THE WORLD OF THE INFANT:
IDEOLOGY OF THE INFANT CONDITION AND
INFANT CARE IN ANCIENT GREECE

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

A number of sources were used to analyze the perceived status of the infant in archaic and classical Greece. Very few ancient, or even modern ones, conduct a study of how the infant was perceived by adults and why the type of care they received was necessary. Although there have been many recent historical analyses on the child in the ancient world, none has focused on the infant specifically. This study considers infancy a period spanning the first three years of life. The myth of the infant Opheltes' death, the foundation story for panhellenic competition at Nemea, served as the paradigm around which this study is conducted.

The first issue that is demonstrated in the myth is the liminal quality of infancy. The boy Opheltes was at once "bringer of increase," as his name implies, and at his death was then renamed Archemoros, "beginner of doom." Following the elements revealed in the myth, philosophical, epigraphic and dramatic sources were examined that reflected this liminal tension seen throughout infancy. By understanding this condition of early childhood, one can understand the rituals used involving children, death and burial practices and the conception of the power of the infant in society.

The second issue of infancy revealed in the Opheltes myth is the central use of a wet-nurse. According to the delicate liminal state of infancy, a young child needed constant care. An examination of caretakers in the ancient world showed that parents
did assume the responsibility, but that it also was common practice to hire a surrogate caretaker. The present study examined possible ideologies that would lend themselves to such a practice. The first was the belief that the proximity of the mother to the child could actually attract the envy of child-killing demons and the wrath of the gods onto her child. A surrogate served as a deflection of this particular danger. The second justification for its use can be seen in the program of male dominance. An analysis of the male conception of the unstable woman as mother necessitated the employment of a surrogate, thereby diminishing one of the only spheres of influence left to her in this patriarchal society.
Dedicated to my entire family
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

..."Αιδών δ' ἐν δόμοις παιδεύεται.

...in the house of Pluto a young guest.
-Euripides Ion 953

Objective

The essential objective of history can be defined in a myriad of ways, each with its own worth and significance. How does one, after all, approach an analysis of past events and peoples? Is the military legacy of a society its most valuable feature? Is it the political life that serves as the most important guide to the future? Is it from the great thinkers of the age that we can somehow establish our own philosophies or is it from past intellectual shortcomings that we learn the most? These types of questions have preoccupied the historian since the inception of the study itself and we must recognize that not one of these approaches, but all of them in concert with yet others, gather to form a symphony of historical understanding. Using Herodotus’ term, a ιστορία, or inquiry, of a culture must include an investigation into state affairs and prevalent ideologies as well as the social significance of the activities of the individual man and his family. In Book 2 of his Histories, his discussion of Egyptian culture ranged from Egypt’s involvement in the Mediterranean-wide political situation to an identification of who in the household washes the laundry. By looking at a culture
from many different vantage points, as Herodotus himself does, one is able to compile a
more complete understanding of its legacy to other cultures, contemporary or future.
Richard Stanyhurst saluted the multifaceted nature of historical inquiry when he said
that history was:

The marrow of reason, the cream of experience, the sap of
wisdom, the pith of judgement, the library of knowledge,
the kernel of policy, the unfoldress of treachery, the
calendar of time, the lantern of truth, the life of memory,
the doctress of behaviour, the register of antiquity, the
trompet of chivalry.¹

What a challenge for the historian! It sets a standard of breadth and depth against which
every historical analysis must be measured. Accordingly, to understand the essence of
what ancient Greek society thought infancy to be will require a comprehensive study of
the society. Thorough historical analysis cannot be satisfied with an understanding of
society merely through a litany of laws, political structure and state pursuits. Rather, it
must search out the homely private lives of citizens where the fundamental beliefs lie
that influence the more public displays. At one time this approach was not the norm,
but for historians today, there is a strong tradition of social and family history. This
study seeks to follow this approach.²

At the turn of the century, J.B. Bury argued for yet another dimension of
historical analysis in terms of a more scientific approach to historical research and for a
more comprehensive inquiry into the issues of the past.

The interpretation of history that shall be more than a
collection of plausible labels must grasp the vital process,

¹ Kenyon 1984: 1.
² This trend of scholarship will be discussed further below.
perceive the breath and motion, detect the undercurrents, trace the windings, discern the foreshadowings, see the ideas travelling underground, discover how the spiritual forces are poised and aimed, determine how the motives conspire and interact.  

It is within this pursuit begun by Herodotus that the present study seeks to add another measure to the “life of memory” and another note to Stanyhurst’s “the doctress of behaviour” by addressing the archaic and Classical Greek concept of the infant and the relationship with its own society. These notes will add to our perception of “breadth and motion” in Greek civilization by illuminating this basic aspect of Greek culture and thereby also Greek social norms as a whole.

An examination of the care of children will reveal many fundamental issues at play in the social fabric of a culture and will allow us to understand the value system of that culture. This belief may be reflected in a traditional Greek phrase that children are καθορέφθης τῆς κοινωνίας (“mirror of society”). As Sifakis says, “…children are links joining the generations.”4 Children5 comprise a significant portion of any population and are mirrors of that population by virtue of being utterly dependent on the community for survival and education. Their absolute need for some sort of communal existence6 allows a study to focus on how that community cares for the child that will, in turn, reveal the social mores about the conception and care of the very young.

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3 Kenyon 1984: 176.

4 Sifakis 1979: 72.

5 By “children” I am meaning any pre-pubescent child. The term “infant” will be more fully defined in “Infancy Defined.”

6 Small 1998: 133 “For the extremely altricial human infant, social care is physiological care.” “Altricial” can be defined as “helpless at birth and requiring parental care for a period of time.”
Children are raised to become active, recognizable members of that society and so they are both formally and informally taught the values that are inherent in their community. As Plato says they must be molded to fit the government and community within which they live. The molding of infants was a crucial task because as this study will reveal, infants existed in a liminal state throughout babyhood. This liminal nature will help to explain many rituals surrounding infants and the perceived power within them. This study will also analyze who provided the care for these babies. While many parents did raise their own children, it was a very common practice to hire a nurse for the job. We will see that religious needs dictated this to some extent, but the social apprehension about the power and instability of women warranted this use of surrogates. The nature of infant care, as seen in the use of surrogate caregivers, reflects and supports the traditionally male dominated culture of the ancient Greeks by stripping women of the one power remaining in their control, namely child-rearing.

Adult conceptions and their treatment of children reveal much about the adults themselves and their cultural identity. However, attempting to study these interactions is a challenging task. Among surviving sources, rarely were these conceptions expressed explicitly. Thus, the infant in ancient Greece was infrequently the topic of intellectual or artistic expression, yet we know that the birth and care of children would certainly be a central part of the daily concerns of its people. The topic may have been far too mundane to warrant lengthy discussions in literary circles or it was seen as

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7 For a discussion about this indoctrination in modern Greece see Friedl 1990: 78-91.

8 Arist. Pol. VIII 1337a.

outside the sphere of influence of men, who were the ones in the public eye and who wrote the sources we now have. No matter the cause for this lack of exposition on the topic, probing into existing literary references on infancy will help broaden our knowledge and understanding about this aspect of ancient Greek society. We, as historians, must peer through windows within the wall of history that conceals the thoughts and actions of those who came before us. These “windows” may be a stone uncovered at an ancient site, a picture left by an unknown artist or a myth retold for centuries. Although these were not left intentionally as messages from the past for our intellectual benefit, they do provide us with clues to piece together an understanding of their world. Myths involving babies and other children, as well as many tragedies that rehearse these myths, offer insights that are helpful in such a search. Cultic sites, documented rituals, epitaphs and artistic renderings are also valuable windows into the world of society’s conception of infancy.

One myth stands out because of its almost exclusive focus on an infant and on effective childcare. The story of Opheltes will serve as a cornerstone of our evidence because it reveals so many elements of the infant’s world. When an analysis of the Opheltes myth is coordinated with the many other seemingly disparate clues, our “window” becomes clearer. In this way, ancient evidence of children and myth will come together. This study will endeavor to analyze exactly what can be learned about the earliest stage of childhood in ancient Greece and the adult community whose task it was to care for them. The title of this study may seem to imply an analysis of infancy in toto in the ancient world, but this would be an impossible endeavor in a single study. Rather, I will address select issues that I feel are at the core of understanding the life of
an infant in ancient Greece, namely their perceived liminal status and the ideology
concerning their day-to-day care. Analyses of other important issues such as health,
feeding and language development, to name a few, I leave to other scholars.

The Roman father, displaying his decision-making power as pater
potestas, might “raise” his newborn child above his head, symbolizing his recognition
of the child as his own and his acceptance of the duty to care for it rather than abandon
it. The present study will “raise” infancy in recognition of the importance of the topic
in the ongoing historical dialogue and our acceptance of the attempt to analyze it. To
carry the analogy further, the “raising” of the topic of infancy here saves it from
intellectual and historical abandonment. By gathering into one place the majority of
ancient references to children, the author can offer one set of interpretations as to the
practice of infant care and the place of the infant in ancient Greece. In addition, it is
hoped the analysis will lead to future study by this author and others.

