of pregnancy. However, they can be interpreted in an additional way that is perhaps more applicable to Roman women of childbearing age in general. Considering the physical and emotional toll that pregnancy takes on women, it is understandable that some women did not want to endure the demanding process. Furthermore, contraception and abortion prevented women from undergoing the psychological stress of committing infanticide or exposing a neonate.

A similar justification can be applied to women who preferred to use contraceptives instead of abortion. Abortion was considered a far more dangerous solution than contraception and Soranus cautions against its use for this precise reason, a point which will be discussed below. Certain methods put the life of the mother in jeopardy and the number of unintentional maternal deaths from abortion was likely quite high, an assumption that seems to be supported by the sources. In the legal sphere, individuals who administer abortifacients that resulted in the death of the mother were sentenced to death themselves.[408] The presence of this punishment in the *Digest* suggests that this type of death occurred often enough that it warranted attention by the jurists.

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[406] Juv. *Sat*. 6.595-601.

[407] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.60.

There are also references to the dangers of abortion from outside the medical and legal sources. Although these authors are considerably more disapproving and moralistic, they nevertheless demonstrate that even laypersons understood the risks associated with abortion.[409] Corinna's near-fatal experience and Ovid's subsequent invective against abortion in the *Amores* echoes the average Roman's knowledge of the dangers of abortion.[410] In the thirteenth elegy, the poet expresses how his concern for his lover's well-being has overcome his anger towards her for procuring an abortion without his consent, which is significant since he is far more preoccupied with Corinna's welfare than that of the fetus.[411] In the fourteenth poem Ovid laments the young women who, in their attempts to kill their unborn children, often died as well. There is a marked change in tone, however, as the poet views the women's deaths as a punishment for their actions, as he states: 'she who first plucked forth the tender life deserved to die in the warfare she began'.[412] These sources reveal that, in addition to the overall negative attitude towards abortion, some of the abortives that were available to Roman women were indeed dangerous and that there were established risks associated with them. The hazards of abortion might have caused other options, such as contraception, to be more attractive to women who did not want to undergo a pregnancy.

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[408] *Dig*. 48.19.38.5 (Paul).

[409] Kapparis 2002: 17.

[410] Parkin 1992: 128. Ovid is the first ancient author who is vocal is his objection of abortion.

[411] Ov. *Am*. 2.13.

[412] Ov. *Am*. 2.14.5-6: 'Quae prima instituit teneros convellere fetus, militia fuerat digna perire sua' (trans. Showerman 1977 [Loeb]).

The final incentive for abortion that appears to be associated almost exclusively with elite freeborn women is the maintenance of beauty. According to the sources, physical attractiveness was of great importance to Roman women, so much so that they were willing to run the risk of a possibly fatal abortion. Soranus maintains his fairly neutral stance, as he states that he will not prescribe an abortive in order to preserve youthful beauty. The physician was very much aware of the potential ramifications of abortion and did not believe that abortion for the sake of beauty was worth the risk.[413] The likes of Juvenal and Ovid, on the other hand, adopt the moralist perspective and claim that elite women viewed pregnancy as a gross inconvenience that troubled their wombs and had an adverse effect on their figures. The objections of these poets are rooted in ethical and political considerations and, despite their moralizing tone, they likely reflect common attitudes towards abortion as well as social practice. Kapparis takes this interpretation further and reasonably argues that these three sources reveal that there was significant pressure placed upon elite Roman women to maintain their figures. Social status and prestige meant a great deal to these women and their appearance must have been a core component of their identity and social worth; thus, a great deal of effort evidently went into maintaining their looks.[414]

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[413] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.60; Kapparis 2002: 119.

[414] Juv. *Sat.* 6.598-599; Ov. *Am.* 2.14.7-8; Kapparis 2002: 119-120.

The second type of motivation that might have caused a Roman woman to use contraception or induce an abortion was risk in pregnancy that might have endangered her welfare. Immediately after his remarks in which he conveys his support for physicians who refuse to prescribe abortives and contraceptives to women who want to conceal adultery or preserve their beauty, Soranus states that it is acceptable to use these remedies only in the following circumstances:

> '…to prevent subsequent danger in parturition if the uterus is small and not capable of accommodating the complete development, or if the uterus at its orifice has knobby swellings and fissures, or if some similar difficulty is involved. And they say the same about contraceptives as well, and we too agree with them. And since it is safer to prevent contraception from taking place than to destroy a fetus, we shall now first discourse upon such prevention.'[415]

This incentive is another manifestation of the apprehension that physicians had for the detrimental effect that underdevelopment could have on the health of the mother and fetus. The didactic texts of Galen and Soranus recommended that a girl should marry and start procreating shortly after the onset of menstruation since her uterus was now prepared to fulfil its proper function. The only writer who was adamant about delaying marriage until later was Rufus, who observed that puberty was not an ideal time for a girl to start having children because of the damage that the pregnancy would inflict on the young mother's womb.[416] Despite their differing opinions, the doctors attempted to prevent the need for contraception and abortion by stating that if a girl's uterus or her cervix is not developed fully, then she should not become pregnant. However, as the above passage from Soranus indicates, it is clear that some young women still became pregnant and the pregnancies were deemed problematic. Whether the woman was underdeveloped or affected by a uterine or genital condition, physicians recognized that the pregnancy could have a negative effect on her health and thus recommended that she use contraceptives and, if absolutely necessary, abortives.

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[415] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.60: '…ἀλλ' ὅτε διὰ <τὸ> κίνδυνον κωλῦσαι γενησόμενον ἐν ταῖς ἀποτέξεσιν, μικρᾶς τῆς μήτρας ὑπαρχούσης καὶ μὴ δυναμένης χωρῆσαι τὴν τελείωσιν, ἢ κατὰ τοῦ στομίου κονδυλώματα καὶ ῥαγάδας ἐχούσης, ἤ τινος ἐμφεροῦς περιστάσεως ἐγκειμένης. τὰ δὲ αὐτὰ λέγουσιν καὶ περὶ ἀτοκίων, οἷς καὶ <ἡμεῖς> συναινοῦμεν. ὅθεν ἐπεὶ τοῦ φθεῖραι τὸ κωλῦσαι γενέσθαι σύλληψιν ἀσφαλέστερον, περὶ τούτου νῦν πρῶτον ὑποδεὶξομεν' (trans. Temkin 1991).

Slave women had a set of different motivations that were influenced primarily by their social status. Unlike their free counterparts, slaves were not recognized as citizens and they did not have the protections afforded by Roman law. A critical factor, however, is that their enslaved male partners did not have *patria potestas* over their children. An informal slave marriage, or *contubernium*, could only exist at the discretion of the owner and the couple's children, if born while enslaved, were not *iusti filii*; rather, they were *vernae* (house-born slaves) who were the legal property of the owner. The social status of a slave woman also meant that her physical person was subject to her *dominus*, who had the power to decide if a pregnant slave kept the baby. Although it is from a Greek context, the Hippocratic anecdote of a slave girl's abortion helps to illustrate the control that a master, whether Greek or Roman, had over the pregnancy of a slave. The author recounts how one of his female relatives owned a female singer who also had sexual relations with men, yet she was not allowed to become pregnant lest she lose her value. The slave girl did become pregnant at one point, but she was able to induce an abortion successfully.[417] This episode shows that it was the mistress' decision for the slave girl to have an abortion for the sole purpose of maintaining her property. While the author suggests that the girl had some understanding of what happened to her and knew that it needed to be remedied, she is described as obedient to her mistress and able to follow the instructions of the Hippocratic doctor. The slave girl adopts a passive role in this situation and does not offer any objection or sign of relief concerning the abortion. Given her lack of physical autonomy, her motivation for the abortion is the order of her master.

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[416] Sor. *Gyn.* 1.20; Gal. *San. Tuenda* 6.2.16; Ruf. ap. Orib. *Coll. Med. lib. inc.* 18.7 (*CMG* 6.2.2, 4.107).

The second incentive that was exclusive to enslaved women was that they were unable to raise a child in slavery in addition to enduring their own enslavement.[418] The source which suggests that this dilemma had an impact on pregnant slaves is Dio Chrysostom, who was active in the 1st century AD. In his 15th discourse on slavery and freedom, Chrysostom states the following:

> '…but in the case of slave women, on the other hand, some destroy the child before birth and others afterwards, if they can do so without being caught, and yet sometimes even with the connivance of their husbands, that they may not be involved in trouble by being compelled to raise children in addition to their enduring slavery.'[419]

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[417] Hippoc. *Nat. puer*. 2.

[418] Harris 1994: 14.

[419] Dio. Chrys. *Or*. 15.8: 'τὰς δὲ δούλας τοὐναντίον, τὰς μὲν πϱὸ τοῦ τόϰου διαφθειϱούσας, τὰς δὲ ὕστεϱον, ἐὰν δύνωνται λαθεῖν, τὸ γενόμενον ἐνίοτε ϰαὶ τῶν ἀνδϱῶν συνειδότων, ὅπως μὴ πϱάγματα ἔχωσι παιδοτϱοφεῖν ἀναγϰαζόμεναι πϱὸς τῇ δουλείᾳ' (trans. Cohoon 1939 [Loeb]).

The additional physical and mental demands of pregnancy and child-rearing would have made a slave's daily life even more difficult and their overall existence all the more unbearable. Furthermore, it is possible to infer that slave women were motivated to abort out of compassion for the unborn baby. Instead of giving birth to a *verna* who would have to endure a life of slavery and its associated physical and emotional anguish, a mother made the decision to not subject her child to this condition. Rather than her *dominus* exercising control over her action, the slave is the one who makes the decision out of consideration not only for her own welfare, but also that of her child. Furthermore, this text suggests that, in certain dire circumstances, the fathers are also involved in the choice to attempt an abortion. This is an interesting piece of evidence, since, as we have already seen, the action is often ascribed to women who were motivated to act either against their husbands' or lovers' wishes.

(ii) Female control and male anxiety

Although there are motivations for abortion that were classified as legitimate by Roman writers and that adhered to the social norms of society, abortion was nevertheless despised because it was often claimed that the women who employed it often did so against the wishes of their husbands and *patresfamilias*. Since a high valuation was placed on children, as they were an important resource for the husband's family and for the Roman state, abortion was viewed as an attack against men. The motivating factor for abortion that contributed to this sentiment was the concealment of adultery, which would have had a significant impact on the father's household. Moreover, with the exception of a few instances, the motivations for abortion are female-centric and it has been suggested that the reason why a husband or *paterfamilias* was rarely consulted when a woman was contemplating whether she should have an abortion is because the woman had something to conceal from him.[420] Since this was the case, abortion and contraception, to a certain extent, were not very well understood by men and thus were viewed with much suspicion.

The impression that is often given in secondary sources is that contraception and abortion were viewed as female concerns and, in the case of contraception in particular, they appear only seldom in the sources, having been deemed unworthy of discussion by male writers, who preferred to document the accomplishments of men. Hopkins, for example, argues that the reason why there is not much mention of contraception in the sources is because it was not of any interest to Roman writers. Eyben puts forth a similar argument, as he claims that since contraception was primarily left in the hands of women, it was not discussed extensively.[421] In addition to suggesting that men might have learned about contraception from prostitutes, McLaren concludes that because women were considered the 'active party' with respect to pregnancy, men left the task of avoiding pregnancy to women. As for abortion, McLaren suggests that women were able to turn to *obstetrices* for assistance in aborting an unwanted fetus, a sentiment that was likewise expressed by Gourevitch and Kampen.[422]

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[420] Kapparis 2002: 138, 143.

[421] Hopkins 1965b: 136; Eyben 1980: 8. Pomeroy (1975: 167-168) also claims that contraception was largely left to women.

[422] McLaren 1990: 56-57, 62; Gourevitch 1984: 220-224; Kampen 1981: 117.

These hypotheses are a part of the broader notions that contraception and abortion were within the ‘realm of women’, that they were chiefly a female concern that was considered mysterious, and that Roman men, in general, were apprehensive towards them and suspicious of the women involved. The ancient sources reveal similar sentiments. Juvenal and Soranus imply that there were women who would use contraceptives or induce abortions without the permission of their husbands or *patresfamilias* in order to cover up extramarital affairs. Pliny contributes to this picture in his claim, which states that while men have devised countless forms of sexual perversion, some of which he considers ‘crimes against nature’, their actions cannot compare to the fact that women have invented abortion.[423] Soranus provides further insight into this perception in his description of the ideal midwife. In his discussion of the positive qualities that a midwife ought to have, the physician states that, ‘she must not be greedy for money, lest she give an abortive quickly for payment’.[424] Despite their seeming disapproval of male sexual deviancy, it can be said that the Romans were not as opposed to these acts because they did not necessarily cause a father to lose an heir and the state to lose a citizen; women who induce abortion, as well as those who use contraceptives, on the other hand, commit both of these offenses. Moreover, it is clear that the opposition was not reserved solely for the women using contraception and abortion, but was directed towards the *obstetrices* who provided women with contraceptives and abortives. The consistent depiction of

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[423] Juv. *Sat*. 6.595-601; Sor. *Gyn*. 1.60; Plin. *HN*. 10.172.

[424] Sor. *Gyn*. 1.4: ‘ἀφιλάϱγυϱον ὡς μὴ διὰ μισθὸν ϰαϰῶς δοῦναι φθόϱιον’ (trans. Temkin 1991).

