The Power of the Breast:

The Influence of the Roman Wetnurse

The abstract can be found at: <https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2022/2759RomanWetnurse.pdf>

1. Soranus. *Gynecology*. 2.19. (trans Owsei Temkin, 1991)

(The wet nurse should be “self-controlled” so as to abstain from coitus, drinking, lewdness, and any other pleasure and incontinence.)

1. Aulus Gellius. *Atticae Noctes* (*Attic Nights*). 12.1.17. (trans J. C. Rolfe, Loeb, 1927)

Quae, malum, igitur ratio est, nobilitatem istam nati modo hominis corpusque et animum, bene ingeniatis primordiis inchoatum, insitivo degenerique alimento lactis alieni corrumpere? **praesertim si istaquamad praebendum lactem adhibebitis, aut serva aut servilis est et, ut plerumque solet, externae et barbarae nationis est, si inproba, si informis, si inpudica, si temulenta est**; nam plerumque sine discrimine, quaecumque id temporis lactans est adhiberi solet.

(What mischief, then, is the reason for corrupting the nobility of body and mind of a newly born human being, formed from gifted seeds, by the alien and degenerate nourishment of another’s milk? **Especially if she whom you employ to furnish the milk is either a slave or of servile origin and, as usually happens, of a foreign and barbarous nation, if she is dishonest, ugly, unchaste and a wine-bibber**; for as a rule anyone who has milk at the time is employed and no distinction made.)

1. Soranus. *Gynecology*. 2.19. (trans Temkin, 1991)

(In regard to drinking, first the wet nurse is harmed in soul as well as in body and for this reason the milk is also spoiled. Secondly, seized by sleep from which she is hard to awaken, she leaves the newborn unattended or even falls down upon it in a dangerous way. Thirdly, too much wine passes its quality to the milk and therefore the nursling

becomes sluggish and comatose and even afflicted with tremor, apoplexy, and convulsions.)

1. CIL 06, 21151: (translation my own)

Lascivia verna / Q(uinti) Sulpici Abascan/ti quae nondum sep/tem compleverat an/nos quae caruit luce / et tenebris se miscuit / atris Lascivia nimium / fatis crudelibus orta est / liquit et orbatos miser/os fidosque parentes / uberibus pressis nutri/cem liquit amantem /

coniunx nutricis infel/ix ille relictus maeret / et ad cineres plangit / sua pectora palmis nec / satis ereptam lucem sibi.

(Lascivia, houseborn slave of Quintus Sulpicius Abascantus who did not yet complete seven years when she was deprived of light and mixed herself with black darkness. Lascivia was born to too cruel of a fate. She left behind bereft, grieving, devoted parents. She left behind a loving nurse with her breast pressed against her [who had nursed her]. The unlucky husband of the nurse left behind mourns in the ashes he bangs his chest with his hands.)

1. *Digest* *of Justinian*. 40.2.11. (trans S. P. Scott, 1932, Roman Law Library, https:// droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/)

Ulpianus 6 de off. procons.

Si minor annis viginti manumittit, huiusmodi solent causae manumissionis recipi: si filius filiave frater sororve naturalis sit.

(Ulpian, *On the Duties of Proconsul*, Book VI.

When a minor under the age of twenty years manumits a slave, the manumission is ordinarily accepted, where the person who manumits is the natural son or daughter, brother, or sister of the slave.)

1. *Digest of Justinian*. 40.2.13 (trans S. P. Scott, 1932, Roman Law Library, https:// droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/)

Ulpianus libro de off. procons.

Si collactaneus, si educator, si paedagogus ipsius, si nutrix, vel filius filiave cuius eorum, vel alumnus, vel capsarius (id est qui portat libros).

(Ulpian, the same book, *On the Duties of Proconsul*.

Or if he or she is the foster-brother, instructor, teacher, or nurse of the minor, or the son or daughter of the person above mentioned, or his pupil, (or the attendant who carries his books).)

1. *Digest of Justinian*. 26.10.1.7. (trans Judith Evans Grubbs in *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood*, 241)

Ulpianus,

Quin immo et mulieres admittuntur, sed hae solae, quae pietate necessitudinis ductae ad hoc procedunt, ut puta mater. nutrix quoque et avia possunt. potest et soror, nam in sorore et rescriptum exstat divi severi: et si qua alia mulier fuerit, cuius praetor perpensam pietatem

intellexerit non sexus verecundiam egredientis, sed pietate productam non continere iniuriam pupillorum, admittet eam ad accusationem.

(Ulpian,

But indeed, even women are allowed (to prosecute untrustworthy guardians), but only those women, who come to this course of action led by the sense of duty owed to kin, as for instance, a mother. A nurse also and a grandmother can bring charges. Even a sister can, for there is a rescript of the deified (Septimius) Severus regarding a sister. And if there is any other woman, whose well-considered sense of duty (*pietas*) the praetor has understood (to be that) of a woman who does not go beyond her sense of shame (*verecundia*) for her sex, but, induced by her sense of duty, is not able to keep to herself the injury done to the minor, he will allow her to bring an accusation.)

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