The Myth of Opheltes and its Sources

The most nearly comprehensive treatment of the nature of infancy within the
corpus of myth is the story of Opheltes. The present study will begin with this one
particular myth and then add other relevant myths and evidence in order to reconstruct
the mores of child care in ancient Greece. As Levi-Strauss explains, in his own work
using the same modus operandi, one particular myth is the “connecting thread” to the

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10 On the converse, a father had the right, if not the obligation, to kill his children. “Quickly kill...a
dreadfully deformed child.”- 12 Tables. On patria potestas, see Saller 1986; Crook 1967. On the power
of the father in Greece see Harrison 1968: 70ff.
rest of the evidence and he henceforward referred to it as his "key myth." In our "key myth," Opheltes, "bringer of increase," was the infant son of the king of Nemea and was being carried by his nurse, Hypsipyle, when the two were approached by the seven commanders traveling from Argos to Thebes. The Seven Against Thebes, as they are known, were a group of commanders gathered by Oedipus’ son Polynices to offer him help in reclaiming his rightful place on the throne of Thebes. They were to lay seige to the city if necessary. On their journey to Thebes they encountered the area around Nemea at that time consumed with drought. When they met up with Hypsipyle and her infant charge, the Seven asked her if she knew where there might be some water and if she could lead them to it. Hypsipyle set the baby down in the grass next to a dried-up spring so she could guide the men. In her absence, a snake that was near this particular spring approached the baby and killed him. When Hypsipyle and the seven commanders returned and saw the death scene, they buried the child, renamed him Archemoros, beginner of doom," and instituted funeral games in his honor.

The first known mention of the story is a 6th century BC version in Pindar, and the story is retold with surprisingly little variation until the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.

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12 From ὀφέλλω increase, strengthen. Note also the connection to ὀφεδηκτος- bitten by a serpent.

13 Levi’s translation of Pausanias 1971:165 n.88 "An oracle had said the child must not touch the ground until he learned to walk." Contrary to what one might expect, there was no further reference given to this and I have been able to find none. However, I can assume that Levi is at least partially alluding to Plato’s command that nurses carry infants for the first three years of life. see a discussion of Plato’s recommendation below.

14 From ἡ ἀρχή beginning and ὁ μοίρας- fate, doom.

15 Pind. Nem. hypoth. 2.3.4; Eur. Hyps. frgs.; Aesch.fr. 261 (see Mette 1963: 38); Apollod. Bibl. 3.6.4; Stat. Theb.; Hyg. Fab. 74; Paus. 2.15.2-3; Sch. Clem. Alex. Protr. 2.34. See also Simon 1979; Roscher 1884-6; Miller 1981, 1988, 1990.
Hypsipyle is consistently named as the nurse of the small child and it is because of her temporary abandonment of him on the ground that he was then killed. In all instances it was the search for water by the Seven Against Thebes that drew Hypsipyle away from her charge. The child is always set down in a bed of foliage 16 near a stream. In the handful of variations of the myth, there is no disagreement about how the infant was killed; in all instances a snake was the culprit. The only variation in the story is who the biological parents of the child are. In some cases the father is King Lykurgus (Euripides, Statius, Hyginus) or he is Priest Lykurgus (Pindar), Euphetos (Clem. of Alex.), Nemea or Talaos (Aeschylus). The mother's identity is variously given as Eurydice or Kreusa (Aeschylus), although most accounts specify her as Eurydice. The identity of the biological parents is obviously not a crucial aspect of the story; it is inconsequential to the plot who the parents are, but what does matter is a nurse, and not a parent, who was negligent in her duties. Her identity and role in the death of the boy is unchanging and significant. The age of the boy is never specifically revealed. He is described as ἄνηφιλος and παιδίον, but we know from the context of the story that he must be an infant because Hypsipyle was carrying him and it was his vulnerability on the ground that precipitated his death. Only Hyginus offers a specific age of five years for the child. However, this seems to be an implausible variation because at this age Opheltes would not have been so helpless and could presumably have walked away from the impending danger.

16 Hyginus notes that it was a high pile of apium, celery, while Pausanias and Statius claim it was grass (ἐς τὴν πόσον). Euripides identifies that the child was playing with blooms (ἀνθήλων) in a grassy area (τον λείμωνα) and Pindar simply notes that it was a λείμων, any grassy place or meadow.
Another interesting consistency in the myth is the treatment of Hypsipyle subsequent to the murder. In all instances, her actions were directly responsible for the tragedy with the baby and yet in many versions she is the object of sympathy and pity. She is either consoled, or prayed for or protected from Eurydice’s wrath or pitied. In none of the versions is she the object of reproach, hate or blame. While one might blame Hypsipyle for laying Opheltes down and leaving the child, the extant versions of the myth do not depict her as culpable. Part of the tragedy of this story must be not only the tragic death of the small boy but also the sad circumstance of an otherwise well-meaning nurse.

The consistent elements of the Opheltes story may be summarized as follows: negligence but not culpable nursing care of an infant, the Seven Against Thebes and their imminent fate, water, a bed of grass, a snake and an infant death. These then are clearly the obvious themes of this myth and each of these represent important issues commonly expressed in myth. But, one must not limit an analysis of a myth only to the superficial and obvious elements. While the obvious points are themselves significant, in order to comprehend more fully its message and its context, a deeper analysis must be undertaken. Unfortunately, I have found no such previous detailed scholarly analysis of this particular myth. Several scholars mention the story but their focus has not been in this direction. Simon discusses its historical roots in terms of the cult of the dead and

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17 Pind.. Hyp. 3 (by the men) παραμυθοῦμενοι; Sch. Clem. Alex. (by Adrastos) παραμυθοῦμενος
18 Hyg. (by the men) deprecati sunt.
19 Eur. Hyp. The majority of the plot revolves around Eurydice’s blame of the nurse and finally how “wise Adrastos” saves her from the “hot-headed mother.”
of figures in the myth like Lykurgus and Amphiaros. She than engages in analyses of artistic representations of the myth.\textsuperscript{21} Baumeister does the same.\textsuperscript{22} Gebhard makes a comparison with the Melikertes/Palaimon cult at Isthmia, citing the possibility that they have connections to the underworld and fertility.\textsuperscript{23} While all this may be true, one might still inquire what the myth expresses concerning infancy itself? What lessons were being conveyed that would be appropriate and recognizable to the contemporary society? It is in these answers that I believe we find elements, substantiated by other evidence, that reveal the Greek concept of the infant condition and the social attitudes about their care. Both these levels of the myth will be analyzed.

**Status of Current Scholarship**

When Plato, in the Republic, discussed the fate of the soul after death, he recounted the Myth of Er,\textsuperscript{24} a Pamphylian who had journeyed to the life beyond and returned to the living to describe the rewards and punishments that awaited. Er had described in the cycle of reincarnation that the soul either enjoys the rewards for having lived a sinless life or it experienced the wretched torments in payment for living a foul one. Plato then makes a break in the recitation of the myth to summarize the lot of children. …τῶν δὲ ἐυθὺς γενομένων καὶ ὀλίγων χρόνον βίούντων πέρι ἄλλα ἐλθέτων οὐκ ἔξια μνήμης …"Concerning infants who die at birth or live but

\textsuperscript{21} Simon 1979.

\textsuperscript{22} Baumeister 1885.

\textsuperscript{23} Gebhard 1993: 171.

\textsuperscript{24} Pl. Resp. 10.613C.
a short time he [Er] had more to say, not worthy of to remember.” This silence about
the condition of infants is an all too common one in ancient Greek mythology,
philosophy and religion. In comparison with discussions about the adult condition,
psychology and abilities, direct and analytical discussions about infants in and of
themselves are rare. Peter Laslett wondered why the “crowds and crowds of little
children are strangely missing from the historical record.”

25 Even in the Ophletes myth we have a specific focus on the infant and the potential ramifications of its safety
or vulnerability, yet the myth is silent on these salient points. We find philosophical
writings, tragedies and epitaphs that specifically describe the life and death of young
children, but they are without thorough analytical discussion about them. Modern
scholarship for decades had failed to fill in the gap of our understanding, but is now
offering the beginning of a comprehensive analysis of this issue. A similar trend was
found in another area of historical analysis. Until recently, there was also a lack of
understanding about the female role in ancient society. There is a recent proliferation of
studies concerning women’s place in the ancient world that has begun to fill in the voids
of our knowledge. 26 The history of childhood will hopefully enjoy the same degree of
contemplation as the history of women has.

Two scholars set the stage for the historical study of the child. Philippe Aries’
*L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’Ancien Regime* is generally noted to be the “bible” of
sorts for the scholar of childhood. His thesis, however, argued that the notion of a


26 Pomeroy 1975 was an influential scholar who began to examine the realities of the life of the ancient
woman. Thereafter, Lefkowitz 1977, etc; Fant 1977; Foley 1981; Blundell 1995; King 1985, 1994;
recognized separate period of life, namely childhood and adolescence, is a recent phenomenon. In the 1920's Margaret Mead studied adolescence specifically and through her observations in Samoa challenged the idea that adolescence is a universal experience. A comprehensive study of the history of the child had not yet been attempted. French recognized that the child had previously eluded the serious historian, "...historians have traditionally paid scant attention to the historical dimensions of childhood."^{27} deMause identified that children were recognized by ancient authors like Plato but he identified Freud as the pioneer in the study of childhood. Psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have turned their attention to this pursuit, but deMause states that this inquiry "is only beginning for the historian."^{28} George Henry Payne attempted to offer a comprehensive study of children in 1916. His book, *The Child in Human Progress*, recognized the neglect of the topic and in *one* book attempted to rectify this deficiency. "This book furnishes what no other work presents to us. I know of none which acquaints us with the position of the child in his social, political, and humanitarian existence in all nations and in all eras."^{29} His subsequent chapters attempt to do just this. With his ambitious and earnest work, we must wonder about how specific he could get in tracing the child through all of history all around the world. Obviously, his study is a seminal work in an area that is more recently flourishing. The present study offers one step in that direction with a particular region and time as it relates specifically to infants.