Roman fathers as victims, when combined with the supposed secretive, female-centric nature of these two forms of family limitation, indicates that there was a great amount of male anxiety surrounding contraception and abortion.

The sources discussed heretofore have been focussed primarily on the consequences that abortion and contraception had in the private, domestic life of the Romans, but the effects that they had on the state are of equal significance. It is clear that the state encouraged reproduction and women who induced abortions or used contraception went against the policy of the state; however, it must be said that abortion was the central focus of contention. Cicero's *Pro Cluentio* is the first text to address abortion as a wider issue that affected the state, characterizing it as a threat to Roman existence, values, and structures.[425] Cicero recounts an incident that occurred while he was in Asia, when a Milesian woman had been condemned to death:

> 'I remember a case which occurred when I was in Asia: how a certain woman of Miletus, who had accepted a bribe from the alternative heirs and procured her own abortion by drugs, was condemned to death: and rightly, for she had cheated the father of his hopes, his name of continuity, his family of its support, his house of an heir, and the Republic of a citizen-to-be'.[426]

Although the trial likely took place in 79 BC during Cicero's trip to Asia, the precise circumstances of the case remain unknown. For example, the charges against the woman are unclear and we cannot know whether she was charged under Milesian or Roman law.

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[425] Kapparis 2002: 148.

[426] Cic. *Clu*. 32: 'Memoria teneo Milesiam quondam mulierem, cum essem in Asia, quod ab heredibus secundis accepta pecunia partum sibi ipsa medicamentis abegisset, rei capitalis esse damnatam: nec iniuria, quae spem parentis, memoriam nominis, subsidium generis, heredem familiae, designatum rei publicae civem sustulisset' (trans. Grose Hodge 1927 [Loeb]).

If the woman was prosecuted in Rome, however, she could not have been charged with having an abortion since it was not illegal until the 3rd century AD.[427] Despite the unclear circumstances of the case, this episode sheds light on how the concern of the Roman state and that of the *paterfamilias* were connected. This shared preoccupation with legitimate reproduction is reflected in the legal sources as well.

(iii) Abortion and Roman law

The jurists are virtually silent on whether there was any legislation that regulated the use of contraception;[428] however, they do provide some insight into Roman social attitudes towards abortion, and the history of legislation governing abortion is significant. Prior to the 3rd century AD, abortion was not considered illegal, largely because the unborn fetus was not considered a legally defined human being protected by Roman law.[429] According to Stoic philosophy, a fetus only received personhood at birth and up until that moment it was deemed a part of the mother.[430] A similar view is reflected in the legal sources. In the section entitled, ‘The examination of pregnant women and the observation of delivery’, which contains the imperial rescript concerning the observation of the pregnant Domitia, the ex-wife of Rutilius Severus, Ulpian states:

> ‘It is quite clear from this rescript that the *senatus consulta* on the recognition of children will not apply if the woman pretended she was not

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[427] Kapparis 2002: 193-194.

[428] Eyben 1981: 20.

[429] Nardi 1971: 211; Hawthorne 1985: 265; Kapparis 2002:176.

[430] Ps. Plut. *Plac*. 5.15; Hawthorne 1985: 264-265.

> pregnant or even denied it. This is not unreasonable, since the child is part of the woman or her insides before it is born'.[431]

Since the fetus was defined as being a part of the mother's *viscera* and not an independent entity, having an abortion was not considered murder. Another piece of evidence from the *Digest* that helps support this view is found in the section that discusses the institution of children and *postumi* as heirs and their disherison.[432] Again, Ulpian asserts that, even if a child is born via caesarian section or if it is born 'incomplete', but nevertheless born, it is possible to break the will. It is important to note in this regulation that the child is regarded as a person once it is born, and not before.[433] That abortion itself was not an offence under Roman law is further demonstrated by the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* of 81 BC and the *lex Pompeia de Parricidiis* of 55 BC. These two sets of laws, which focussed on murderers, poisoners, and those who committed parricide, were concerned primarily with reducing the incidence of homicide by making it punishable by the law; they did not pertain to abortion because the fetus was not considered a human.[434]

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[431] *Dig*. 25.4.1.1 (Ulpian): 'Ex hoc rescripto evidentissime apparet senatus consulta de liberis agnoscendis locum non habuisse, si mulier dissimularet se praegnatem vel etiam negaret, nec immerito: partus enim antequam edatur, mulieris portio est vel viscerum' (trans. Watson 1985). See also *Dig*. 35.2.9.1 (Papinian); Eyben 1980: 27.

[432] Disherison is the legal term for the act of disinheriting someone.

[433] Hawthorne 1985: 270; *Dig*. 28.2.12 (Ulpian): 'Quod dicitur filium natum rumpere testamentum, natum accipe et si exsecto ventre editus sit: nam et his rumpit testamentum, scilicet si nascatur in potestate. Quid tamen, si non integrum animal editum sit, cum spiritu tamen, ad adhuc testamentum rumpet? Et tamen rumpit'.

[434] Nardi 1971: 210-211; Hawthorne 1985: 265. For the details of the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* of 81 BC, see *Dig*. 48.8 and for the restrictions of the *lex Pompeia de parricidiis* of 55 BC, consult *Dig*. 48.9.

A shift occurred at the beginning of the 3rd century AD, specifically sometime between AD 198 and 211, under the authority of the emperor Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla. The new legislation was introduced in the form of an imperial rescript,[435] and the jurist Marcian records the provision in a brief statement which reads as follows:

> 'In a rescript, the deified Severus and Antoninus (Caracalla) said that a woman who procured an abortion for herself should be sent into temporary exile by the governor; for it would appear shameful that she could with impunity deprive her husband of children'.[436]

The second mention of the imperial rescript is found in an entry from Tryphoninus. This excerpt, which is also worth mentioning in full, is considerably more elaborate. In addition to providing further information on the punishments for women who have abortions during the 3rd century AD, Tryphoninus refers to the aforementioned episode of the Milesian woman who appears in Cicero's *Pro Cluentio*:

> 'Cicero, in his speech for Cluentius Habitus, wrote that when he was in Asia a certain woman of Miletus had been condemned for a capital offence because, after taking money from the substituted heirs, she herself aborted her own child with drugs. But if [a woman], because she is pregnant, does violence in some way to her womb after her divorce so as to avoid giving a son to her husband who is now hateful, she is to be punished by temporary exile, as has been written in a rescript by our most noble emperors'.[437]

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[435] Kapparis 2002: 183.

[436] *Dig*. 47.11.4 (Marcian): 'Divus Severus et Antoninus rescripserunt eam, quae data opera abegit, a praeside in temporale exilium dandam: indignum enim videri potest impune eam maritum liberis fraudasse' (trans. Watson 1985).

[437] *Dig*. 48.19.39 (Tryphoninus): 'Cicero in oratione pro Cluentio Habito scripsit Milesiam quondam mulierem, cum esset in Asia, quod ab heredibus secundis accepta pecunia partum sibi medicamentis ipsa abegisset, rei capitalis esse damnatam. Sed et si qua visceribus suis post divortium, quod praegnas fuit, vim intulerit, ne iam inimico marito filium procrearet, ut temporali exilio coerceatur, ab optimis imperatoribus nostris rescriptum est' (trans. Watson 1985).

Marcian's and Tryphoninus' language reveals that Severus and Caracalla introduced a law that helped to fill a void that existed between Roman law and social attitudes towards abortion. There is nothing in the wording of these *Digest* entries that would suggest that the emperors sought to eliminate any confusion surrounding an existing abortion law. The jurists sought to record a new law that made abortion punishable and penalized women who had abortions with temporary exile. Tryphoninus mentions the passage from Cicero's *Pro Cluentio* because he observes that both the imperial rescript and the sentencing of the woman from Miletus appear to have had a similar goal: to protect the father's right to have an heir and the state's right to a citizen.[438]

The case of Cicero's Milesian woman and the rescript of Severus and Caracalla share a common ideology; however, it is difficult to prove that there was a direct connection between the two with respect to the development of abortion-regulating legislation. In addition to the unclear circumstances of the trial, it is clear that the case that is vaguely outlined in the *Pro Cluentio* was an extraordinary one that Cicero thought was worth mentioning because of its unique nature. Even though Tryphoninus cites the Milesian episode, the jurist separates it from the regulations of the rescript and explicitly states that the punishment for inducing abortion is exile and not death. Moreover, this differentiation is supported by Marcian in his entry, which shows that exile was not reserved solely for divorced women, but married women as well. Perhaps the most important observation that ought to be made is that, unlike Cicero's brief recollection of a case that occurred 13 years before the actual trial against Cluentius, the imperial legislation had a significant impact on the lives of the Roman citizen population.[439] Despite this legal disconnect, the two sources are nevertheless insightful when examined together, since they prove that the attitude towards abortion was an unfavourable one for a significant period of time. Although there was no enforceable legislation that prevented women from inducing abortion until the 3rd century AD, it is evident that this form of family limitation met with considerable opposition in the form of general disapproval.

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[438] Kapparis 2002: 182-183.

Another change in the 3rd century which complemented the abortion law of Septimius Severus and Caracalla was a *senatus consultum* that extended the regulations of the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*. The new provision is recorded by Paul and states the following:

> 'Those who administer an abortifacient or aphrodisiac draught, even if they do not do so with guilty intention, are still condemned, because the deed sets a bad example, if of lower rank (*humiliores*) to the mines, if of higher status (*honestiores*) to relegation to an island with the forfeiture of part of their property. But if for that reason a man or woman dies, they suffer the extreme penalty'.[440]

This excerpt is particularly useful as Paul reveals that changes in the law were not limited to women who induced abortions, but that, depending on the outcome of the abortion, stricter punishments were administered to the individuals responsible for providing abortifacients. In addition to the punishments being ultimately dependent on status, with *humiliores* being subject to labour in the mines and *honestiores* to exile if found guilty, the law maintains the severity of the *lex Cornelia*, and those who administer an abortive that kills the woman are condemned to death. Watts interprets this use of capital punishment as a recognition of a mother's rights,[441] in that there was some justice for the mother's death, but perhaps these consequences can also be interpreted as another manifestation of the concern for the mother's health that was ever-present in the medical writers. Although the law is still chiefly interested in protecting the father's interest, it is also clear that there was some effort made to safeguard the mother's welfare.

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[439] Kapparis 2002: 183.

[440] *Dig*. 48.19.38.5 (Paul): 'Qui abortionis aut amatorium poculum dant, etsi dolo non faciant, tamen quia mali exempli res est, humiliores in metallum, honestiores in insulam amissa parte bonorum relegantur. Quod si eo mulier aut homo perierit, summon supplicio adficiuntur' (trans. Watson 1985). This change is also recorded in Paulus, *Sent*. 5.23.14. See also *Dig*. 48.8.3.2 (Marcian), which states the same provisions.

The section of the *Digest* that outlines the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* also provides another reiteration of the imperial rescript. The jurist Ulpian states that: 'if it is proved that a woman has done violence to her womb to bring about an abortion, the provincial governor shall send her into exile'.[442] Hawthorne argues that Ulpian's entry is an interpolation of the rescript and incorrectly applies the legislation to all women. He maintains that married and divorced women are the sole targets of the law because these are the two groups that are mentioned by Tryphoninus and Marcian. Although Hawthorne is correct in stating that the laws sought to protect the father's interest and that induced abortion was only considered punishable if it was done without the consent of the *paterfamilias*, married and divorced women were not the only women affected by the law. Kapparis presents a more feasible interpretation: Ulpian provides a direct transcription of the rescript, while Marcian and Tryphoninus record the law itself and provide their own interpretation of its provisions.[443] The law certainly applied to all Roman women, but the implementation of it was likely another matter. If a *paterfamilias* had given his consent for the woman to have an abortion, he would probably not call for her to be exiled. As for unmarried women, it is possible that her family preferred to keep her abortion out of the courts in order to avoid embarrassment and scandal. On the other hand, if the woman had an abortion without the consent of her *paterfamilias*, the act was viewed as an offence against him and the law afforded him the ability to punish her accordingly.[444]

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[441] Watts 1973: 94.

[442] *Dig*. 48.8.8 (Ulpian): 'Si mulierem visceribus suis vim intulisse, quo partum abigeret, constiterit, eam in exilium praeses provinciae exiget' (trans. Watson 1985).

Pregnancy, childbirth, and early infant care were considered the responsibility of women, with men uninvolved in these aspects of maternity. It appears that contraception and abortion were categorized in a similar manner, with medical writers and laymen alike displaying confusion between the two. There is a noticeable lack of interest in the subject of contraception, but the sources are vocal in their disapproval of abortion. Although it was not punishable until the 3rd century AD, this form of family limitation was considered highly problematic and suspicious. The impression that is provided by the extant sources is that women who induced abortions did so for the purpose of preserving their beauty and concealing adultery. For the most part, these women acted against the wishes of their husbands and the would-be fathers are often depicted as the victims of their wives' actions: these women diminished the *potestas* of their husbands. What is more, the Roman state was also characterized as a victim, since women who procured abortions deprived Rome of a citizen.

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[443] Hawthorne 1985: 269; Kapparis 2002: 183. Kapparis uses the syntax of Marcian's version (*Dig.* 47.11.4) to prove his argument. He states that the jurist uses indirect discourse when he describes the precise law and switches to direct discourse when he discusses his own interpretation of the law.

[444] Kapparis 2002: 184.

