

**THE NURSE IN  
GREEK LIFE; A  
DISSERTATION**

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The nurse in Greek life; A dissertation by Mary Rosaria

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**MARY ROSARIA**

**THE NURSE IN  
GREEK LIFE; A  
DISSERTATION**



# THE NURSE IN GREEK LIFE

By  
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## A DISSERTATION

*Submitted to the Catholic Sisters College of the Catholic  
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## PREFACE

The frequent mention of the nurse in connection with the child and the family and the numerous descriptions of her in Greek art have suggested the investigation of Greek classical literature and the inscriptions with the purpose of ascertaining and presenting the position and characteristics of the nurse as a contribution to the private life of the Greeks. The subject here dealt with is viewed solely from the social standpoint, though the writer recognizes its value from the literary and psychological sides.

The scope of this study practically includes the whole range of Greek literature from Homer to Plutarch. A correct notion of the part played in Greek life by this character could not have been obtained from a narrower field. Certain phases of the nurse's life are discussed by Becker in his "Charikles" (Excursus to Scene I), and references to different aspects of the subject are found in Hermann's "Lehrbuch" (3rd. ed., pt. IV). Friedländer's "Sittengeschichte Roms" (5th. ed., I, p. 468ff.) was of special value in throwing light on some of the *μυθοί* of Chapter IV. Wherever the works of other modern authors dealing with Greek domestic life have been used, due credit will be given them.

SISTER MARY ROSARIA.

Feast of St. Joseph,  
March 19, 1917.

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## CHAPTER I

### TERMS USED FOR NURSE

Of the various terms employed in the literature to designate the nurse we shall speak only of four: *τροφός*, *τιθήνη*, *μαῖα*, and *τίτθη*. The first three are found in Homer<sup>1</sup> and the Hymns<sup>2</sup> with no apparent difference of meaning. *τίτθη* is of later origin and is used of a wet-nurse by Plato,<sup>3</sup> Demosthenes,<sup>4</sup> Aristotle,<sup>5</sup> Antiphanes,<sup>6</sup> Plutarch,<sup>7</sup> Soranus.<sup>8</sup> The ancient lexicographers generally bear out this meaning of the word. While Herodianus (I, 456, l. 2, Lentz), Hesychius and Photius give *τροφός* as a synonym for *τίτθη*, Suidas defines it more at length: *τίτθαι, οὕτω καλοῦνται αἱ τοῖς τιθίοις καὶ τῷ γάλακτι τρέφουσαι τὰ παιδία*. Eustathius<sup>9</sup> calls wet-nurses *τίτθαι*, and those who have the care of children after weaning *τιθηνοί* and *τροφοί*: *τίτθαι . . . αἱ τοὺς τιθίους παρέχουσαι . . . τιθηνοὶ δέ, ἐτι δέ καὶ τροφοί . . . αἱ τὸν ἄλλον φασὶ πόνον μετὰ τὸν ἀπογαλακτισμὸν ἄνα εχόμεναι*. Pollux defines *τίτθαι* as *αἱ θηλάζουσαι* (II, 163) and again (III, 50) he says: *τὴν δὲ θηλάζουσαν Εὐπολις τίττην θηλάστριαν ὠνόμασε*. Between *τιθήνη* and *τίτθη* he makes this distinction: *ἡ δὲ τροφὸς τῆς κόρης, τιθήνη· καὶ ἡ γάλα παρέχουσα τίτθη* (III, 41). However, a writer of the second century A. D. plainly referring to a wet-nurse, uses *τιθήνη*.

*κούροι ὑπ' ἐκ μαζοῦο τιθήνης  
χειλεσιν αὐ' ἐρύει λαρὸν γλάγος.*<sup>10</sup>

The Etymologicum Magnum refers *τιθήνη* to *τιθόν*: *τιθήνας, τροφούς παρὰ τὸ τιθόν*. According to Brugmann<sup>11</sup> *τίτθη*, *τι-*

<sup>1</sup> Od. ii, 361; xix, 15, 21, 489; ii, 349, 372; xvii, 499; Il. vi, 389; xxii, 503.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. Hymn to Aphrod., 114; Dem., 103, 147, 227, 291.

<sup>3</sup> Republic, 373C.

<sup>4</sup> H. A., vii, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Alc., I, Lyc., 16.