^{27} French 1977:3.

^{28} deMause 1974:2.

^{29} Payne 1916: V.
The topic of children in the Greco-Roman world is just now beginning to attract serious scholarly attention. This must be set in the context of an increasing number of studies on the family in the ancient world. These works have, however, followed a fairly common focus that essentially dances around the topic of infancy itself. For the most part, when childhood is discussed, the focus has been on older pre-pubescent/pubescent children who are on the cusp of entering into the adult sphere. Therefore, their path to maturity and their capability of fulfilling the obligations of the community are at issue. Golden offers an excellent analysis and compilation of the evidence concerning the place of children in ancient Greece but, as he admits, he is interested in the socialization process of these children, which highlights the age of puberty and its rituals, both social and religious. He argues that religion is just one of the many ways a child is symbolically admitted into the adult citizenry and his focus has been to highlight their cultic performance rather than their religious condition. When infancy itself is the focus of a study, it is usually a discussion about the bottles and playthings used by the infant or the practice of infanticide through exposure of these children that


31 French 1991; She analyzes the positive and negative life of children; Lacey 1968 introduces children as a part of the family as an interconnected unit.


33 Golden 1990.

34 On bottles see Fildes 1986; Bartsocas 1978; Kern 1957. On playthings see Elderkin 1918; Blumner 1966: 78-98.
is at issue. The endless controversy concerning the social reasons that would allow parents to perform infanticide is debated and so it becomes the emotional capacity/attachment or the economic viability of the parents that would dictate their ability to care for the child and not the child itself that is analyzed. While infanticide was a practice of significance in ancient Greece, it is a topic in and of itself and deserves exclusive treatment beyond this study. However, I will focus on the infant that is raised and lives: a child far from the issues that he/she will have to confront in puberty and a child whose characteristics and the associated religious implications determine how the adult community will respond to it rather than how it must bear the decisions of the adult world. Small has recognized that in the interaction between children and adults, "... the infant is not simply a helpless or passive recipient of parental largess, but an active initiator of a synergistic relationship with the parent." Children, then, are powerful in that they evoke reaction from the adult community. For this reason, the Opheltes tale stands as an appropriate "key myth" for our study because the infant itself and the ultimate fate of his memory by the community after its death are the central features. This myth will then, as mentioned, provide the backdrop with which to analyze other references.

Kagan, for example, studied the perception of the child as it influenced the concern and care that it would receive from adults. He noted that before the 17th c., the

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36 Golden 1988; Wedeck 1929.

mortality rate of children under 5 was 40%, a fact that did not engender in the adult community an interest or sense of value in understanding the infant. Survival of the child was the goal, not what could be done for the child’s future: class and economic status dictated what the future held for each child. In the 17th c., social mobility was more prevalent, and Kagan argues that this uncertain future for the child inspired parents to alter their practices in raising it to reduce that uncertainty. For contemporary America, he continues, the theory stands that infant treatment lays the foundation for a productive adulthood and so a focus on childcare is meant to be a cure for social ills.  

This is an excellent example, on the one hand, of how children can be studied as a vehicle to understand a given society and, on the other, to analyze the child-parent relationship. Valerie French also studied the child-parent relationship and the effects of children on the adult community. However, she surveys many Mediterranean cultures, devoting only ten pages to the child in ancient Greece. She also identifies certain qualities in children that adults recognized, for example innocence, imitativeness, unruliness, unformed, helpless and fearful. French argues that the Greeks were most attentive to the “unformed” aspect of the child, that they were perceived as being “moldable.” This, after all, marks the most obvious parental job, namely educating and molding the child into an adult. What French does not do is interpret what all of these characteristics tell us about the overall perceived condition of the child, what effects a child could have on society, and who must care for them.

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40 ibid. 13-15.
Researches in the fields of anthropology and psychology have explored the interaction between family and children, but have done so primarily with contemporary cultures that can be actively observed. ⁴¹ This has, in fact, developed into a new field of study, ethnopediatrics, which examines how the “cultural ideology and various parenting styles affect infant health and growth.” ⁴² One of the foci is on the relationship between infant and caregiver throughout history and around the world. This is technically a field of anthropology but it thrives on a transcendence of academic boundaries by drawing from scientists, pediatricians and anthropologists alike. deMause had also analyzed the perception and treatment of children, including infants, in a broad historical framework, but also then established historical “modes” of parent-child relations. ⁴³ The present study follows this tradition, which has only been recently coined as “ethnopediatrics,” and seeks to study one particular historical era and geographical area to answer some questions about the history of parent-child relations. A study very similar to this is Wiedemann’s book on Roman children. This discusses the adult perception of children in the Roman world but does not treat the issue of infant care. ⁴⁴ One of the expressions of adult attitudes about children can be seen in artistic material, but in order to effectively analyze the artistic evidence, a more thorough study must be conducted than this work allows. For this reason, I have not included artistic renderings.


⁴³ deMause 1974.

⁴⁴ Wiedemann 1989.
There have been many studies on the adult influence on and care of children in the contemporary world and in historical eras. Most often, however, the analysis is on formal education in the post-toddler years, for example, how and with what curriculum a school age boy is educated.\textsuperscript{45} Specifically, in terms of infant care, there have been several works on the Roman wet-nurse\textsuperscript{46} but a very scant treatment of the Greek practice. Study of the Greek nurse can be found, but because the Greek nurse often influenced her charge even when the child had grown to adulthood these studies can cover a wide range of the nurse's function and influence. The topic of nurses, then, is not necessarily exclusive of infant care and so an analysis of this topic could encompass a wide range of issues.\textsuperscript{47} When Greek wet-nursing is discussed the subject is the physical jobs undertaken by the nurse in terms of swaddling bands, breast-feeding and bottles. The social implications of this practice are either not addressed at all or a cursory explanation is given\textsuperscript{48}.

In the present study, the use of feminist\textsuperscript{49} analyses of women's and family's roles will offer an interpretation concerning the use of surrogate care-giving that

\textsuperscript{45} Beck 1964; Rawson 1991.


\textsuperscript{47} Karydas 1998.

\textsuperscript{48} Rosaria 1917; Fildes 1988, 1986 overall histories of infant care which partially includes Greece. Mentions of the practice can be found in Golden 1990; Calder 1983; Demand 1994; Garland 1990; Lacy 1968; Lee 1919; Price 1978;

\textsuperscript{49} By the term "feminist" I mean a focus on the condition of women and the elucidation of their world within the overtly male sphere. I am, however, implying no political overtones or suggestions of superceding traditional power structures as Rabinowitz defines the role of feminism in the classics. 1993: 2. Mine is a more unaffected observer's approach to uncover another thread in the lives of women and their children. On discovering women's voice, see Showalter (1985) 3-10; Foley 1981; Rhyne 1995.
upholds the most fundamental premise upon which this society is based, male dominance. Nancy Demand has come closest to this point by using all sources available to her (medical and literary texts, funerary monuments and inscriptions) to argue the prestige of women’s central role as childbearers was socially undermined in the Classical age in order to weaken a woman’s social reputation by displaying her passivity to the dominant male. In this study we shall see that the father’s decision to employ a surrogate child care-giver functions in much the same way, undermining the power a woman holds in the nurturing and raising of her own children.

Methodology

What makes this study especially important, and at the same time most difficult, is obviously the lack of surviving evidence from the ancient world about attitudes toward infancy and infant care. Young children were very rarely the topic of discussion and so we must content ourselves with passing or peripheral references about them. Clearly the importance of children was recognized, but the ancient Greeks did not write about the mores of infancy and infant care within the public arena. Fanthom noted the nature of references to the child, “…tragedy is not a child’s business and children are introduced into drama only for their importance to their parents, set before us as the passive objects of love or hereditary hate.” There are few direct expositions about infants and so we must extrapolate information from varied sources. It is, therefore,

50 Demand 1994.

51 Fanthom 1986: 268.

52 Just as some important values about infancy are embedded in the religious tales of the Greeks, one would think that the beginning of human life and the preservation of it would be present in other
necessary to draw on references in very disparate sources that *allude* to infants themselves, rituals connected with infancy and the relationship between the child and its mother and/or care-giver. As Sue Blundell notes, women are a “muted group,” silenced from the annals of ancient history, because there is little direct evidence by, or about, them in the sources that forces the historian to gather indirect references and hypothetically rebuild the experiences of their lives. I contend that infants are far more “muted” a group that demands even more diligence and patience to reconstruct how they were perceived. Expanding Blundell’s use of the metaphor, I include “deaf and dumbness” because infants are not only, by nature, unable to speak as the Latin word for infant implies, even if given the opportunity, but they are also metaphorically deaf to the world around them. It is not until years later that they are able to comprehend the behavior of the society of which they are a part. On the other hand, infants simply exist at the whim of the adult world and are oblivious to its attitudes. An examination of ancient literature reveals references to infants which, when analyzed as a whole, will be useful to reconstruct the ideology surrounding them and allow us, at least, to offer one construct of reality concerning their place in society. The richest area to find these references is in myth. If all of these examples are taken collectively, a rather definite image emerges about the ancient Greek ideology of infancy, thus allowing us to create some understanding of this “muted” group. The myth of Opheltes is a rare glimpse

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systematic religious doctrines, but as I have found, it is not addressed in any substantial way in *any* of the major world religions. Again, the scholar must glean an understanding from the information that is embedded in the religious tales.