In addition to the harm that abortion did to the husband and the state, it is possible that the high maternal mortality rate associated with it contributed to its negative image. The introduction of the legislation under Severus and Caracalla created a way for husbands to protect their *potestas* by making abortion punishable under Roman law. What is significant, however, is that although the law applied to all women who induced abortion, it is likely that only those who acted against the wishes of their husbands would have been punished. If the husband had provided consent, then there was no reason to bring forth a case, as his *potestas* remained protected.

Infanticide and Infant Exposure

Along with the questionable efficacy of abortion and contraception, time was another important matter to consider. Contraception was rendered completely useless, and abortion became life-threatening for the mother, if they were not employed at an appropriate time. However, there were two methods of family limitation that could be used after the baby had been brought to term: infanticide and exposure. Although the two are often conflated, there is a clear distinction between them. Infanticide is defined as the intentional killing of a newborn. In a Roman context, infanticide often took the form of smothering or drowning, both of which were considered effective and immediate ways of killing the unwanted neonate.[445] Infant exposure (referred to as *expositio* in the Latin sources), on the other hand, is a phenomenon that is defined by greater complexities. When this method was employed the baby was taken away from the home and left in another location, either somewhere secluded, such as a forest, or in a highly-frequented public place. While the majority of exposed infants probably died as a result, exposure was viewed by the Romans as an alternative to infanticide and not its equivalent. It was regarded as the more compassionate option, since there was a chance that the infant might be picked up and survive.[446]

Infanticide and exposure were considered options throughout the Roman period; they are mentioned in the account of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in which he states that Romulus permitted Roman fathers to expose or kill newborns who were malformed, an act that was subject to the approval of the parents' five closest neighbours. The showing of the infant to five neighbours was not Roman practice and it is possible that this excerpt is a comment on the prevalence of exposure in the late Republic, another example of Augustan authors longing for the social relations of early Rome, or both.[447] Although the historicity of Dionysius' passage is questionable, the practice of killing or exposing newborns who are deemed monstrous or malformed was nevertheless longstanding and appears to have been accepted since the time of the Twelve Tables. In his dialogue on the law, Cicero, in the voice of Quintus, responds to his brother Marcus' comments on the tribunician power, stating that, 'the Twelve Tables direct that terribly deformed infants shall be killed'.[448] These two forms of family limitation remained unpunishable by Roman law until the 4th century AD, with changes regarding the legality of infanticide and exposure emerging in the early 3rd century AD.

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[445] Carroll 2018: 170.

[446] Boswell 1988; Evans Grubbs 2011: 22.

[447] Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.15.2; Harris 1994: 5; Shaw 2001: 68.

It is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty how frequently parents resorted to infanticide and exposure as well as the demographic impact that these two methods of family limitation had on the Roman population. The literary sources do not reveal how widespread infanticide and exposure were, nor the frequency of the practices.[449] Previous scholarship has attempted to address these questions through analyses of osteological material. There are two Roman-era archaeological sites where human remains were discovered that are often identified as evidence for infanticide and fatal infant exposure: Ashkelon (4th century AD), a site on the southern coast of Israel, and Yewden villa at Hambleden in Buckinghamshire (1st century to 4th century AD).

The remains of approximately 100 neonatal individuals were found in a sewer beneath a bath complex at Ashkelon, and excavations carried out on the north side of the villa at Hambleden found 97 individuals whose ages ranged between 38 and 40 gestational weeks. It has been suggested that these sites indicate the practice of infanticide due to presence of a high number of neonatal and infant remains.[450] Much like literary evidence, osteological evidence is defined by certain limitations and the study of human remains, in particular, is fraught with a unique set of problems. For example, infant bones and teeth are fragile, it is difficult to establish when fractures occurred, and this type of material does not show diagnostic signs of mortality. Moreover, no paleopathological analysis for either site has been published; therefore, the victims of infanticide and exposure cannot be differentiated from those who died from natural causes. Although it is possible that some of the remains found at Ashkelon and Hambleden are infanticide victims, the only certainty is that neonates and infants were found at these sites and the circumstances surrounding their presence are unknown.[451]

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[448] Eyben 1980: 27; Cic. *Leg*. 3.8.19: '…quom esset cito <n>ecatus tamquam ex XII tabulis insignis ad deformitatem puer'(trans. Walker Keyes 2000 [Loeb]).

[449] Parkin 1992: 97; Evans Grubbs 2013: 84; Carroll 2018: 171.

[450] Smith and Kahila 1992 (Ashkelon); Mays and Eyers 2011 (Hambleden).

While the questions surrounding the frequency of infanticide and infant exposure and their influence on Roman demography remain unanswerable,[452] there are nevertheless crucial areas of investigation that are worthy of analysis. That the literary sources mention these two forms of family limitation at all suggests that, although their use might not have been widespread, infanticide and exposure were categorized as options for parents whose babies had been carried to term, only to be faced with a newborn who, to the Roman sensibility, was not considered viable. Furthermore, the sources provide significant insight into what motivated parents to choose one of these forms of family limitation over abortion or contraception.

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[451] Carroll 2018: 171-174; Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder 2018: 109-111. The Hellenistic Bone Well in the Athenian Agora is another site that shows evidence for the practice of infanticide; however, unlike the Ashkelon and Hambleden remains, the 449 infant and fetal skeletons have undergone paleopathological analysis. The study of the material revealed that there were several causes of death among the sample: complications associated with premature birth, trauma from perimortem fractures (evidence of abuse), and congenital and neonatal infections and haemorrhages. The analysis also showed that a small number of infants in the sample were born with developmental defects (i.e., malformed limbs and cleft palates). Although this does not indicate with absolute certainty that these infants were killed or exposed, it does suggest that their condition might have contributed to their parents' decision to reject them (Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder 2018: 44-51). The study of the Agora Bone Well is useful as it demonstrates how important it is to exercise caution and to understand the limitations of osteological evidence when it is used to examine infanticide and exposure in an ancient context.

[452] Due to the lack of published paleopathological analyses for these sites, I will not explore this category of evidence further. For a recent, in-depth, critical analysis of the archaeological material of intramural burial, child sacrifice, exposure, and infanticide, consult Carroll 2018, specifically Chapter 6: *Mors Immatura I* – Contextualizing the Death and Burial of Infants.

The Roman social attitudes towards infanticide and exposure differed greatly from contraception and abortion in that they were not viewed with as much contempt and there does not appear to be as much of a stigma surrounding these two methods in the extant sources. The chief reason for this lack of negative perception is that both occurred after the baby had been brought to term and undergone a physical examination that was conducted by the *obstetrix*.

Following his guidance for the delivery and the care of the mother, Soranus dedicates the rest of Book 2 of his *Gynaikeia* to the care of the newborn. Prior to severing the umbilical cord, the physician instructs the *obstetrix* to determine the infant's sex and then its viability. The *obstetrix* was to consider first the health of the mother throughout her pregnancy and whether the baby was born at an appropriate time (i.e., at the end of nine months). She was then required to see if the baby cried with vigour, for if the baby did not or if he had a weak cry, this could be a sign of an unfavourable condition. Following these tests, Soranus advises the *obstetrix* to ensure that the infant:

> '…is perfect in all its parts, members and senses; that its ducts, namely of the ears, nose, pharynx, urethra, anus are free from obstruction; that the natural functions of every <member> are neither sluggish nor weak; that the joints bend and stretch; that it has due size and shape and is properly sensitive in every respect. This we may recognize from pressing the

> fingers against the surface of the body, for it is natural to suffer pain from everything that pricks or squeezes'.[453]

If the newborn did not meet these criteria, he was not considered worth rearing. As Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder observe, it is probable that such guidelines existed before Soranus documented them; therefore, educated Roman physicians held the opinion that if a newborn did not pass this examination, he was not deemed viable and that it would be irresponsible for his parents to rear him.[454] The *potestas* of a *paterfamilias*, which came into effect immediately after the child's birth, permitted him to decide whether or not the newborn was to be accepted into his family and acknowledged as one of his heirs. It is also important to note that the mother might have been involved, to a certain extent, depending entirely on the family dynamic. As well, the situation did arise when there was no living *paterfamilias* and so the mother, again with the counsel of the *obstetrix* who monitored the pregnancy and delivery, was the one who had to make the decision.[455]

Infanticide and exposure would have occurred while the newborn was still in a liminal position within the family, which also contributed to the more accepting attitude towards these practices. The child was viewed as being in a liminal stage because he or she had not yet reached their *dies lustricus*, the second, social birth of the child that occurred on the eighth day after birth for girls and on the ninth for boys. During this ceremony, the freeborn child underwent ritual purification, received their *tria nomina*, and the sartorial items that signified their free status; that is, the *bulla* (the bubble locket for boys) and the *lunula* (the moon-shaped amulet for girls). The *dies lustricus* was an important rite of passage in which freeborn children received their social status.[456] Since the decision to kill or expose an infant was an important part of his *potestas*, the choice was ultimately the father's to make and the medical authorities were concerned with his wishes. Furthermore, the act would have happened before the child had received his name and social identity, which possibly caused the Romans to not view these family limitation methods as offensive.

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[453] Sor. *Gyn*. 2.10: 'ἔκ τε τοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς μέρεσι καὶ μορίοις καὶ αἰσθήσεσιν ἄρτιον ὑπάρχειν καὶ τοὺς πόρους ἔχειν ἀπαρεμποδίστους, οἷον ὤτων, ῥινῶν, φάρυγγος, οὐρήθρας, δακτυλίου, καὶ τὰς ἑκάστου <μορίου> φυσικὰς κινήσεις μὴ νωθρὰς [καὶ] μηδὲ ἐκλύτους καὶ τὰς τῶν ἄρθρων κάμψεις τε καὶ ἐκτάσεις μεγέθη τε καὶ σχήματα καὶ τὴν πᾶσαν ἐπιβάλλουσαν εὐαισθησίαν, ἣν γνωρίζομεν κἀκ τῆς ἐπιφανείας ἐπερείδοντες τοὺς δακτύλους · κατὰ φύσιν γάρ ἐστιν τὸ πρὸς ἕκαστον ἀλγεῖν τῶν νυσσόντων ἢ θλιβόντων'(trans. Temkin 1991).

[454] Liston, Rotroff, and Snyder 2018: 120-121. The Hippocratics also demonstrate a concern with what children are worth rearing (Hippoc. *Oct*. 10).

[455] Corbier 2001: 58; Evans Grubbs 2011: 22; 2013: 85.

(i) Infanticide: the sensible option

Up until this point, infanticide and exposure have been grouped together because they were the two forms of family limitation that were used after the baby had been brought to term and modern scholarship often discusses them together. However, the key feature that distinguishes infanticide from exposure is the intention of the newborn's parents. Parents who chose to employ infanticide wanted a very specific outcome: that their child would not live. There are two circumstances that are frequently associated with infanticide: the first was the birth of a visibly disabled or malformed infant, and the second was the birth of an infant of an undesired sex.

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[456] Corbier 2001: 55; Dasen 2009: 207.

It is important to understand first that there is no evidence from the Roman period which suggests that every disabled infant was automatically killed. Even when they were not deemed worth rearing by an *obstetrix*, choosing to dispose of an infant could not have been an easy decision to make, especially in instances when the child was wanted. Moreover, there is evidence which indicates that some infants who were born with physical deformities were indeed accepted and reared by their parents. Pliny the Elder, for example, observes that there were some females who are born with their genitals closed, and others who are born with six fingers, neither of whom were killed at birth.[457] Osteological evidence helps provide a fuller picture in this instance. A skeleton (K131) of a 15-20-year-old discovered in Kingsholm, Gloucester had a left leg that displayed features of childhood poliomyelitis, a condition that would have prompted the development of a clubfoot.[458] Although such a condition is apparent at birth, in this particular case the individual reached adulthood. Another issue that arises in discussions of infanticide and disability is that, as Laes observes, there was no set definition of disability in ancient Rome nor was there a specific word for 'disability'; instead, it was a rather loosely defined concept. In addition, many disabilities are undetectable at birth and symptoms do not materialize until the child is much older. Evidently, some infants who were born with physical disabilities or other congential conditions were reared and infanticide was not always the outcome.[459]

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[457] Dasen 2009: 201 (fn. 11); Plin. *HN* 7.69 (girls born with closed sexual organs), 11.244 (the six-fingered daughters of M. Corianus).

[458] Southwell-Wright 2014: 118-119. Poliomyelitis is an infectious viral disease that affects the central nervous system.

As was evident from the criteria provided by Soranus, the Romans were indeed sensitive to the potential difficulties that were associated with disability and physical malformations; therefore, the practice of infanticide was considered a sensible option in certain circumstances. This sentiment was reflected in Cicero's comments on the contents of the Twelve Tables, in which it was codified that physically deformed newborns ought to be killed.[460] However, in this excerpt Cicero does not provide much insight into the intentions of the parents who commit infanticide. Seneca, on the other hand, approaches the subject in more detail in his dialogue on anger, *De Ira*:

> 'For what reason have I for hating a man to whom I am offering the greatest service when I save him from himself? Does a man hate the members of his own body when he uses the knife upon them? There is no anger there, but the pitiful desire to heal. Mad dogs we knock on the head; the fierce and savage ox we slay; sickly sheep we put to the knife to keep them from infecting the flock; unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal. Yet it is not anger, but reason that separates the harmful from the sound'.[461]

The philosopher is concerned with violent actions, including killings, that should not be categorized as hateful, since they do not stem from a place of anger, but rather as sympathetic. Seneca's comments do not reveal whether infanticide was a systemic phenomenon in the Roman world, but they do demonstrate how, in certain circumstances along with the socially acceptable intentions of the parents, the practice was a reasonable response to the birth of malformed children.[462] The parents had to consider the welfare of not only their family, but also of the child. If the child's disability caused him great difficulties at birth, there was the distinct chance that they could worsen as the child got older. This would have resulted in strain on both the family's emotions and resources and also the child's quality of life.