<sup>6</sup> Com. on Il, vi, p. 513.

<sup>7</sup> xlvii, 55, 56, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Athen., vi, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Gynaecia, i, 87, 88.

<sup>10</sup> Oppian, Halieutica, II, 404-5.

<sup>11</sup> Brugmann, Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik, Strassburg, 1889, ii, S. 92.

*θήνη*, *τίθος* are formed by reduplication beside *θήλη*, "mother's breast."

As to the word *τροφός*, Herodianus (I, 225, l. 11, Lentz) refers it to *τρέφω*. Hesychius<sup>12</sup> contrasts it with *θρέμμα*, "nursling." Pollux (l. c.) seems to distinguish *τροφός* and *μαῖα* and to take the latter as meaning more strictly, "Ea quae lactat," as Stephanus remarks in his Thesaurus.

Various meanings were attached to the word *μαῖα*. Besides its use as "mid-wife," it was employed as a form of address in speaking to nurses:

*εἰ δ' ἔγε δὴ μοι, μαῖα φίλη.*<sup>13</sup>

*μαῖα, θεῶν μὲν δῶρα καὶ ἀχνύμενοι περ ἀνάγκη.*<sup>14</sup>

*μαῖα, πάλιν μου κρήφον κεφαλάν.*<sup>15</sup>

The signification was even extended to embrace the true mother, as attested by Euripides, *Alcestis* 393, where the child says of its mother: *μαῖα δὴ κάτω βέβακεν*.

To distinguish accurately and sharply between the different words for nurse is not our present purpose. Doubtless the differences between them were not broad and clear even to the Greeks themselves. *τροφός* seems to be employed as the generic term, while *τίθη* is generally used for "wet-nurse" and *τροφός* and *τιθήνη* for "nursery-maid."

<sup>12</sup> Lexicon, s. v. *τροφοί*.

<sup>13</sup> *Od.*, xxiii, 171. Cf. xxiii, 35, 81, 11; xix, 482, 500, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Homeric Hymn Dem., 147.

<sup>15</sup> Euripides, *Hipp.*, 243.

CHAPTER II  
SOCIAL STATUS OF THE NURSE

*From Homer to Herodotus*

The Homeric poems deal wholly with the life of the upper classes. Hence we do not get from them a complete picture of how all classes lived. Even for the aristocrat therein described, the habits of life were simple. Mothers nursed their own children: thus Hecuba speaks to her son, Hector:

"Ἕκτορ, τέκνον ἑμόν, τάδε τ' αἶδοο καὶ μ' ἐλέησον  
αὐτήν, εἰ ποτέ τοι λαβικηδία μασθὸν ἐπίσχοι."<sup>16</sup>

Still, there is one instance which points to a different practice. Odysseus in addressing his old nurse Eurycleia says:

μαῖα, τίη μ' ἐθελείς ὀλέσαι; σὺ δέ μ' ἔτρεφες αὐτή  
τῷ σφ' ἐπὶ μασθῷ.<sup>17</sup>

The expression ἐπὶ μασθῷ here employed is used in another place of the relation between mother and child:

πάντε δὲ οἱ ἦν ἐπὶ μασθῷ  
νήπιος, ὅς που νῦν γε μετ' ἀνδρῶν ἴζει ἀριθμῷ.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> II., xxii, 82. Cf. also xvi, 203 and Od., xi, 448.

<sup>17</sup> Od., xix, 482.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xi, 448.

NOTE. — Seymour (*Life in the Homeric Age*, N. Y., 1914, p. 139), objects to this on the ground that "nothing indicates that she (Eurycleia) ever bore a child and could have served as a wet-nurse." The words *εὐνή δ' σὺ ποτ' ἔμειπτο* (Od. I, 433) merely show that Eurycleia was not the concubine of Laertes, and not that she was childless. Dolius, the slave, had a wife and family in the household of Laertes (Od. xxiv, 389). Moreover, if the apportioning of awards mentioned in Od., xxi, 214 (*ἄξιομαι ἀμφοτέρους ἀλόχους*) were a matter of custom, would not the faithful Eurycleia have served as a very special prize? Cf. Buchholz, *Die Hom. Realien*, Leipzig, 1881, vol. II, Pt. 2, p. 24.