54 *infans*- not speaking; see p.58 below on a discussion of this terminology.
directly into the heart of the issue concerning the infant condition and infant care and, therefore, it is a crucial piece of this puzzle. Within the confines of this study, the myth of Opheltes will become the skeleton around which other evidence will further illuminate the ancient beliefs about babyhood.

The connection between myth and social realities has been an issue that the scholarly community has debated for decades.\textsuperscript{55} The question of just what myths expose about social ideals and realities has been variously answered. Because the corpus of myth is so varied, it lends itself to various schools of thought and approaches and reflects not only a scholar’s interpretation but also the time within which that scholar is writing. The majority of scholars recognize that myths are in some way reflective of the society that tells them and uses them, especially if, as in the case of Opheltes, there is ritual activity associated with them. As Zaidman argues, ritual “serves to organize space and time, to define relations between men and the gods, and to set in their proper place the different categories of mankind and the links which bind them together.”\textsuperscript{56} If we adopt Zaidman’s premise that cult was used as a defining archetype around which society molded itself, then the myths that formed the cult might reveal fundamental values essential to society. While we don’t know what aspects were emphasized originally, its very existence shows that some element in the myth was recognized and considered significant, and this study offers one interpretation.

Frazer, in his landmark work \textit{The Golden Bough}, was one of the first modern scholars to identify the function of myth within a society or to see the social reality

\textsuperscript{55} for example Harrison 1962; Burkert 1979; Malinowski 1926; Durkheim 1954; Levi-Strauss 1958: 66.

\textsuperscript{56} Zaidman 1989: 27.
embedded within it. Since then, the study and analysis of ancient mythology and cult has taken various paths in its development in the last century from simple categorization to an analysis of the social "purpose" embodied in its myth and ritual. A myth/ritual can be interpreted as the "documentation" of the population movement and cultural dispersion. The introduction of foreign gods and myths can reveal cultural interaction and exchange that can be useful to the demographic historian. The psychoanalytical interpretation has also been a significantly common approach, one that identifies the deep-seated human consciousness as reflected in myth. There has also been a popular trend to interpret a myth/ritual as the reflection of a fertility rite, which in turn was supplanted by the "rite of passage" analysis (i.e., ritual that eases the passage from one transitional state to another) referring most generally to puberty rituals. In more recent years, myth has been used to reveal the position/oppresion of women in ancient society by "reading" the subliminal messages left behind in the myth and exposing women's voices within them.

Because this study seeks to uncover actual beliefs and practices of the ancient Greeks, the functionalist approach will be used whereby lessons about contemporary

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57 Frazer 1922.

58 Durkheim 1954; Bethe 1914-1927; Wilamowitz 1959.

59 Freud 1953 on the incestuous tendencies of sons; Jung 1964; Slater 1968 on the violence expressed by oppressed women.

60 Price 1978 discusses various instances of vegetative and fertility rites and deities.

61 van Gennep 1909; ultimately Frazer

62 Leifkowitz 1985 to show how bad things could be if they gained control, e.g. the Amazons; Blok 1987; Padel 1985; King 1985 the gynaecological interpretation of one of the cults of Artemis.
social perceptions and mores become clear as they are expressed in mythic form. A pioneer of this interpretation is Malinowsky, who argued for the connection of myth and social institutions. He theorized that myth provided a paradigm for the beliefs and customs of a community. In his words “... an intimate connection exists between the work, the mythos, the sacred tales of a tribe, on the one hand, and their ritual acts, their moral deeds, their social organization, and even their practical activities, on the other.”

Similarly, Emile Durkheim argued that social solidarity is the primary goal of any community that comes from a “collective conscience” about what is appropriate and what is inappropriate behavior within that society. These universal guidelines establish the norms by which a society functions and by which it governs itself. In Durkheim’s analysis, this “collective conscience” is revealed in myth and religion. Tyrrell and Brown effectively state that these myths “both exemplify the categories of thought... and condition their audience to those categories.” Therefore, this study is not a religious analysis of a particular cult per se; rather, it offers an interpretation as to how this cult and related sources reflected the values of the society of which it was a part and how it was used within that society. I will not attempt to identify the cultural origins of the various elements of the Opheltes cult or any other source referencing children, nor will I employ the previously common interpretations of fertility or puberty rituals. I will also not analyze the evidence solely from the perspective of the women’s historian.

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63 Malinowsky 1926, 1948: 96.

64 Pals 94-5. see also Vernant 1980; Detienne 1986; Tyrrell and Brown 1991; Bremmer 1983; Eliade 1963.

65 Tyrrell and Brown 1991: V.

66 see Price 1978.
Rather, I will try to establish how the cults, related myths and other relevant sources express social and religious elements concerning infants and society in archaic and classical Greece and how, combined, they serve as a formative element in society to be a guide for child-care and a reiteration of the male-dominant social hierarchy. In this way we will be able to understand more fully the Opheltes myth, our representative myth, in the way that Bremmer defines it, “a traditional tale relevant to society.”\(^{67}\) These “relevances” are what will lead us to understand the importance of this cult in ancient society and the attitudes toward infants it reveals.

In this study, the mythological evidence will be supplemented by other sources. Philosophical treatises express the particulars of certain aspects of child-raising. Historians and biographers sometimes describe the infancy and childhood of noted figures, and epitaphs reflect personal grief. While there have been these occasional references to children in the literature, they have been essentially without exposition as to the meaning or essence of childhood. "...they were not investigators asking whether or why."\(^{68}\) This incidental documentation provides an avenue of understanding nonetheless. Dewald\(^ {69}\) discusses the same phenomenon when she analyzes the perception of women’s social role embedded in Herodotus’ Histories. Because, as she argues, Herodotus’ thesis is the analysis of the Persian War, his inclusion of women is

\(^{67}\) This definition is his revision of Burkert’s famous definition “a myth is a traditional tale, with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance.”Bremmer 1986: 7. Eliade 1969 (1984) preface stresses that the divine provide models and structures for cultural functions. An example of the sociological approach employed in this study is Bremmer 1986: 41-59.

\(^{68}\) Boorstin 1998: 113.

\(^{69}\) Dewald 1981.
purely descriptive, without political and social characterization. With children, we are left with the same character of evidence. Epitaphs, however, are a special class of documentation. They may be taken to reveal actual emotions and relationships between the adult world and the infant monumentalized in the funerary inscription. Philosophical arguments contribute at least one ancient attempt at systematizing, characterizing and ultimately understanding the essence of infancy and often provides the measures thought to be appropriate for their care.

The chronological focus will be essentially the Archaic and Classical ages but, because the sources on children for this span of time are limited, I have, at times, had to draw from much later evidence in which the same characterization is reflected. For example, Medea as a murderous mom is seen in 5th c. BC tragedy as being motivated by a desire to punish her husband Jason and his infidelity and neglect. She turns her rage on her own children as a means to harm him most effectively. By the same token, Procne as revealed by Ovid in the 1st c. BC is also a murderous mom who is motivated by punishment of her husband in response to not only his infidelity but also his crime and deceit. She, too, turns to the murder of her child to accomplish this. In cases such as these, Roman sources were often based upon Greek myth and were transmitting these stories.\footnote{For a similar approach to an elusive topic see Blumner 1966.} It is in instances like these that I have stepped outside the time focus of this study. From the evidence used, I have found no significant change in the attitude toward children in either space or time. This is not to argue that one cannot find changes in belief but that at this point I have found none.
Finally, I must explain my use of a source controversial in its reliability as a historical mirror. The use of tragedy will here be used for its depiction of the overall issue of the reliability and character of women and also most obviously for its references to infants specifically. The use of drama/comedy as evidence for historical fact rests on tenuous footing.\textsuperscript{71} It could be argued that tragedy, for example, exploits the impossible and the bizarre to make its point and it is precisely in this far-fetched scenario the impact of the tragedy is realized. For example, Medea’s murder of her own children could be seen as the horrifying opposite of what a mother could do, hence displaying a frightening, if not utterly unrealistic familial episode. If, on the other hand, we refer to Aristotle’s analysis of the six components of a good tragedy, he specifically states: \textit{φανερὸν ἃ ἐκ τῶν ἐρμηνεύων καὶ ὅτι οὐ τὸ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸ ὑποποίητον ἔργον ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ οὰ ἄν γένοιτο καὶ τάδυνατα κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς η τὸ ἀναγκαῖον “...it is also clear that the poet’s job is not to report what has happened but what is likely to happen: that is, what is capable of happening according to the rule of probability or necessity.”}\textsuperscript{72} The difference, he says, between an historian and a poet is that the historian writes about an action completed, while a poet writes about one that \textit{could} happen in the future. He specifically pinpoints that the poet shows what a particular character is \textit{most likely} to do. If there were no possibility within the realm of human action that Medea could kill her children, then the point of the tragedy is moot. There must be some recognizable trait in Medea’s violent madness

\textsuperscript{71} For a good argument about tragedy as a historical reflection see Burkert 1979. Dixon 1988 discusses the literary evidence of wet-nursing. In this instance, she states that these references reveal the values of the practice, maybe not the exact particulars.