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[459] Laes 2013: 126; Southwell- Wright 2014: 119; Carroll 2018: 171.

[460] Cic. *Leg*. 3.8.19.

[461] Sen. *Ira* 1.15.2-3: 'Quid enim est, cur oderim eum, cui tum maxime prosum, cum illum sibi eripio? Num quis membra sua tunc odit, cum abscidit? Non est illa ira, sed misera curatio. Rabidos effligimus canes et trucem atque immansuetum bovem occidimus et morbidis pecoribus, ne gregem polluant, ferrum demittimus; portentosos fetus exstinguimus, liberos quoque, si debiles monstrosique editi sunt, mergimus; nec ira, sed ratio est a sanis inutilia secernere' (trans. Basore 1928 [Loeb]).

The choice to reject a disabled infant was also a strictly private, family affair, devoid of legal intervention, unless there was a question surrounding the *ius trium liberorm*, namely whether a malformed infant could be counted.[463] There appears to have been differing opinions among the jurists. Ulpian argues that even when a child is considered monstrous, his parents should benefit from his birth, 'for there are no grounds for penalizing them because they observed such statutes as they could, nor should loss be forced on the mother because things turned out ill'.[464] Paul puts forth a harsher view, stating that only infants who are fully formed with the proper number of limbs and with a human appearance are to be counted towards the *ius trium liberorum*.[465] The *ius trium*

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[462] Corbier 2001: 60.

[463] Laes 2013: 130.

[464] Laes 2013: 130; *Dig*. 50.16.135 (Ulpian): '…nec enim est quod eis imputetur, quae qualiter potuerunt, statutis obtemperauerunt, neque id quod fataliter accessit, matri damnum iniungere debet' (trans. Watson 1985).

[465] *Dig*. 1.5.14 (Paul).

liberorum was a key part of the Augustan legislation that promoted marriage and reproduction; thus, the jurists' comments on its qualifications are not unusual. As for why the jurists are virtually silent on the killing of malformed infants, it was not due to a lack of interest,[466] but it was because the state did not want to encroach on the *potestas* of the Roman father.

The second factor that might have motivated a couple to commit infanticide is if the child was not the desired sex. It has been inferred from sources such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who stated that Romulus ordered all male children to be reared while only the first-born female child had to be reared, that Roman society preferred males over females.[467] Due to this preference, it has often been assumed that newborn girls were more likely to be victims of sex-selective infanticide than boys. This aspect of infanticide, specifically the extensiveness of the practice, has been the subject of much debate among demography scholars. In 1980, Engels claimed that extensive female infanticide was not possible in a Roman context, arguing that a low rate of female infanticide would increase the death rate while lowering the birth rate. If this change occurred in a (nearly) stable population, the population would experience an alarmingly high decline. Harris responded and disagreed with Engels' claims. He rebuked Engels for basing his findings on misleading demographic information, neglecting to consider the textual sources, as well as discounting comparative evidence from studies by historians of other periods and anthropologists. He concluded his remarks with an observation provided by Dickeman, who perceived that infanticide occurred at a rate between 5 to 50 percent in hunter-gatherer, horticulture-based, and stratified agrarian societies. Harris argues that it is highly probable that female infanticide was a reality in the Roman world.[468]

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[466] Laes 2013: 130.

[467] Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.15.2.

As for the ancient sources that contribute to our understanding of infanticide, there is one documentary source that is frequently used to prove sex-selective infanticide. A letter dating to the 1st century BC in which a certain Hilarion instructs his pregnant wife, Alis, to rear the baby if it is a boy, but if it is a girl, Alis is to 'cast it out' (*ἔκβαλε*).[469] While this letter does contribute to the notion that, in certain circumstances, female infants were cast out, either killed or exposed, this is only one example that represents a specific family, time, and place. The inclination to commit infanticide, and even to expose an infant, was dependent on the region of the Empire, the familial strategy of the parents, as well as their feelings towards both of these methods.[470]

(ii) Infant exposure: a compassionate alternative

The intention of the parents differentiated exposure from infanticide. Exposure was considered the compassionate alternative to infanticide, as the parents who chose to expose their child did not believe that they were condemning their child to death, even though this was the most likely outcome. Rather, these parents probably hoped that their child would be picked up by a passer-by, and they might have also had the intention of reclaiming their child when they could afford to do so, which was possible since the exposure of an infant did not eliminate a father's *potestas*. A number of exposed infants did, in fact, survive, and some of them were fortunate enough to be reared free as informally adopted children, which might have provided the incentive to parents to choose exposure over infanticide. However, many *expositi* who were rescued were enslaved and not reclaimed by their parents later in life. Nevertheless, the belief that the child would survive provided the parents with the justification they needed to expose their newborn. Furthermore, parents who chose exposure over infanticide were likely motivated by the fact that doing so prevented them from witnessing their child's death.[471]

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[468] Engels 1980: 118-120; Harris 1982: 114-116; Dickeman 1975: 130.

[469] *P. Oxy*. 744.

[470] Evans Grubbs 2011: 23.

A significant component of infant exposure is the notion of 'circulation', in that *expositi* might be rescued and reared in other households. The best-known anecdotal example for this is the story of the grammarian Gaius Melissus, who, after an intense argument between his parents, was exposed by his mother. Melissus was subsequently picked up, enslaved and educated, and then given to Maecenas as a gift.[472] However, the information provided by the census returns from Roman Egypt offers a fuller picture of circulation that is perhaps more reflective of the phenomenon in a broader context.

	Metropolitan (number of cases = 20)	**Rural (number of cases = 30)**
Sons	23	19
Daughters	11	34

Table 4.1: Data from the census returns of Roman Egypt (adapted from Bagnall and Frier 1994: 152).

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[471] Evans Grubbs 2011: 32. For informally adopted children (*alumni/alumnae*), consult Rawson 1986a and Bellmore and Rawson 1990.

[472] Suet. *Gram. et rhet.* 21.

In their seminal work on the demography of Roman Egypt, Bagnall and Frier gathered and conducted a thorough analysis of approximately 300 returns from censuses that were conducted in Roman Egypt, which occurred during the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. Among the returns, there are 50 instances of parents 35-years-old or younger who declared their surviving children, including information on their sex and age. In the metropolitan returns, it appears that sons were recorded with more frequency than daughters (23 sons versus 11 daughters), while the rural returns display the opposite pattern (34 daughters versus 19 sons). Bagnall and Frier also observed that approximately twice as many metropolitan families reported more sons than daughters (13 to 5), while rural families, again, report the opposite (7 to 20). In cases where a family declared only one child, metropolitan families often reported a son (6 out of 9), while rural families reported a daughter (10 out of 16).[473]

This information suggests that there might have been a difference in reporting practices, with metropolitan families failing to report daughters and rural families failing to document sons, but the lopsided sex ratio for juveniles is of particular significance because it suggests that the exposure of girls was more common in the densely populated city-centres.[474] Bagnall and Frier also note that a small number of the rural households declared a single, young *ancilla*, without declaring her mother. While it is possible that the slave girl's mother might have died, another potential reason for this omission is that the girl was an exposed infant from the city who the rural family took in and reared as a slave.[475] Thus, death was not always the outcome for *expositi* and, evidently, some were 'put into circulation' and picked up and raised by other families. While the ideal result would have seen the child reared as free, it is clear that they could also be brought into a life of slavery.

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[473] Bagnall and Frier 1994: 152.

[474] Bagnall and Frier 1994: 152-153. As for the higher number of daughters in the rural areas, Bagnall and Frier suggest that it is highly unlikely that this was because of a preference for daughters; instead it probably indicates that rural families were more inclined to conceal the number of sons that they had on their returns.

The ancient evidence concerning exposure and infanticide provides a great deal of information about Roman attitudes towards the practices and the factors that motivated couples to employ these forms of family limitation, but there is a noticeable lacuna: the sources do not shed light on the emotional impact that these practices had on the parents. However, comparative evidence from a modern population that also engaged in the 'circulation' of infants is useful and helps to provide a fuller picture of this facet of exposure and abandonment. Scheper-Hughes, an anthropologist, studied the maternal beliefs and child treatment among the women of Alto do Cruzeiro, a shantytown located in northeastern Brazil. By studying the reproductive histories of 72 women of Alto do Cruzeiro, a population with a mortality rate of up to 40%, Scheper-Hughes illuminated the socio-economical context that helped to form maternal sentiments.

She observed that maternal detachment and selective neglect were considered appropriate reactions to a deficiency within the child (i.e., a disability or illness) and that it was essential for Alto mothers to learn how to separate themselves from their babies, especially since mothers in the Alto often had to expose their child out of necessity.[476] The women in this community were inclined to neglect or expose their newborns who suffered from disabilities or other conditions. The mothers did not hold themselves responsible for the death of the child and the other women of the Alto did not place blame on them for their actions. Scheper-Hughes also obtained testimonies from some of the mothers of infants who died as a result of an 'innate weakness' and many echoed a similar sentiment which is summarized concisely in the following statement:

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[475] Bagnall and Frier 1994: 159.

> 'They die because they have to die. If they were meant to live, it would happen that way as well. I think that if they were always weak, they wouldn't be able to defend themselves in life. So, it is really better to let the weak ones die'.[477]

Maternal indifference appears to have been a necessity for mothers of Alto do Cruzeiro and has been interpreted as a protective distancing. However, Scheper-Hughes observed many instances of the completely opposite reaction. For example, some of the women gave their newborns to their employers as foster children in the hopes that they could be reunited in the future, while others who had developed strong maternal feelings and who had invested hope in an infant who did not survive experienced intense grief.[478] Despite the cultural, environmental, and social differences between the Romans and the women of Alto do Cruzeiro, the maternal reactions revealed in Scheper-Hughes' study provide considerable insight into how we might understand the emotional landscape of Roman mothers. Although they have been portrayed as indifferent towards their children, the decision to expose or kill an infant could not have been an easy decision for Roman parents and those who made the choice might have experienced a great deal of psychological stress as a result. That infanticide and exposure typically occurred before the child's *dies lustricus*, before they were considered fully human, helped to safeguard the emotions of the parents. As well, there were indeed parents who did not use indifference as a protection, since they had the intention of reclaiming their child at a later time.

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[476] Scheper-Hughes 1985: 295, 312.

[477] Scheper-Hughes (quoting an anonymous mother from the Alto in her study) 1985: 305.

[478] Scheper-Hughes 1985: 312- 313.

(iii) Infanticide, exposure, and Roman law

Infanticide and exposure remained unpunishable by Roman law from the time of the Twelve Tables until the 4th century AD. The chief reason for this is that any potential restriction would have been in conflict with the *potestas* of a *paterfamilias*. However, beginning in the 3rd century these forms of family limitation became subject to social and legal criticism. The first attempt at curbing these practices was supposedly introduced in AD 228, when Severus Alexander classified those who commit infanticide and exposure as murderers, as recorded by Paul:

> 'It is not just a person who smothers a child who is held to kill it but also the person who abandons it, denies it food, or puts it on show in public places to excite pity which he himself does not have'.[479]

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[479] Carroll 2018: 171; *Dig*. 25.3.4 (Paul): 'Necare uidetur non tantum is qui partum praefocat, sed et is qui abicit et qui alimonia denegat et is qui publicis locis misericordiae causa exponit, quam ipse non habet (trans. Watson 1985).

Although ascribed to the time of Severus, it has been accepted that this entry is an interpolation by Paul and thus is more of a reflection of the law and social attitudes during the reign of Justinian.[480] This entry is nevertheless revealing, as it suggests that attitudes towards infanticide and exposure were beginning to shift, possibly under Severus Alexander, but had yet to be manifested in the legal world. Legislation regulating and prohibiting these practices did not come into immediate effect: the law concerning infanticide, for example, did not change for another 146 years. Infanticide was prohibited eventually on 7 February AD 374 in a decree that was issued by Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian, who declared that 'if anyone, man or woman, should commit the crime of killing an infant, such an evil deed shall constitute a capital offense'.[481] This decree was a new addition to the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*, which placed those who committed infanticide in the same category as those who were found guilty of parricide.

A unique legal issue associated with infant exposure presented obstacles on the way to its prohibition. According to Roman law, the *potestas* of a *paterfamilias* remained intact even if he chose to expose a child. The previously discussed case outlined by Scaevola in which an exposed infant whose father was unaware of his existence and yet the boy remained in his *potestas* and inherited his father's estate, proves how important and powerful the authority of *patria potestas* was to the Romans.[482] Since an exposed infant never left his father's *potestas*, the father had the right to reclaim his child, even if the child had been reared as a slave. It is also important to note that the right to reclaim an exposed infant was not reserved solely for the child's *paterfamilias*; rather, mothers, sisters, daughters, and other female relatives were able to bring forth a claim of freedom, a *causa liberalis*, if the *paterfamilias* or other male relatives were not alive and able to handle the case.[483]

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[480] Eyben 1980: 31.

