

## αἰδοίη ταμίη: A New Reading

This paper examines the position of the slave known as the ταμίη in the Homeric household. I focus on her presence in the *Odyssey*, where she appears both as a general worker, and as a figure embodied by two named characters. The ταμίη often appears in a formulaic, poetic context, where she is afforded a reverential epithet. I argue first that this household slave is, through formula and contextual elements, attributed a high level of respect in the original Greek. Unfortunately, in traditional discussion of this slave, both as she appears in translation and in scholarly discussion, her role in the homeric household has often been diminished. I contend that there has been a historical pattern of disregard for the significant role she serves. I will demonstrate through examination of two named *tamiai*, Eurykleia and Eurynome, that this female slave is not simply a high level slave, but also a valued contributor to the continued productivity, even sexual productivity, of the primary family in a homeric household.

The ταμίη in early Greek poetry is an individual within the household who occupies a relatively privileged position as a high-ranking slave. In extant Homeric epic she is always a woman. She most clearly controls and apportions the stores of the house, conventionally such items as food, cloth, and other consumable goods. Versions of this individual appear in multiple households in the *Odyssey*, notably the palaces of Menelaus, Nestor, and, as will be particularly important in this paper, Odysseus. She is a slave with a relatively large amount of authority, higher in rank than the average slave in the household. Her elevated position seems to derive in large part from her designation as privileged custodian and distributor of material goods within the household.

The ταμίη appears in set scenes at *Odyssey* 1.139, 7.175, 10.371, 15.138, 17.94, and 17.259, every time in a full formulaic arrangement of five lines. The set scene surrounding the formula occurs in several geographical locations within the narrative of the poem. In each instance of the set scene a guest has been invited into the household, and is offered an opportunity to wash their hands before being offered food. In performing a role in this process the ταμίη takes on a clear and important duty in maintaining social rituals, especially those surrounding food, in epic society. This is just one reflection of the way in which she provides for the sustenance of the family.

Two particular *tamiai* have expanded narrative roles in the *Oydssey*, even sharing dialogue with other characters. Through a close reading of these figures, Eurykleia and Eurynome, *tamiai* in the house of Odysseus, I will demonstrate that they not only act as stewards of material resources in the home, but that their role involves particular duties, both honorable and intimate, in caring for offspring and promoting the growth of the family. Eurykleia is closely involved with the male heirs of the household from the time of their birth through adulthood (see, e.g., *Od.* 1.434-5, 19.353-5), but I argue, against the conventional view, that Eurykleia's role is closer to that of guardianship, and does not involve her reproducing or physically nursing. She, like her counterpart in the poem, Eurynomene, is rather more influential in guiding and growing the legitimate line of Laertes and his sons. In this vein, it is Eurynome who accompanies Penelope to her new home as she marries Odysseus and prepares to bear his children. Eurynome is the constant companion of Penelope as they wait for Odysseus. Both *tamiai* address the immediate members of the family as children and are in turn treated as mother figures. When Odysseus finally returns, it is these slaves who together prepare the bedchamber for his sexual reunion with Penelope, signalling the renewal of their marriage.

These women safeguard the resources of the home, not just in the form of food and other material items, but in terms of possible longevity and reproduction within the household. These women are highly respected and deeply necessary not just to the daily functioning of the Homeric household, but to the ongoing sustainability of the family's lineage.