\textsuperscript{72} Arist. \textit{Poet.} 1451b
that strikes a chord with the audience. It is in this way that Aristotle’s fourth component is understood: a character’s attempt that ἀποδείκνυαοίν τι ἐκ καὶ ἀποφαίνονται γνώμην. “they prove some thesis or set forth an opinion.”

Therefore, the pervasive picture of women (and children) throughout both drama and comedy must be recognizable to the audience and it must reveal some socially instructive point.

Burkert argues that myth is retold to communicate a thought to future generations and tragedy is the expansion of a myth that would also be socially instructive- as he says it is an “applied Tale”. “The specific character of myth seems to lie neither in the structure nor in the content of a tale, but in the use to which it is put,... Myth is a traditional tale applied.”

So, using Burkert’s explanation of the role of myth, we can more fully understand the effect a tragic performance had on its audience. As to Hippolytus’ monologue about the miserable condition that men must rely on women for children, Garland says that the male audience was “evidently expected to recognize” this logic and possibly “apply the tale” to heart. Some have argued that this recognition is in fact a reflection of the male fantasy about the dangers of women.

Therefore, even the ancients themselves could have seen the importance of tragedy as a

73 ibid. 1450a5-10.

74 Segal 1986; Sifakis 1979.

75 Burkert 1979: 2.

76 ibid 23.

77 Garland 1990: 22; also the same idea in Lefkowitz 1983: 49.

reflection of actual human behaviors and characteristics and so this study can employ the drama as evidence of possible social belief structures.79 “Text and context,” then, “are interrelated.”80

An analysis of these myths must then reveal a backdrop of several important beliefs about infancy and how society was affected by such beliefs. If these examples, and particularly our “key” myth, are indeed reflections of the inner world of the household and childrearing, characteristics associated with the infant condition, their social importance and their need for successful care will become clear. Let us examine our best example of this, the myth of Opheltes, which reflects both the circumstances of the infant condition and the issue of infant care. Henceforward, this myth will provide the skeleton around which this study revolves.

The element of the Opheltes story that is most fundamental to the ideology of the nature of the child is the dual name of the boy. He is at once Opheltes (“bringer of increase”) and Archemoros (“beginner of doom”). The polarity of characteristics implied by these names might symbolize a liminal quality commonly found in other marginal beings that is here being associated with human infants. Why might human children have been seen as existing beyond the established realm of society? What emotional benefits might this have offered to a person or the community as a whole? The condition of liminality brings with it, among other things, a heightened susceptibility to danger exhibited in the myth by the serpent attack that ultimately leads to the boy’s death. What dangers in real life might the serpent and the potentially fatal

79 Gargarin 1975: 103.
attack have represented? We must ask that if this condition was believed to be inherent in infancy, how did this alter society’s treatment and rearing of the very young?

A heightened power and communication with the divine is commonly attributed to the liminal.\textsuperscript{81} If children fell within this category of marginality, were children seen as being any closer to the divine realm than the adult community? Was this a way to come to bear with any misfortune experienced concerning an infant or was this one of the many avenues that the Greeks used to tap into the wishes and the power of the gods?

The death of an infant would be seen as running counter to the procreative efforts of a family and state and its loss would be felt by many and for various social reasons. The mythic/heroic death of Opheltes focuses precisely on this tragedy and the resulting actions of the adult world. Because this myth is the foundation story for one of the panhellenic competitions, it would be appropriate to analyze what message might have been perceived by the festival participants. The attention on this issue, by virtue of its position at this panhellenic competition, has then been extended in some sense from the personal realm to the attention of the state.\textsuperscript{82} How, then, does an infant relate to the agenda and interests of the community as a whole? The death of Opheltes was seen by Amphiaros, one of the Seven, as a prophetic warning to the Argives that their expedition would ultimately fail and so could children be seen as reflectors of divine plans in terms of state issues?

\textsuperscript{81} see “Expressions of Divine Will” below.

\textsuperscript{82} Hero worship, grave and ancestor cults and local cults at athletic sites were common especially in the Archaic period. These are examples of the personal being raised into the public interest. see Morgan 1990; Antonaccio 1995; Farnell 1921; Marinatos 1993; Simon 1979: 31; Rouse 1975: 7. On cult as an extension of political control see de Poignac 1994; Osborne 1994.
We must examine closely the element in the myth involving nursing care. How does this reflect society’s use of surrogate infant care and what issues are being raised about care-taking practices and nurse reliability. Although the myth could operate on many levels unrelated to this issue, this could be a formative myth revealing the consequences of neglect of this practice. Does this myth serve as a prohibitive lesson on the use of nurses or is it an example of a myth of inversion, much like the “keres” episode in the Athenian Anthesteria,\textsuperscript{83} in an attempt to ensure successful surrogate care? On yet another level, the practice of employing a surrogate child care-giver might fit in well with the ongoing agenda of the ancient male to reduce the responsibilities of mothers, thereby diminishing their power and, hence, their danger to the male circle.

**Infancy Defined**

Before continuing, I must clarify my definition of “infancy”. By “infant” I mean any child up to three years of age. Plato\textsuperscript{84} divided the various stages of childhood and their characteristics into four distinct periods. A newborn should be swaddled and carried by a nurse up to the age of 3; at 2-5 years of age they should exercise through play under supervision; 7 years of age when they lose their first teeth is the time of a transition from home-rearing and where their social role began changing; and finally 14 years of age is marked by the onset of puberty and the transition to adulthood.\textsuperscript{85}

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\textsuperscript{83} see p. 72 below.

\textsuperscript{84} *Leg.* 792-3.

\textsuperscript{85} Solon “The 10 Ages of Man” divides man’s life into seven year stages. The end of the 1st stage is characterized by the growth of mature teeth, a demarcation that will not be used in this study. I will follow Plato’s stages which were the more popular and even similar to the contemporary definition of infant/toddler because this is the clearest definable age that the relationship between the child and its
Although at times throughout this study I will refer to any pre-pubescent child because of either lack of evidence or lack of clear age distinction in the source, my focus is on the child within what Plato would call the first age, i.e. up to the age of three. This delineation is appropriate here because it pinpoints those children who are still, or at least should be, totally dependent on their caregiver. Another element of Plato’s first age is lack of communicative skills that differentiates the infant from all other children. Plato characterized the first stage of life as that in which infants are incapable of communicating their needs and desires like adults do but are only able to do so through their cries. Ἐστὶ δὲ ὁ χρόνος ὁ τριάν τοῦ ἐλάττων ἐτῶν, μόριον ὁ γὰρ συμμετέχει τοῦ βίου διαγαγεῖν χεῖρον ἡ μηθωρομενον...“This period of infancy lasts not less than three years that is no small fraction of one's time to spend ill or well.”  

Infancy is a critical and sizable period in every person’s life because the body and mind are rapidly forming into their permanent form of recognizable characteristics matching the other members of society. According to Plato, there is always the danger a child’s body will “malfuction,” causing physical deformities that will make the child differ from his peers. The mind could also “malfuction,” leading to an individual who does not acknowledge the accepted precepts of society. Finally, the very real possibility that death could snatch the child away at any time posed a constant threat and necessitated a watchful eye. Yet, as Plato recognized, just at the time of life when

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caregiver is crucial. Nilsson 1940: 34 argues that the Anthestenia marked the end of babyhood which also puts the terminus at around 3 years of age. On stages of childhood see Eyben 1972. Fantom 1986: 267-268 discusses the ambiguity of the terminology of the child.

86 Leg. 792A.
danger continually lurks around the successful growth of a child, that child is unable to communicate accurately to its care-giver to help in its own navigation through infancy.

The earliest years in a child's life are a fairly sizable span of time and it is through this period that a child not only has to pass successfully, surviving to become a toddler, but also it is within this period that the child is brought within the society into which it was born. This implies not only the beginnings of social and moral teaching but also religious instruction. In the face of childrearing, a society will then focus on just what its most important belief systems are, creating a set of characteristics that taxonomically distinguishes itself from others. These taxa are then impressed upon society’s newest members. Therefore, infancy is a crucial stage of life for the infant, its family and also society as a whole.

**An Apparent Paradox**

An apparent paradox emerges within this study that could cause one to pause in confusion about just how important an infant was to the ancient Greeks. On the one hand, as we will see throughout the course of this study, the liminal status of an infant meant that it was not fully recognized as a human being and so there was quite a bit of latitude in the adult response to it. As a result, exposure, relatively little expressed grief or ceremony at an infant’s death and the characterization of children as animals were often common responses to the child. On the other hand, sources exalt children as necessary for the life of society, establish very specific rules about proper and beneficial rules of handling infants, educating and training them to be contributing members of
society, and express enormous amounts of affection for children. How can both of these views be true?