[481] *Cod. Theod.* 9.14.1: 'Si quis infantis piaculum adgressus, adgressaue sit, erit capitale istud malum (trans. Pharr 1952).

[482] Evans Grubbs 2011: 24; *Dig.* 40.4.29 (Scaevola).

It might seem that a father's *potestas* would discourage others from picking up and rearing *expositi*;[484] however, it is evident that this did occur and unique legal consequences came along with it. Such cases arose in Rome and the provinces, with praetors hearing cases in the city proper and provincial governors adjudicating those in their respective territories. The correspondence between the emperor Trajan and Pliny the Younger, who served as the governor of Bithynia and Pontus, documents that there had been much discussion of the social status of exposed freeborn children who had been reared as slaves. In the first set of letters, Pliny enquires about whether exposed freeborn infants whose parents attempt to reclaim them are legally free or enslaved, as well as whether parents had to reimburse the individual who found the child (the *nutritor*) for rearing expenses (referred to as *alimenta*). While the emperor could not find an imperial ruling that was applicable to all provinces, he decided that parents who reclaimed their children should not be denied from doing so and that they should not repay the *nutritor* for the cost of rearing.[485] The second set of correspondence likewise revolves around parents who attempted to restore the social status of their exposed children, but it brings forth another concern. Instead of the issue of compensation for rearing, Pliny was asked to hear cases in which the children's claim of free social status was called into question by those who held them in slavery. The emperor suggested that the governor send him a copy of the *senatusconsultum* that was concerned with restoring birth status, but it is unclear if Pliny sent the document and what Trajan decided. These exchanges reveal that there were no established policies regarding exposed infants, those who picked them up, and the parents who tried to reclaim them;[486] as well, they demonstrate that there was a need for a more universal legislation that could be applicable throughout all areas of the Empire.

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[483] Evans Grubbs 2010: 298; *Dig*. 40.12.3.2 (Ulpian).

[484] Eyben 1980: 29.

The infant exposure cases handled by Trajan and Pliny the Younger occurred in AD 111, but no official Empire-wide regulations were imposed until the reign of Constantine. With the first measure introduced in AD 315 and a second in AD 322, the emperor offered financial assistance to parents who could not afford to rear their own children as a means to prevent them from selling, killing, or exposing them.[487] The critical change that had a profound impact on the legal relationship between *patria potestas* and *expositi* occurred on 17 April AD 331, when Constantine decreed the following:

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[485] Plin. *Ep*. 10.65, 66.

[486] Plin. *Ep*. 10.72, 73; Evans Grubbs 2010: 299-301 (detailed discussion of the correspondence between Trajan and Pliny).

[487] *Cod. Theod*. 11.27.1 (AD 315), 2 (AD 322); Eyben 1980: 29.

> ‘Whoever has taken up a boy or a girl, thrown out of its home by the wish and knowledge of its father or master and brought it up to strength with his own sources of support, shall keep the same child under the same status as he wished to consider it when he took it up, that is, whether he has preferred it to be a son or a slave. All anxiety is to be removed regarding reclamation on the part of those who knowingly, of their own will, threw out from their home recently born slaves or children’.[488]

This legislation reflects the influence that Christianity began to have on Roman social attitudes and, by extension, on their legal practices. Guaranteeing a father the right to reclaim a child whom he exposed as an infant was now considered immoral and the father lost this powerful authority. As well, the *nutritor* was the one with the power to determine the social status of the *expositi*. This law is the first attempt at a universal policy concerning *expositi* in a Roman context. However, of greater significance to the history of the Roman paternal authority is its role as the first instance of the state interfering with the rights of the *paterfamilias*. The law punished the *paterfamilias* who exposed his child by revoking his *patria potestas*, which, up until this point, had remained untouchable by Roman law. Although it is difficult to determine with any certainty if this new legislation discouraged parents from exposing their newborns, it might have mollified those who were initially hesitant about picking up and rearing an *expositi*, as there was no longer a potential threat from the child’s *paterfamilias*.[489]

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[488] *Cod. Theod.* 5.9.1: ‘Quicunque puerum vel puellam, proiectam de domo, patris vel domini voluntate scientiaque, collegerit, ac suis alimentis ad robur prouexerit, eundem retineat, sub eodem statu quem apud se recollectum voluerit agitare hoc est, siue filium, siue servum eum esse maluerit; omni repetitionis inquietudine penitus submouenda, eorum, qui servos aut liberos scientes propria voluntate domo recens natos abiecerint’ (trans. Evans Grubbs 2013).

[489] Eyben 1980: 30; Evans Grubbs 2013: 97. The fate of *expositi* continued to be of legal interest well into Late Antiquity, with the final legislation against it being issued in AD 529 under Justinian. The emperor declared that all infants who were exposed, regardless of their initial social status at birth, were automatically granted freeborn status (*Cod. Iust.* 8.51.3; Evans Grubbs 2013: 99). For a detailed discussion of exposure in Late Antiquity, consult Evans Grubbs 2009.

Conclusion

Patria potestas and the *ius vitae necisque* were important social constructs that afforded the Roman father a great deal of protection and allowed him to control the shape of his family. Since a father's *potestas* came into effect at the birth of his child, he had the right to reject the newborn, through infanticide or exposure, if he deemed it appropriate to do so. The financial and social stresses associated with the Roman practice of partible inheritance, disabled and malformed children, and daughters were considered legitimate reasons for a father to reject a child. In such circumstances, the decision to do so was viewed as responsible or compassionate since the *paterfamilias* acted on behalf of his family's welfare.

Contraception and abortion, on the other hand, were surrounded by confusion and ambiguity and therefore were the cause of much anxiety among Roman men. Even though there were reasonable motivations for women to use these forms of birth control, such as pre-existing medical conditions, the reality that pregnancy and childbirth were emotionally taxing, and that some women did not want to endure the heartbreak associated with infanticide and exposure, the Roman attitude towards these methods and the women who used them was highly negative. These women's intentions were unacceptable since they were only concerned with preserving their beauty or concealing adulteries. By acting against the wishes of their husbands, who wanted to preserve the continuation of their family line, the wives were considered subversive because they were not adhering to the social norms of Roman society. The interests of fathers and the state were connected, since the father was losing an heir at the same time the state was losing a citizen, which led both to be portrayed as innocent victims of deceptive women.

Despite this moral objection towards certain forms of family limitation, the law was fairly slow to reflect Roman social attitudes. It is understandable that Roman law did not intervene in the case of infanticide and exposure because of the influence of a father's *potestas*, which permitted him to reject his child; however, with the influence of Christianity, changes began to take place in the 4th century that directly challenged the notion of *patria potestas*. As for the punishment of abortion in the Roman world, the change came into effect sooner in the 3rd century AD, but it was still a gradual one. Abortion was met with opposition for a considerably longer period of time than exposure and infanticide, but it did not have to contend with the influence of *patria potestas*. The intentions associated with abortion, which deprived the father and the state, was the problem, not abortion *per se*; the fetus was not recognized as a person and thus was not protected by Roman law. Although marked by unique complexities, social attitudes, and motivations, contraception, abortion, infant exposure, and infanticide clearly played an important role in shaping the structure of Roman families from all social strata.

CONCLUSION

Several observations emerge from my examination of pregnancy, childbirth, and primary care-givers in a Roman context. Social status and demographic realities, such as high maternal and infant mortality rates, played equally significant roles in these central aspects of Roman maternity, and indeed influenced one another. In order for Roman women to garner the social prestige associated with being a *matrona*, as well as the advantages associated with the release from *tutela mulierum perpetua*, and for husbands to benefit politically, they had to produce the appropriate number of children set out in the Augustan reward system of the *ius trium liberorum*. This system sought to increase the free Roman population by offering this form of social prestige, but it also must have been influenced, at least to some extent, by high infant mortality rates that affected the Roman population.

In addition to the Augustan benefits, further aspects of the social and legal spheres fashioned an environment that countered the adverse consequences of a high mortality regime and that attempted to promote maternity. The legal age minimums combined with the social norm of Roman girls marrying relatively young, some even before puberty, created an extended reproductive period during which husband and wife could hopefully produce enough children to obtain the *ius trium liberorum*. Furthermore, they would also achieve the stability that offspring provided to parents as heirs and care-givers in old age to ensure proper funerary commemoration. These positive aspects of maternity, however, came with ramifications, since the desire for a family often overshadowed other impediments, such as the significant detrimental effects that physical and emotional underdevelopment could have on a pregnancy.

As for freedmen couples, they experienced an additional demographic consequence. This social group was also a target for the Augustan legislation, albeit with different caveats, namely that they had to produce four children instead of three. If a freed couple had been formally manumitted, this would typically not have occurred until they had reached 30 years of age, a regulation that was established in the *lex Aelia Sentia*. This presented a demographic predicament, since freedwomen were reproducing later in life and thus did not have the substantial fertility window of their freeborn counterparts. These demographic conditions resulted in freedmen families being characteristically small, as freedwomen had often likely passed their prime fertile years.

These two compelling factors contributed to a different set of anxieties for the enslaved population of Rome. *Contubernia* and the production of *vernae* were considered mutually beneficial for both the slaves and their *domini*. As was the case for the free members of Roman society, the family was a symbol of stability for slaves; what is more, the creation of the slave family unit could have led to manumission and freed citizen status. However, freedom was never a guarantee for *contubernales* and their offspring, who were threatened by the possibility of familial separation if the slave-owner decided to sell them off, since these units existed at the discretion of the *domini*. As for the masters, the reproduction of slaves offered many advantages, since *vernae* were considered an important source of slaves. Allowing *contubernia* and slave families to exist afforded the *dominus* yet another form of control over the members of his *familia* since slaves who were involved in such unions were thought to be more obedient, whether out of personal satisfaction or through fear of family disruption.

The social dynamic between the enslaved *obstetrices* and *nutrices* and the members of the freeborn household also demonstrates how social status and demographic factors were inherently linked. The birth and rearing of a freeborn Roman child fell under the supervision of women who were of low status: the room of confinement required the silent assistance of a slave, and childrearing was considered beneath the dignity of a freeborn *matrona*, who should be protected from its emotional and physical strain. While the use of *obstetrices* and *nutrices* was a symptom of Rome's exploitive hierarchical structure, it also meant that these women, who were deemed moral inferiors, had great influence over the development of the freeborn family. In addition to overseeing a Roman woman's pregnancy and delivery, the *obstetrix* determined the viability of the newborn and her assessment was taken into consideration by the *paterfamilias*. *Nutrices*, on the other hand, were not only the first child-minders responsible for the socialization of Roman children, but also had an effect on their health, since they would often be involved in nursing children during illness. Furthermore, it was believed that the *nutrix* aided the freeborn couple's reproductive goals: since she was the one nursing the infant, the mother was not hindered by the contraceptive effects of lactation. Evidently, these low status agents of maternity had a significant impact on both maternal and infant health.

Puberty and the onset of menstruation signified that the Roman girl had survived the perilous time of childhood and was prepared to take up her role as wife and mother. However, accompanying this physical maturation was an awakening sexuality that had to be controlled. A young age at first marriage addressed the inherently patriarchal social construct that pubescent girls were particularly vulnerable to sexual desire which needed to be contained within the confines of a legitimate union. If a young Roman woman deviated from her established social role in any way or if she caused her *pudicitia* to be questioned, her marriageability was severely affected and it might also have had negative ramifications for her family's social status.

Lastly, the evidence examine throughout this thesis reveals significant information about the relationship between Roman men and pregnancy, childbirth, and primary care-givers. The sources demonstrate that Roman men had a great interest in female reproduction and although they were, for the most part, ignorant about what it truly involved, they nevertheless sought to exercise their authority over female reproduction and they managed to do so, albeit imperfectly. Sources such as the medical writers and the jurists almost exclusively address the interests of the *patresfamilias*. They appear to discuss this female experience with other men as opposed to *obstetrices* who, by the physicians' own admission, had readier access to and more experience with women engaged in active labour. Moreover, women are represented in the sources as being too vulnerable to bear the responsibility of true knowledge about childcare. For example, women run the risk of making labour more difficult for themselves with their irrational emotions, and they are represented as irresponsible in their lack of understanding of their own biological processes. The notion of Roman men exercising their authority over female experience is not a new concept; however, it is noteworthy that it attempted to reach into an experience that human biology dictates can be women's alone.

The behaviours of the Romans with respect to maternity were complex and it is important to understand them in their proper social and cultural context. At Rome the family system was inherently patriarchal, with both men and women actively seeking entry into the institution of the family, along with the protections and benefits that it afforded. Roman couples evidently pursued family formation at whatever cost, including placing the life of the mother and the pride of the father at risk, a price that both Roman men and women were indeed willing to pay.

FUNERARY INSCRIPTION APPENDIX – *Obstetrices*

The material presented in this appendix has been gathered from the epigraphic dossier provided by Laes 2011 (pages 280-284). I have also provided additional information obtained from volumes III, VI, VIII, X, XI, XII, and XIII of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, *L'Année Épigraphique*, and *Inscriptions du Port D'Ostie* (*IPOstie),* as well as from the Clauss/Salby Epigraphik-Datenbank, the Epigraphic Database Heidelberg, and the Epigraphic Database Roma. A note has been made if there is a companion inscription. All translations are my own.

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[1] *CIL* III 8820

D(is) M(anibus) | Aeliae Soter(a)e op | setrici def(unctae) an(norum) XXXV | Ael(ius) Antonianus | Themistocles | libertae b(ene) m(erenti)

Translation:

To the Spirits of the Dead. Aelius Antonianus Themistocles (set this up) for his well-deserving freedwoman, Aelia Sotera, midwife, having died at 35 years of age.

Location: Dalmatia (Salonae)
Name: Aelia Sotera
Age: 35
Social Status: *Liberta*
Note: *ILJug*. 1, 125

Total from *CIL* III: 1

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[2] *CIL* VI 4458

Hygia | Marcellae l(iberta) | obstetrix

Translation:

Hygia, freedwoman of Marcella. Midwife.

Location: Rome (*columbarium* of the Marcellae)
Name: Hygia Marcellae l.
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta*

[3] *CIL* VI 6325

Secunda | opstetrix | Statiliae Maioris

Translation:

Secunda, midwife, (slave of) Statilia Maior.

Location: Rome (Porta Maggiore, *columbarium* of the Statili)
Name: Secunda
Age: Unknown
Social Status: Slave

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[4] *CIL* VI 6647

Hygiae | Flaviae Sabinae | opstetr(icis) vixit ann(os) XXX | Marius Orthrus et | Apollonius contubernali | carissimae

Translation:

To Hygia, midwife of Flavia Sabina. She lived thirty years. Marius, Orthrus, and Apollonius (made this) for a most dear spouse.

Location: Rome (*columbarium* near the Praenestina Gate – near the monument of the Statili)
Name: Hygia
Age: 30
Social Status: Slave

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[5] *CIL* VI 6832

Sempronia Peloris | Atratinae opstetri(x) | [---] ris v(ixit) a(nnos) [---]

Translation:

Sempronia, midwife of Peloria Atratina. […] Lived […] years.

Location: Rome (*columbarium* near the Via Latina)
Name: Sempronia
Age: Unknown
Social Status: Slave

[6] *CIL* VI 8192

Q(uintus) Sallustius | Diogae l(ibertus) | Dioges || Sallustia | Artemidori l(iberta) | Athen[ai]s | opstetrix

Translation:

Quintus Sallustius Dioges, freedman of Dioga || Sallustria Athenais, freedwoman of Artemidorus. Midwife.

Location: Rome (*columbarium* for the freedmen of Q. Sallustius)
Name: Sallustia Artemidori l. Athen[ai]s
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta*
Note: *AE* 1999, 24

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[7] *CIL* VI 8207

Sallustia Q(uinti) l(iberta) Imerita opstetrix | Q(uintus) Sallustius Q(uinti) l(ibertus) Artimidorus | p(atronus?)

Translation:

Sallustia Imerita, freedwoman of Quintus. Midwife. Quintus Sallustius Artimidorus, freedman of Quintus. Patron [?].

Location: Rome (*columbarium* for the freedmen of Q. Sallustius)
Name: Sallustia Q. l. Imerita
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta*

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[8] *CIL* VI 8947

Antoniae Aug(ustae) l(ibertae) | Thallusae | opstetric(i)

Translation:

Antonia Thallusa, freedwoman of Augusta. Midwife.

Location: Rome
Name: Antonia Aug. l. Thallusa
Age: Unknown

Social Status: *Liberta* of the *familia Caesaris*
Note: *AE* 2000, 132

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[9] *CIL* VI 8948

Prima Liviae opstetrix Asterope Maximi | Epicharis Maximi mater

Translation:

Prima Asterope, midwife of Livia. Mother of Maximus, Epicharus, and Maximus.

Location: Rome
Name: Prima
Age: Unknown
Social Status: Slave of the *familia Caesaris*

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[10] *CIL* VI 8949

[Iul]iae | [div]ae Aug(ustae) l(ibertae) | […]siae | obstetrici

Translation:

To Julia, freedwoman of the divine Augusta. […] midwife.

Location: Rome (marble fragment)
Name: Iulia divae Augustae l.
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* of the *familia Caesaris*

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[11] *CIL* VI 9720

Claudiae Trophim(ae) | obstetrici | T(itus) Cassius Trophimus f(ilius) | matri pientissimae et | Ti(berius) Cassius Trophimianus | aviae et posterisque suis | fecerunt | vix(it) ann(is) LXXV m(ensibus) V

Translation:

To Claudia Trophime, midwife. Titus Cassius Trophimus, son, made (this) for his most dutiful mother and Tiberius Cassius Trophimianus made (this) for his grandmother and their descendants. She lived 75 years and 5 months.

Location: Rome (selpulchral monument in the Villa Ferretti outside of the S. Lorenzo gate)
Name: Claudia Trophime
Age: 75 years, 5 months
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

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[12] *CIL* VI 9721

C(aius) Grattius | Hilarae | opstetricis l(ibertus) | Plocamus | a monte | Esquilino || Grattia m(ulieris) l(iberta) Hilara

Translation:

Gaius Grattius Plocamus, freedman of Hilara the midwife, from the Esquiline hill || Grattia Hilara, freedwoman of the wife.

Location: Rome
Name: Grattia m(ulieris) l. Hilara
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta*
Note: *CIL* VI 9721a

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[13] *CIL* VI 9722

D(is) M(anibus) | Iuliae Vene | riae opstetri | ci b(ene) m(erenti) | fecit | Iulius He[---]

Translation:

To the Spirits of the Dea. Iulius He[…] made (this) for Iulia Veneria, the well-deserving midwife.

Location: Rome
Name: Iulia Veneria
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

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[14] *CIL* VI 9723

Poblicia G(aiae) l(iberta) Aphe | opstetrix ossa tibi | bene quiescant | vixit annos XXI

Translation:

Poblicia Aphe, freedwoman of Gaia. Midwife. May your bones rest well. She lived 21 years.

Location: Rome (possibly from the Via Ostiense)
Name: Poblicia Gaiae l. Aphe
Age: 21
Social Status: *Liberta*

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[15] *CIL* VI 9724

[…]antiu [--- V]aleriae Syre | [---] qu(a)e vixit annis XXXI | [--- cum coniuge s]uo fecit annos VIIII et | [--- de]posita pri(die) Idus Novem(bres) | [---]a filia obs(t)etricis

Translation:

[…]anitu to Valeria Syre [?] who lived to 31 years. […] with his wife he made 9 years and […] having been laid to rest the day before the ides of November […] his daughter. Midwife.

Location: Rome
Name: Cannot be determined with certainty
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)
Note: *ICUR* 3843, *ILCV* 618

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[16] *CIL* VI 9725

[D(is)] M(anibus) s(acrum) | [Volusia]e D[m]oeni | [Volusiae To]rquataes ops(t)etrici | [Cl]audia Nome | [de s]e bene merenti

Translation:

Sacred to the Spirits of the Dead. Claudia Nome (made this) for Volusia Dmoenis, midwife, and the well-deserving Volusia Torquataes [?].

Location: Rome
Name: Volusia Dmoenis
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)
Note: *CIL* VI 27558

[17] *CIL* VI 37810

Sex(tus) Teidiu(s) [Sex(ti) l(ibertus)] | Ante[ros] | Teidia Sex(ti) [l(iberta)] | opstetri(x)

Translation:

Sextus Teidius Anteros, freedman of Sextus. Teidia, freedwoman of Sextus. Midwife.

Location: Rome
Name: Teidia Sex. l.
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta*

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[18] *AE* 1926, 52; 1991, 127

Taxis Ionidis Iulia[e Aug(ustae sevae) | opstetrix v(ixit) a(nnis) XXX [---]| Hesper et Epitync(hanus) vicari de suo [fec(erunt)]

Translation:

Taxis Ionis, slave of Julia Augusta. Midwife. She lived to 30 years. Hesper and Epitynchanus, her *vicari*, made this for her.

Location: Rome
Name: Taxis Ionis
Age: 30
Social Status: Slave

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[19] *AE* 1991, 126

Helena | Lucretiae (serua) | opstetrix

Translation:

Helena, slave of Lucretia. Midwife.

Location: Rome
Name: Helena
Age: Unknown
Social Status: Slave

Total from *CIL* VI: 18

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[20] *CIL* VIII 4896

Diis M(anibus) sac(rum) | Irene ops(t)e | trix Fausti | D(omitiae) S(aturninae) s(ervi) medici (uxor) | v(ixit) a(nnis) XXXIII

Translation:

Sacred to the spirits of the dead. Irene, midwife and wife of Faustus, physician and slave of Domitia Saturnina. Lived 33 years.

Location: Numidia Proconsularis
Name: Irene
Age: 33
Social Status: Slave (?)
Note: The expansion and translation of this inscription follows the suggestions presented by Gummerus (1932:79) and Alonso (2015:1502). It is possible that the D S in line 4 can be expanded to Domitius Severus or Decimus Septimius Severus. I would like to warmly thank Dr. Jonathan Edmondson (York University) for his suggestions and guidance (via email correspondence).

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[21] *CIL* VIII 5155

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) | Noviae | Dativae | boni o | minis | feminae | piae qui | v(ixit) a(nnos) XXXV h(ic) s(ita) || D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) | Caeliae | Victori | ae obste | trici ka | rissim(a)e(?) | piae qu[a]e | vixit an | nis XXVI | h(ic) s(ita) || [C]ae[l]ius Nori[cus] coniugi et | [so]ror(i) caris | [si]mis

Translation:

Sacred to the Spirits of the Dead. Here lies Novia Dativa of the good omen. To the pious woman who lived 35 years || Sacred to the Spirits of the Dead. Here lies Caelia Victoria, most dear and pious midwife, who lived 26 years. || Caelius Noricus (made this) for his wife and most dear sister.

Location: Numidia Proconsularis
Name: Caelia Victoria
Age: 26

Social Status: *Liberta* (?)
Notes: *AE* 1914, 240

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[22] *CIL* VIII 15593

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Caelia Bono/sa Mazica / obstetrix ma/rita castissi/ma et pudicis/[sima] vixit / [ann]is XXXXII / m(ensibus) III h(ic) s(ita) e(st) // D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / P(ublius) Flavi/us P(ubli) f(ilius) / Corn(elius) / Felix / p(ius) v(ixit) a(nnos) / LXXV / m(enses) VI / h(ic) s(itus) e(st)

Translation:

Sacred to the Spirits of the Dead. Here lies Caelia Bonosa Mazica. Midwife, most pure and chaste wife. She lived 42 years and 3 months. || Here lies the pious Publius Flavius Cornelius Felix, son of Publius. He lived 75 years and 6 months.

Location: Africa Proconsularis (Mustis)
Name: Caelia Bonosa Mazica
Age: 42 years, 3 months
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

---

[23] *CIL* VIII 25394

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) // o(ssa) v(obis) b(ene) q(uiescant) // L(ucius) Valerius / Valerianus / pius vixit / annis LXII / m(enses) V dies VII // Licin(i)a / Victoria / ops(t)etrix / pia vixit / annis IL / m(ensibus) VI d(iebus) XIII // t(erra) v(obis) l(evis) s(it)

Translation:

Sacred to the Spirits of the Dead. || May your bones rest well. || The pious Lucius Valerius Valerianus lived to 62 years, 5 months, and 7 days. || The pious midwife, Licinia Victoria lived to 51 years, 6 months, and 13 days || May the earth rest lightly on you.

Location: Africa Proconsularis (Utica)
Name: Licinia Victoria
Age: 51 years, 6 months, 13 days
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)
Note: *AE* 1903, 107; 1913, 166

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[24] ***AE*** **1980, 936**

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) | Aurelia Ma | [c]ula p(ia) vixit | annis LVI | obs(t)etrix

Translation:

Sacred to the Spirits of the Dead. Faithful Aurelia Macula. She lived 56 years. Midwife.

Location: Africa Proconsularis (Mactaris)
Name: Aurelia Macula
Age: 56
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

Total from ***CIL*** **VIII:** 5

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[25] ***CIL*** **X 1933**

Inscription:

D(is) M(anibus) / Cóeliáe Hagne / obs(t)etrici / M(arcus) Ulpius Zosimus / coniugi sánctissim(ae)

Translation:

To the spirits of the dead. Coelia Hagne, midwife. Marcus Ulpius Zosimus (made this) for his most venerable wife.

Location: Puteoli (Regio I)
Name: Coelia Hagne
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

---

[26] ***CIL*** **X 3972**

Mariae (mulieris) et Suavitti l(ibertae) / [P]eregrinae, opstetricì.

Translation:

To Maria Peregrina, freedwoman of the wife and Suavittus, midwife.

Location: Capua (Regio I)
Name: Maria Peregrina
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta*

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[27] ***AE*** **2005, 328**

Secunda / Aug(usti) l(iberta) opste / trix vix(it) an(nis) / XXIV

Translation:

Secunda, freedwoman of Augustus. Midwife. Lived to 24 years.

Location: Surrentum
Name: Secunda
Age: 24
Social Status: *Liberta* of the *familia Caesaris*

Total from ***CIL*** **X:** 3

---

[28] ***CIL*** **XI 3391**

[V]olu[si]a [--] / opstetrix / vixit annos [---]

Translation:

Volusia. Midwife. Lived […] years.

Location: Tarquinii (Regio VII)
Name: Volusia
Age: Unknown
Social Status: Slave (?)