One possible answer is to acknowledge a cultural recognition that a live infant meant something to its parents and society and a dead one did not. Death, after all, was so much more common to a family in the ancient world than to families in our age, that one would think emotional distancing must surely have been a part of life for most parents. When a child died or was exposed, it hadn’t earned anything—deep emotional bonds with the parents or social respect—because it hadn’t contributed anything itself. But if it lived, then social responsibility for the child was expected.\(^\text{87}\) As neat as this answer seems, it is far from explaining this paradox. We cannot see this as two sides of the same coin: emotional distance from exposed/dead children vs. concern and care of live ones. Even those living children being raised and educated were viewed as something “other” and seen as suspicious. At the same time, there often was tremendous grief at a child’s death and in the case of Opheltes whose death spawned great panhellenic competition.\(^\text{88}\) His particular case, however, is easy to understand because he was, after all, heir to the throne of Nemea. But it is through these extraordinary circumstances that we come to know anything at all about infants. So, our task, then, is to find out what this does say about infancy in general. What could be the explanation that reconciles these seemingly opposing views?

\(^{87}\) On both of these scenarios Patterson 1985.

\(^{88}\) On the alternate foundation story at Nemea see Morgan 1990; Gardiner 1980.
CHAPTER 2:

THE CULT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF μῦθοι-
CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

While the purpose of this study is not an exegesis only of the Opheltes cult, it is important to understand the cult and its place relative to other myths, including its relationship to the games. This examination will allow us to understand what elements were shared and, therefore, may reflect common concerns. It will also help us understand the prominence this myth held, namely as a panhellenic foundation myth. We will see that infancy was a common concern, albeit one that was not publicly scrutinized, and so the present study is even more revealing.

The corpus of mythological stories from ancient Greece represents a collection of attempts to organize and understand the workings of nature and also the world of men and the gods. These μῦθοι could explain the cause of an earthquake, justify the authority of a certain πόλις or explain acceptable norms of social behavior. They satisfied the human need for understanding and guidance and pervaded life at all levels, from everyday household activities to grand state or even panhellenic events. These myths then served as the foci for ritual, cult and festivals that then transferred the power of mankind to have more control over his/her surroundings and/or relationships to the

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Ritual could be performed very privately and simply or it could be a very public occasion for the community and beyond. Examples of some of the most public and widely renowned rituals were the panhellenic athletic competitions and their accompanying festivals. These ancient panhellenic religious festivals and athletic contests were held every year at various sanctuaries in honor of particular gods. The purpose of these events was not only to worship, honor and entertain the gods but also to perform a very important sociological purpose: the yearly gathering of panhellenic societies in a reaffirmation of solidarity and peace. With these extremely important purposes in mind, the honored god and the myths surrounding the location of the events would be very significant. Morgan argues that these gatherings would also render a "reinforcement of ideas and values central to polis organization." Notable examples of this are the panhellenic sites. Each of the four panhellenic sites honored one Olympian god and, in most instances, also a hero about whom a "foundation myth" explained the institution of athletic contests on that particular spot. In other words, either the death or the heroic exploits of a mythic character was honored with athletic contests that marked the beginning of the regularly held events.

Two "foundation" myths have been attributed to Nemea. The first recalls one of Herakles' twelve labors where he wrestled, strangled and killed the Nemean lion. In thanksgiving to Zeus, Herakles established the games at the site. Very little archaeological evidence for Herakles has been found at the site, but this is probably due

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90 for example Burkert 1983.

91 Morgan 1993: 18.

92 Gardiner 1980; Morgan 1990.
to the fact that this myth was not attributed to the games until the 1st c. AD. As Miller calls it, “the proper foundation myth” is the tragic death of the infant Opheltes. In honor of his death, athletic competition was established at Nemea.

Excavations at Nemea have located what is believed to be a Heroon, or hero shrine, to Opheltes. Votive figures and burnt offerings were found in the Heroon which indicate cultic activity of “fair popularity” and the nature of those finds reflect chthonic and heroic connections. Little is known about the nature of the ritual at the Heroon but part of the ritual of the Nemean games was that the judges wore dark/black robes. Farnell supposes that these robes, coupled with the parsely crown, a symbol of death, reflect their chthonic nature. Unfortunately, no more evidence is as yet available to reconstruct worship at this site.

At the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia, the premier games in the panhellenic circuit, the origins of the games are attributed either to the chariot-race contest devised by Oenomaos for his daughter’s hand in marriage and won by Pelops or to the celebrations instituted in honor of Herakles’ victory over Augeas. Oenomaos was king of Pisa and had a daughter named Hippodamia who was of marriageable age.

93 Miller 1990: 25 says that even the earliest reference would only be the 3rd c. BC.

94 ibid.

95 ibid. 110. See also Gebhard 1991: 476; Antonaccio 1995.


97 Farnell 1970: 41.

98 Greek tradition; Gardiner 1980: 31.

99 Pindar Olympian Ode 10.29-92. For a more complete examination of the sources concerning the Olympian foundation myth see Robinson 1984: 32-55; also Morgan 1990.
Either because he loved the girl himself or because he had heard that her husband would kill him, he set up a contest for her hand that none could win. The suitor was to take Hippodamia in a chariot from Pisa to Corinth being chased by Oenomaos himself in a chariot pulled by divine horses. He eventually overtook them all and speared them in the back. Pelops came to contend for Hippodamia but in an act of deceit and treachery convinced the king’s charioteer to replace the lynchpins of his chariot with wax ones. In the ensuing chase, Oenomaos’ chariot crashed because of the melted lynchpins and Pelops stabbed him in the back. Being now king of Pisa, he was said to have instituted the Olympic Games. Another tradition claims Herakles as the founder, as mentioned above. Having accomplished one of his twelve labors where he was to clean Augeas’ stables in one day, Augeas refused to hand over to Herakles the agreed upon compensation. Herakles later returned to Elis and killed him, thereby conquering the country. Games were then established in honor of this victory.

At Delphi, the panhellenic games were instituted in commemoration of Apollo’s slaying of the Python. Python was a female oracular snake of the Earth Mother, Gaia. A few days after Apollo’s birth, he was fully grown and went in search of a location for his own shrine. He came upon the Python at Delphi and killed her, thereupon appeasing Gaia for the murder by establishing the Pythian games in honor of the original oracle.

100 Pindar, Schol. Pythia, hyp.c; Paus 10.6.5-7; Gebhard 1993.

101 Some say this was the snake sent by Hera to prevent Leto’s birth of her great twins Apollo and Artemis.
At Isthmia, the death of the boy Melikertes served as the foundation myth for the games. Ino, the sister of Semele, was convinced to nurse and protect her nephew Dionysus after her sister was consumed by Zeus' fire. Disguising the boy as a girl incurred the wrath of Hera for which deceit she drove Ino and her husband, Athamas, mad. In their madness Athamas shot and killed their own son Leearchus and Ino plunged herself and their other son, Melikertes, into the sea. His body was delivered by a dolphin to the shores of the Isthmus where King Sisyphus honored him with athletic contests at Isthmia. An alternate myth labels Theseus as the founder of the games in commemoration of his murder of Sinis, the Pine-Bender. Gebhard discounts this as a later attribution because of Theseus' Athenian origins and the game's Corinthian control.

Within this pattern of athletic contests and their founding myths, we see several common themes at work. All pay tribute to some specific event of the legendary or mythic past. The most striking similarity between them is that three of the four events involve children. Apollo was said to be fully grown but his murder of the Python occurred just days after his birth. Although this is unrecognizable in human terms, this is, nonetheless, divine infancy. Opheltes is most certainly an infant. Because of his tender years his vulnerability proved fatal. He is either incapable of walking and so

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102 Some say she was trying to save him from his father's madness. For a more complete list of references for Isthmia see Gebhard 1993.

103 Gebhard 1993: 172 also for sources on the Theseus foundation myth.

104 Jung and Kerenyi 1973:25 discuss how the childhood facts of the gods are remarkable, showing the god in full perfection of their power.
must be a very young infant or, if we accept Plato's command to nurses,\(^{105}\) he is at least less than three years of age. The cause of his death is the very fact that his nurse Hypsipyle set the child down on the ground where he was powerless to escape the attacking serpent. The Isthmian child is Melikertes also named Palaimon. The age of this child is unclear yet he is certainly perceived as a young boy\(^{106}\) and not a grown man. Most often he is represented as a young wrestler/athlete, which is actually the meaning of his name from παλαιμόνεο = to wrestle. As the son of Ino, he is young but the specific age at which his mother hurled him into the sea is not a crucial element of the myth.\(^{107}\) For our purposes here it is simply notable that he was a child and his death prompted the Isthmian games.