---

[29] ***CIL*** **XI 4128**

Hygiae / Autroniae Fortunat(ae) / opstetrici / fecit Fidus / filius

Translation:

Fidus, son, made (this) for Hygia Autronia Fortunata.

Location: Narnia (Regio VI)
Name: Hygia
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

Total from *CIL* XI: 2

---

[30] *AE* 1979, 396

Niger P[---] / et Cleopa[trae--] / suae opst[etrici?] / f(ecit)

Translation:

Niger […] and Cleopatra […] to her midwife.

Location: Gallia Narbonensis (Forum Iulii)
Name: Unknown
Age: Unknown
Social Status: Slave (?)

Total from *CIL* XII: 1

---

[31] *CIL* XIII 3706

Iulia Pier/is obstetrix / hic iacet / nulli gra/vis

Translation:

Here lies Iulia Pieris, midwife. (Let) no harm (come to this grave).

Location: Belgica (Trier/Augusta Treverorum)
Name: Iulia Pieris
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

Total from *CIL* XIII: 1

---

[32] *IPOstie* A 222

Inscription Expansion:

H(uic) m(onumento) d(olus) m(alus) a(besto) | D(is) m(anibus) | Scribonia Attice | fecit sibi et M(arco) Ulpio Amerimno | coniugi et Scriboniae Calli | tyche matre et Diocli et suis | et libertis libertabusque poste | risque eorum praetor Panara | tum et Prosdocia h(oc) m(onumentum) h(eredem) e(xterum) n(on) s(equetur)

Translation:

Let evil harm be absent from this monument. To the spirits of the dead. Scribonia Attice made (this monument) for herself and for M. Ulpius Amerimnus, her husband, and for Scribonia Callityche, her mother, and for Diocles and her own (slaves) and freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants except for Panaratus and Prosdocia. This monument will not pass to an external heir.

Location: Portus (Tomb 100)
Name: Scribonia Attice
Age: Unknown
Social Status: *Liberta* (?)

Total from *CIL* XIV: 1

IMAGE APPENDIX

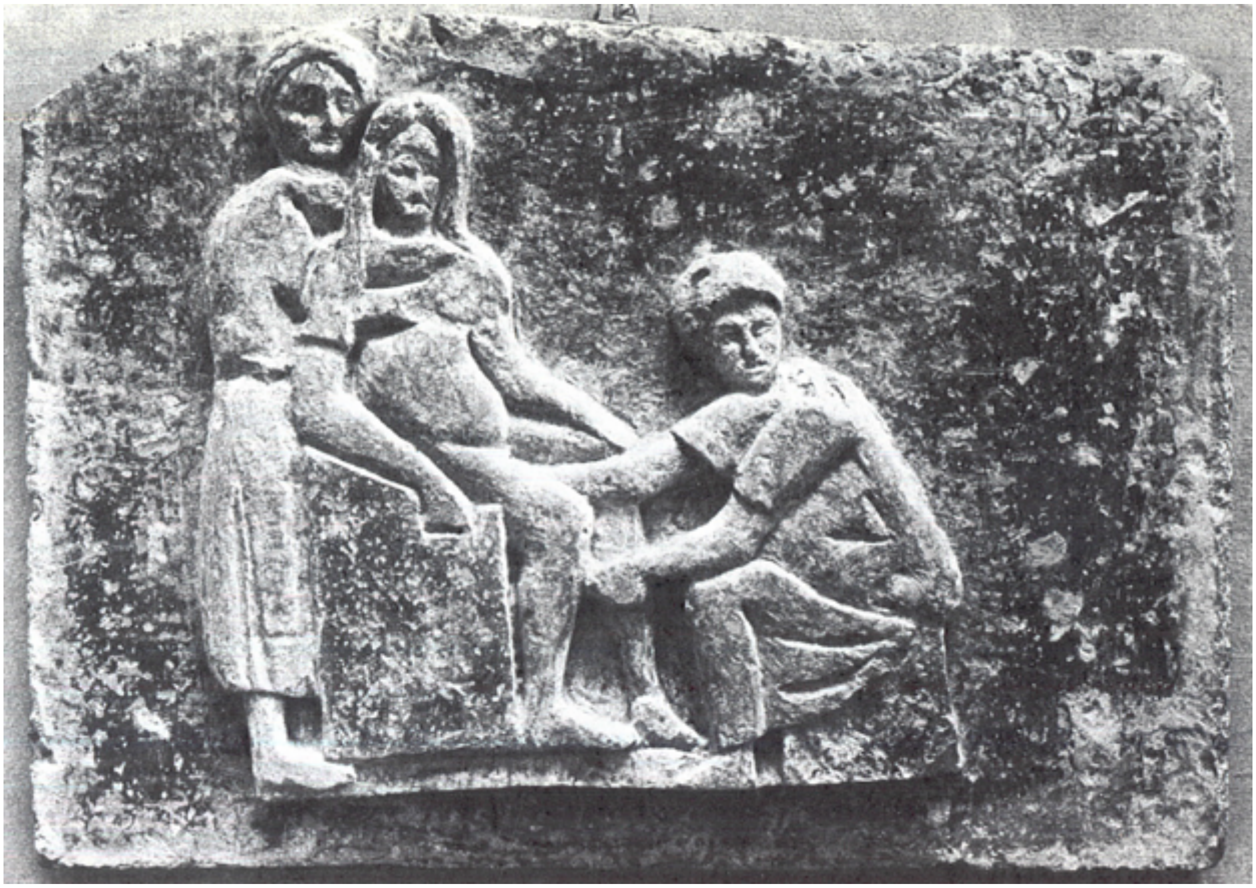

Figure 1: Terra cotta relief from Tomb 100, tomb of Scribonia Attice (Museo Ostiense, Inv. 5204)
Origin: Isola Sacra Necropolis
Date: 2nd Century AD
Image Source: N. Kampen (1981), Cat. I. 6 (Figure 58)

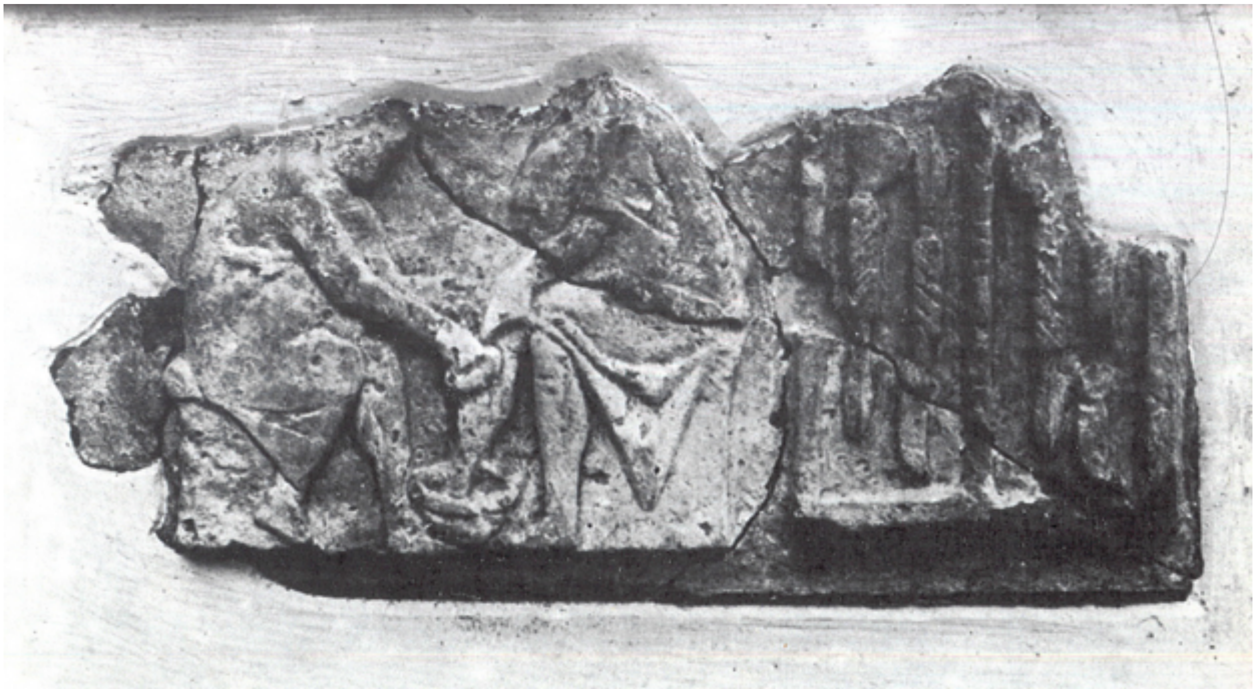

Figure 2: Terra cotta relief from Tomb 100, Tomb of Scribonia Attice (Museo Ostiense, Inv. 5203)
Origin: Isola Sacra Necropolis
Date: 2nd Century AD
Image Source: N. Kampen (1981), Cat. II. 16 (Figure 59)

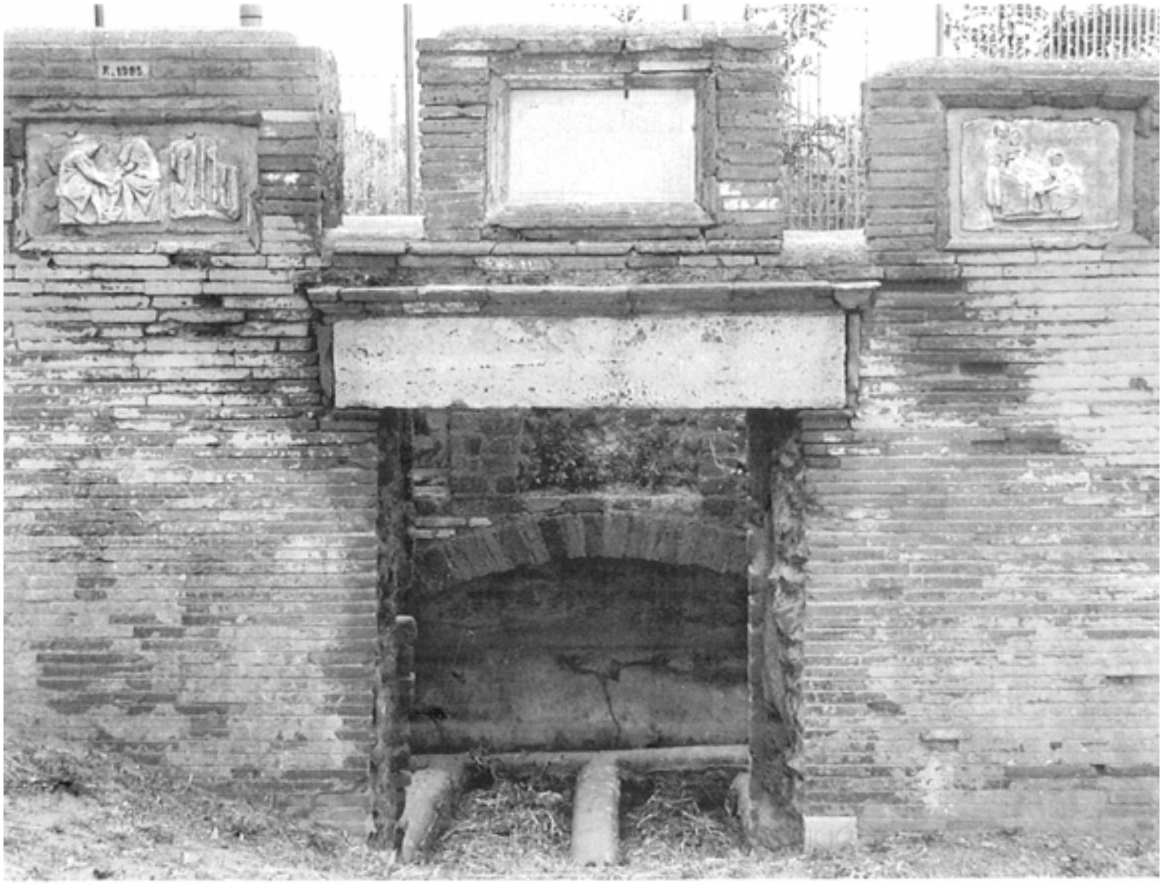

Figure 3: Tomb 100, Tomb of Scribonia Attice, entrance
Origin: Isola Sacra Necropolis
Date: 2nd Century AD
Image Source: L. Hackworth Petersen (2006), Figure 118. Page 193.