One can assume that the power and security of children is clearly an important issue for the Ancient Greeks if a child is raised to be honored by panhellenic games. Two of the four myths focus on mortal children and the third on a divine child, and this must have called upon the participants to recognize the relevancy of the child to the Greek world. As Price notes, the very importance of a child to one’s immortality necessitated a concern for their safety and so myth and cult are naturally concerned with all phases of childhood.\(^{108}\) While the approach and interpretation of the Opheltes myth that this study provides may seem unlikely to some, one does find that infants and

\(^{105}\) see page 29 below on Plato’s recommendations to nurses.

\(^{106}\) In Hyg. Fab. 2, 5 and 4 he was the younger of the two sons; a statue of the boy in the temenos at Isthmia is certainly of adolescent age; Ovid Fast. 6. 493-494 says he was snatched from the cradle by Ino. Farnell 1970: 40 skirts the issue by describing him as a “person of immature or tender years” also calling him a “child or boy.”

\(^{107}\) Farnell 1970: 40-1 on the question of the boy’s age.

\(^{108}\) Price 1978: 1.
young children figure elsewhere in myth in much the same way. It is obvious, then, that the nature of the child and their care was indeed an issue of state and personal concern.

Two of these myths then deal with the death of a child. Both were the mortals whose deaths were the impetus for the establishment of the games at their respective locations. It is significant that child deaths would command focus at half of these sites, and even within the body of traditional myth, child deaths remain in fairly significant numbers. We can then see that the fate of the children of Medea, Heracles, Agamemnon and Hektor, for example, constitute a fairly common mythical theme which may reflect concern for the welfare and safety of the young expressed in mythic form.

At both Nemea and Isthmia, the sites for the original tombs of the boys are the focus of honor and worship. As Dowden observes about hero cults, "Tombs of the legendary dead are not called into existence by the need to dispose of corpses; rather the inhabitants of an ancient town needed a specific place or position in which to recall and commemorate what that figure of legend means to them."\(^{109}\) What Opheltes the infant and the child Melikertes "means to them" is, then, a central issue of the Nemean and Isthmian cults. This myth must have reflected some type of societal belief/value system and functioned as a formative influence on society; as Burkert says, all myth and ritual are communicative.\(^{110}\) Gebhard argues for a connection to fertility and the underworld in the Melikertes myth.\(^{111}\) Farnell interprets Opheltes to reflect death and

\(^{109}\) Dowden 1989: 1

\(^{110}\) Burkert 1979: 46.

\(^{111}\) Gebhard 1993: 171.
the underworld. But I would add to these theories that Opheltes in particular sheds light on more tangible, human matters. Even Farnell recognized that Opheltes was more of a character and his situation was one that could be identifiable. "His legend has been more humanized than that of Melikertes." In this role the Opheltes cult sheds light on attitudes concerning the infant condition in Greece, and also acts as a re-establishment or reminder of accepted social values.

The element of the serpent appears in two of the four myths: Delphi and Nemea. It is instructive to note the divine infant Apollo overcomes and kills the creature, and in contrast, the human infant Opheltes is the one overcome and killed by the snake. Farnell sees the snake in the Opheltes myth as a chthonic element. While this may be true, the snake is often seen as a symbol of fertility and here the tension plays out as it represents the ongoing nature of birth but also it is the instrument through which new life is snatched away, or at least an attempt was made to do so with Apollo. We must note that while a person having contact with these two myths in the ancient world may have seen a different message here, the suggestion given may be one interpretation.

The final comparison of these foundation stories is that in two of them, disaster strikes as the direct result of negligent child-care. Hypsipyle is the nurse of the baby Opheltes and her negligent care of him when she set him on the ground was

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113 Farnell 1970: 42.
114 Ibid. 41-42.
115 Another example of divine infant power in the form of snakes is Herakles. He kills the snakes sent to his crib by the angered Hera. On the iconography of Herakles strangling snakes see Woodford 1983.
immediately followed by, and was the cause of, his death. By the same token, Ino, who was caring for her orphaned nephew Dionysus, jumped into the sea with her own son, also causing his death. Whether or not Ino was intending to murder her son or to save him, the end result of their leap was the boy’s death. If a myth must be communicative, then some point is being made about the dangers of child-care providers.

As we see, the Nemean myth of Opheltes retains a continuity and similarity with the other foundation stories in the panhellenic circuit. It is, therefore, not unique but reiterates several common issues that these myths attempt to express. This study focuses on this particular myth, rather than all of them together, for several reasons. The first is that the conception of infants, human infants, is the issue explored in this study. The divine nature of the “infant” Apollo is not within the realm of potentiality. Through this study, the historical reality of the child is instead our goal. The second reason is that Opheltes is the only one of these “infants” who is clearly an infant and he suffers directly as a result of this condition. Finally, it alone allows us to reach further into the infant world by including his nurse as a key element in these tragic events. By examining this story specifically, we can better understand some of these overriding issues and concerns of Greek society.
CHAPTER 3:

THE NATURE OF THE INFANT CONDITION

One day God asked the first human couple who then lived in heaven what kind of death they wanted, that of the moon or that of the banana. Because the couple wondered in dismay about the implications of the two modes of death, God explained to them: the banana puts forth shoots which take its place, and the moon itself comes back to life. The couple considered for a long time before they made their choice. If they elected to be childless they would avoid death, but they would also be very lonely, would themselves be forced to carry out all the work, and would not have anybody to work and strive for. Therefore they prayed to God for children, well aware of the consequences of their choice. And their prayer was granted. Since that time man's sojourn is short on this earth.

-African Myth (Madagascar)\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{116} Feldman 1963: 114-115.
Liminality

Where did you come from, Baby dear? 
Out of everywhere into here.....

-George MacDonald

The birth of a child is one of the most mysterious and magical events that any person could experience. Despite the medical, scientific or even philosophical explanation that a culture uses to describe the event, it still remains an almost other-worldly phenomenon beyond anyone’s control. “Where do babies come from?” is one of the first questions a child might ask in his search for a self-awareness and world-awareness. Although the child’s parents may stumble through an answer to satisfy the hungry curiosity before them, do they themselves really know? As simple as this question might seem, the implications of its philosophical, religious and metaphysical answer are staggering. Even if the biological processes of the beginning of life are understood, such as the fertilization of the egg, rapid cell division and cell specialization, from where does the life, the soul, the personality come? Any parent of multiple children would be quick to pronounce that, despite common genetics and nurturing environment, each of their children is distinctly different. Each has its own personality, its own thought processes and its own view of the world. Whence does this part of each child come? It is a fundamental question of our collective experience on this earth through all time and one whose answers are as brilliantly varied as the people

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117 Biologists have identified one third of the brain as genetic functioning, one third as learned environment and the other one third that is the core of who we are cannot be identified.
on this globe. The ancient Athenians and the Australian Aborigines, for example, say that babies are αὐτόκθονοι or “sprung directly from the earth.” Some cultures say that they come from the gods or are sent from the sky as sung in an Indian birth song:

Where have you come from, Little One?  
Where were you staying before?  
Today, where have you made your camp?

I came from the sky;  
Till now I was staying in the belly  
Today I have camped on earth.

Some cultures think that babies originate in the magical power of words or from the ocean, while others believe that the children themselves are active decision-makers in their choice of place, time and parents in their own birth. The “Spirit Babies,” as many cultures conceive of them, gather in certain places awaiting incarnation. The idea of “Spirit Babies” can be extended to encompass the soul of one already passed from this life. Thus the birth of a child is simply one step in the ongoing process of reincarnation. In whatever way each culture and time answers these questions, their explanations reveal something very basic in their belief system and understanding of nature, the gods, and mankind. So, the search in this study is to approach this question from the classical Greek perspective. How did they accept these foreign intruders into

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118 Dunham 1992 is a charming compilation of cultural conceptions of birth, infants and childcare and Chatham-Baker 1991 gathers various superstitions and wives’ tales about the same.

119 On Athenian autochthonic myths see Loraux 1993.


121 Dunham 1992: 12.

their midst? How did they organize in their minds and their society the
otherworldliness of birth and the presence of infants as reflected in the concepts above?
A close examination of the evidence will provide us with some answers to these
questions. Further below we will examine the scientific and philosophical explanations
set forth by the Greeks to explain the origin of life, but let us first look at how the
newborn was viewed as a newcomer into society.

Any social group entity—family, clan, tribe, state, nation, species, etc.—identifies
itself by a set of characteristics, or taxa, unique unto itself. Each member of the group
possesses these taxa and, therefore, conforms to the group identity and is then
recognized by such. A group may identify itself by characteristics such as clothing
styles or colors, behavior, language, shared rituals, or physical traits and it is by these
very characteristics members of the group are able to identify one another. Inherent in
the process of self-identification is the recognition of an “other” or one who is not a
member of the said group and one who, therefore, will not exhibit the same
characteristics. The recognition of these differences serves to establish the boundaries
of the group: those outside the group do not share in the common identifiable taxa and
are, therefore, “other”; those inside the group do share these characteristics and are,
therefore, part of the accepted group identity. In his study of modern demonological
beliefs on the island of Naxos, Charles Stewart analyzed the taxonomic use of identity
and difference in the intervillage relationships on the island. Even though the villages
shared a common language, culture and religion, nevertheless they distinguished
themselves from one another by, for example, time differences for ritual
performances. The need for humans to demarcate what is identifiable to the community establishes patterns for normalcy and consistency in that community and also immediately identifies outsiders who may pose a potential threat. This “line drawn in the sand” can become unclear, however, if a particular individual does not display any of the recognizable taxa from either inside or outside the line or embodies characteristics of each. This individual may exhibit traits from both categories making identification confusing if not impossible.