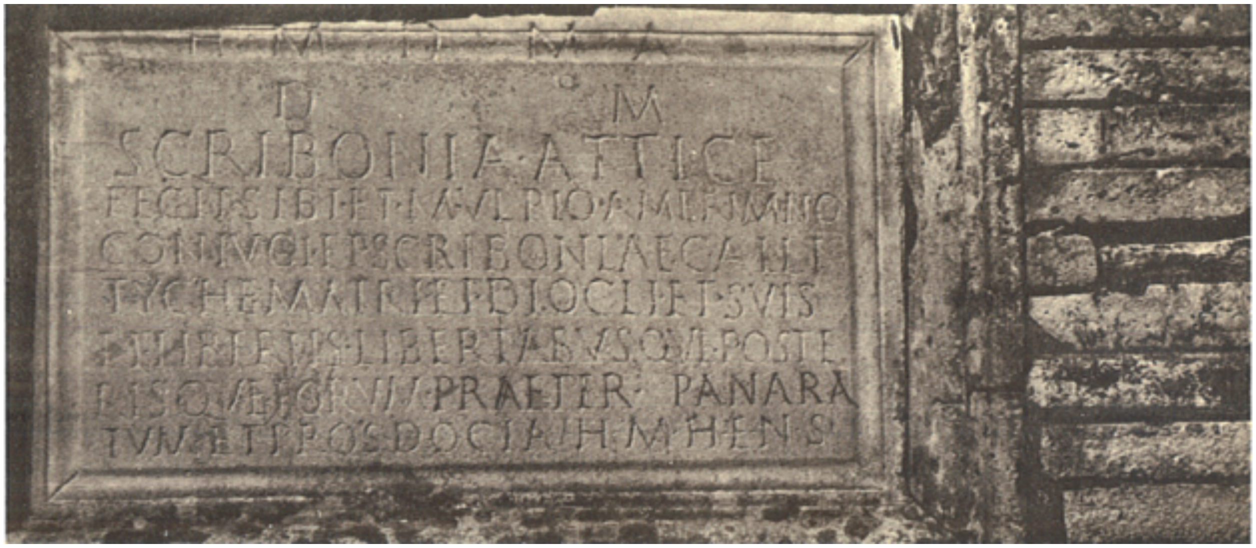

Figure 4: Funerary inscription from Tomb 100, tomb of Scribonia Attice and M. Ulpius Amerimnus
Origin: Isola Sacra Necropolis
Date: 2nd Century AD
Image Source: H. Thylander (1951), Inscription A 222 (Pl. LXIV, Fig. 1)

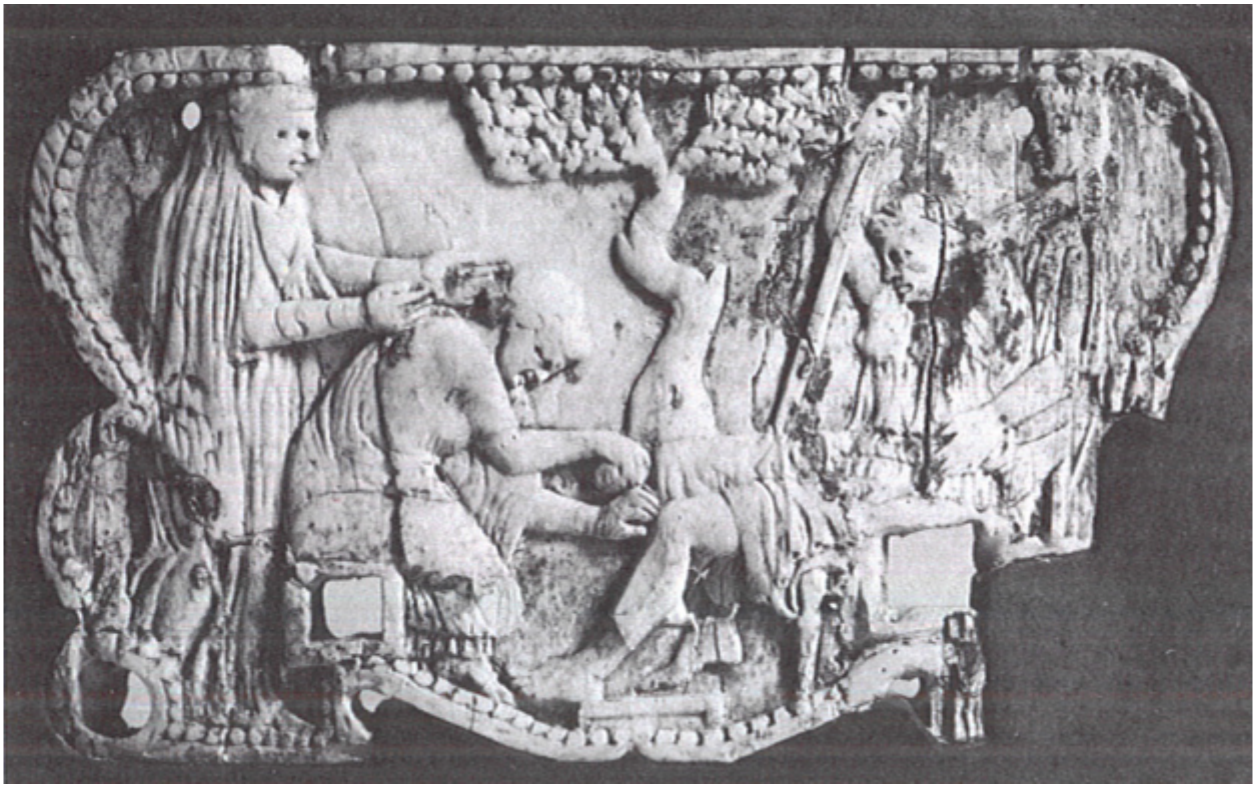

Figure 5: Ivory plaque of childbirth scene (Museo Nazionale Archeologico Napoli, Inv. 109905)
Origin: Pompeii (Regio I, Insula 2)
Date: Before AD 79
Image Source: V. French (1987), Plate II

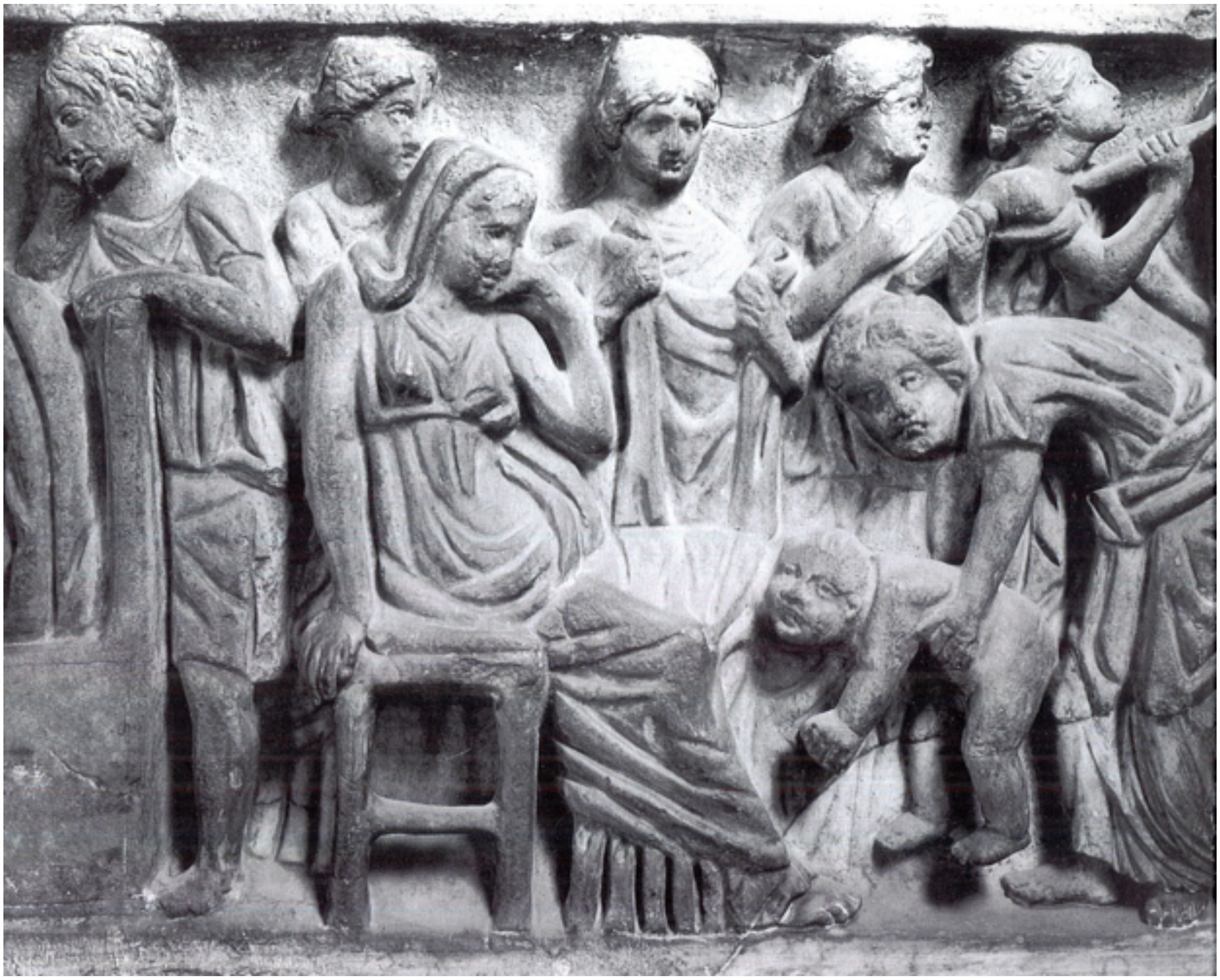

Figure 6: Biographical sarcophagus, first bath of the newborn scene (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Inv. Ma. 319).
Origin: Rome
Date: 1st quarter of the 3rd Century AD
Image Source: Amedick (1991), Kat. 115 (Taf. 56. 1)

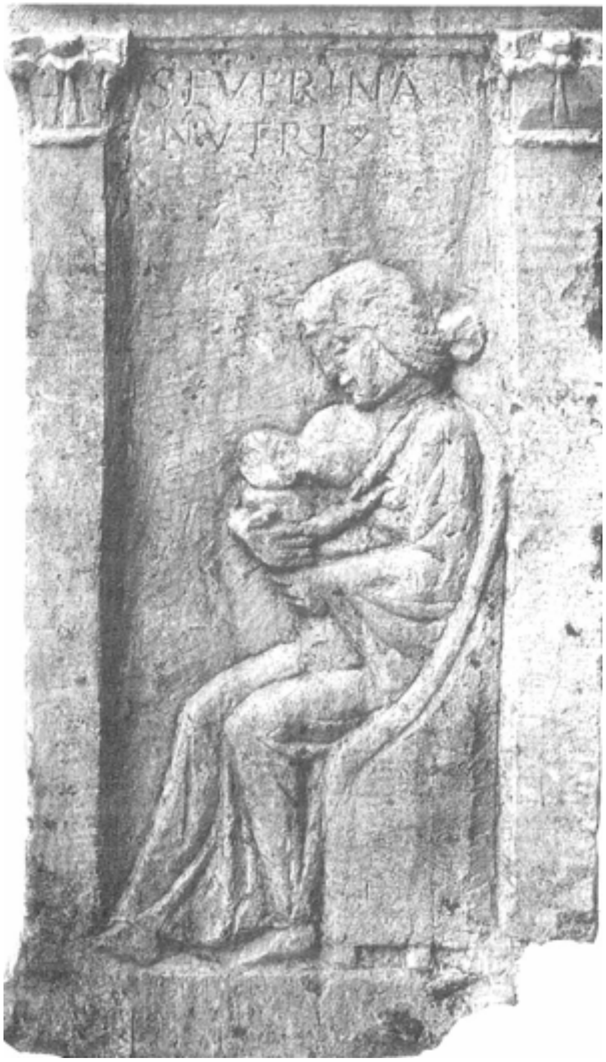

Figure 7: Right side of the Altar featuring Severina the *Nutrix* (Köln, Römisch-Germanisches Museum, inv. 74.414)
Origin: Colonia Agrippina (Silvanstraße [near the cemetery of St. Severin])
Date: AD 220 – 250
Image Source: R. Jackson (1988), Figure 25b (p. 101)

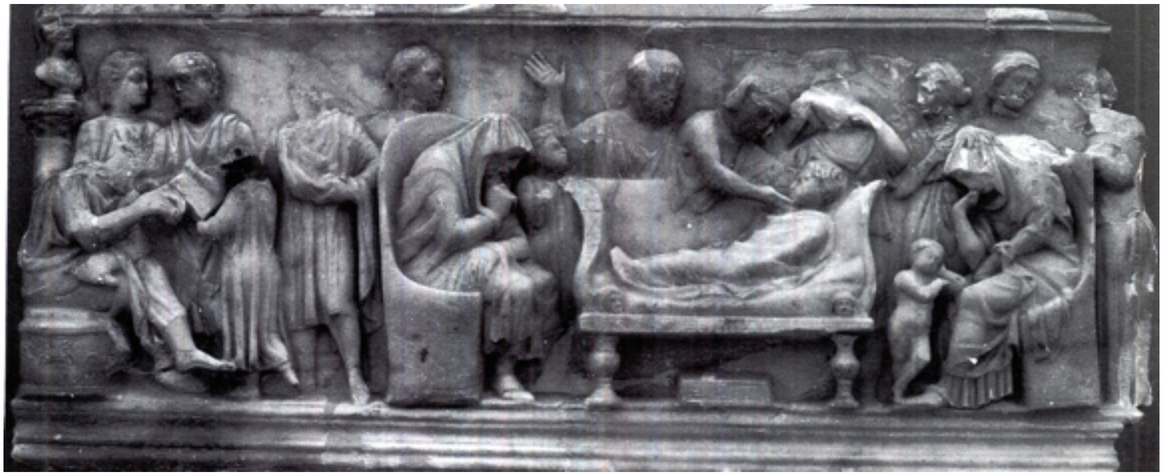

Figure 8: Biographical sarcophagus, *Conclamatio* scene (Agrigento, Museo Regionale)
Origin: In the area of the Roman necropolis of Agrigento
Date: AD 120-130
Image Source: Amedick (1991), Kat. 2 (Taf. 53. 1)

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