Therefore, if a person displayed characteristics that are shared among those inside a certain group, then he/she could be recognized as a member. But, if that same person also possessed characteristics of those outside the group (or in other words characteristics not shared by the group) then he/she could be recognized as an outsider. The person would, in fact, straddle the “line drawn in the sand” being both inside and outside the community simultaneously and existing on the “threshold” (from the Latin limen = threshold, doorway) of community identification. Nam puer hoc parvus vitaeq(ue) e limine raptus... For their little boy was carried off from the very threshold of life. This tombstone inscription of a small boy expressly recalls this marginal status that marks the passage of children into life. This “liminal” state can provoke anxiety in the community that is faced with this and, as we will see, can leave the liminal person himself in an extremely vulnerable state.

This state of marginality can also refer to times in a person’s existence when they were in a transitional state and hence they are neither pre- nor post- event. The

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123 Stewart 1991: 31-42.

124 CIL 8,8567 line 3; Shore 1997: 64-65.
transition of puberty is a good example, the adolescent is neither a child nor an adult and so he is liminal at that moment.¹²⁵ This concept could then be applied to any conflicting identification, passage through time or an event that elicits ambiguous responses. Van Gennep argues that it was through these uncertain ambiguous times that humans employed the use of ritual in order to make or deal with the transition of the liminal being easier,¹²⁶ “...all facilitate the passage from one state to another,...they (transition rituals) ward off the dangers of the transit and enhance its benefits.”¹²⁷ And so we return to the appearance of this newborn stranger. From wherever it was believed to have come, it is now in the process of crossing over or joining the living/society.¹²⁸ This uncertainty about a newborn’s true origins, I argue, would cause an increased anxiety about its liminality.

So, infancy can be seen as a prolonged state of liminality on several levels and it is my intention to show that not only are van Gennep’s “ritual safeties” employed in a Greek context, but that a more generalized attitude developed around these infants, necessitating certain observance and care that made use of and protected the child’s delicate state. The myth of Opheltes reflects this theory by representing the dead infant as liminal on several counts. It clearly represents the ambiguous nature of infancy and further study of other references to infants reveal that indeed these babies clearly exhibit


¹²⁶ Van Gennep 1909; Parker 1983: 59.

¹²⁷ Harrison 1962: xxx.

¹²⁸ Eliade 1959: 141-143 on the world-wide practice of laying a newborn on the ground to reinforce the journey the infant just passed through the threshold of life from Mother Earth.
and represent identities of differing character. The tragic killing in the myth also exemplifies how an infant’s condition leads directly to their extreme vulnerability.

One of the main points of the myth is the fact that this small boy goes from being a cared-for heir to the throne of Nemea to an unfortunate victim to the venom of a snake, which ominously foreshadows the impending doom of the traveling commanders of the Seven Against Thebes.\textsuperscript{129} We are, in a sense, bearing witness to the transition from the literal meanings of his names, Opheltes to Archemoros. The two conflicting implications of the child’s existence are seen as a simultaneous condition because the names are used interchangeably. Both of these names, therefore, reflect the condition of the child. The tension witnessed between these two states reflects the tension seen in all children as to their potential blessings and disasters.

With the coming of a child there is the joy at the birth for the “increase” it brings to the $\circ \overset{x}{\bar{\kappa}}\bar{\omicron}\varphi$ and also hope for family continuance (at least for a male child). Opheltes was the son of the king of Nemea and would have been expected to carry on the royal line and the power of the throne. He was being well cared for with a nurse employed to watch over him constantly. Yet, as the story shows, these hopes can be dashed by the unexpected and tragic event. The most obvious way in which these hopes could be cast is in the literal death of the infant. Just as the sudden death of Opheltes was experienced by his mother and father who lost their begotten and future heir, it is a metaphor any parent understands as they live in constant fear that some unfortunate mishap might rob them of their children.\textsuperscript{130} Although the physical loss of the child is an

\textsuperscript{129} The commanders engaged in battle once they arrived at the city of Thebes and all were killed.

\textsuperscript{130} Wiedemann 1989: 11ff.
everpresent danger, there are other “losses” capable of dashing the hopes of prosperity and increase for the parents. The possibility of physical or mental malformation, demonic attack or failure to conform fully to society’s precepts would all be potential losses.\footnote{131} Even if child-care has been ultimately successful, the process can be worry-ridden and painful. So, again, the child offers at once joy and pain.

\textit{Gaudiaque dederat rapuit fortuna repente}
\textit{[inqu(e) acr]es luctus convertit vota parentum;}

Fortune, which has bestowed happiness
Upon his parents, swiftly turned their
hopes into sharp cries of lamentation.\footnote{132}

Conflicting effects on parents and reactions concerning the child also reveal its liminality. Let us first examine the attitude of the joy experienced by infancy. The birth of a child would most likely be a happy occasion for the parents. Both parents might feel relief in that they had supplied themselves with their own care in their old age as well as custodians for their family tomb.\footnote{133} For the mother, she has successfully brought a child into the world and fulfilled her duty as a wife and also as a woman,\footnote{134} solidifying her place in her husband’s family.\footnote{135} In Euripides’ \textit{Iphigeneia at Aulis}, Agamemnon has summoned his wife and children to Aulis in order that his daughter, Iphigeneia, may marry the great warrior Achilles. In reality this was a trick and she was

\footnotetext[131]{These losses will be discussed below.}
\footnotetext[132]{CIL 8,8567; Shore 1997:64.}
\footnotetext[133]{Rohde 1966: 172.}
\footnotetext[134]{Dyson 1988: 15.}
\footnotetext[135]{Demand 1994: 17.}
to be sacrificed upon the altar instead. His wife, Clytemnestra, being ignorant of the deceit arrived with pride that her daughter was to gain such a prominent husband.

When Clytemnestra steps from the cart before the wedding of Iphigenia, she exhorts her daughter and “babe” Orestes to stand beside her so that others may see her rich motherhood.136 Motherhood is portrayed, then, as a prized social status for a woman and when the child is perceived to be noble, all the more renown follows for the woman. The same can be seen when a messenger informs Hecuba of her daughter’s noble death. εὐτεκνωτάτην τε σε! πασῶν γυναικῶν δυτιχεστάτην θ᾽ ὀρῷ.

“I regard thee as blest beyond all mothers in thy noble child.”137

For the father, he has provided himself and his family with an heir and the promise of the continuation of the family line.138 Plato notes this is a natural desire and one that immortalizes. ἡ θυντὴ φύσις ξητεῖ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀεὶ τὸ εἶναι άθάνατος. δύναται δὲ ταύτῃ μόνον, τῇ γενέσει, ὅτι ἀεὶ κατάλείπει ἐτερον νέον ἀντί τοῦ παλαιοῦ, “... mortal nature seeks... to perpetuate itself and become immortal. The only way in which it can achieve this is by procreation...”139 Through their capacity to carry on the family line, children, then, become equated with the father’s social deathlessness. οῦτω γὰρ τῇθηκας οὐδὲ περὶ θανῶν· παιδες γὰρ ἀνδρὶ κληδόνες σωτηριοὶ θανόντι...“So, though you died, you shall not yet be dead, for when a man dies, children are the voice of his


139 Pl. Symp. 207b.
salvation.” Euripides also addresses this issue in his *Hercules*. Lycus has just murdered Creon to obtain the Theban throne and has now turned his sights on the murder of Hercules' children, the grandchildren of Creon. This seems, at first glance, an odd strategy for a monarchical usurper, however, in view of the significance of children, it is completely appropriate. These children are in part the very living blood of Creon himself that has been passed down through his daughter, the wife of Hercules, and, therefore, they represent his own immortality. If they are the continuation of Creon's life and family, they are a threat to Lycus and his newfound authority and may exact vengeance on his murder. ...οἶδα γὰρ κατακτανὼν/κρέοντα πατέρα τήσει καὶ θρόνους ἐχων, οὐκουν τραφέντων τάνδε τιμωροὺς ἐμοὶ/χρήζω λιπέσθαι τῶν δεδραμένων δίκην. “I have no wish that these children should grow up and be left to take vengeance on me in requital for what I have done.”

Creon, in a sense then, would be avenging his own death. These children who symbolize the continuation of the father himself as well as his family are considered his property and the father would have the ultimate decision in matters concerning them. Producing children is a man's way to ensure his memory in the future, but, just as the mother's reputation is vulnerable to the behavior of her children, so too the father is affected by their good or bad deeds. ἡλιωτὸς ὅστις ἔνυχησεν εἰς τέκνα/καὶ μὴ πισήμους συμφορᾶς ἐκτῆσατο. “His is an enviable lot, who is blest in

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140 Aesch. Cho. 504.
141 Eur. HF 166-169.
142 Pomeroy 1975: 65; Sifakis 1979: 78.
his children, and does not find himself brought into evil notoriety.143 and again, οἱ γὰρ εὐγενεῖς κάμνουσι τοῖς αἰσχροῖς τῶν τέκνων ὑπὲρ, “...For the noble are afflicted by disgrace on account of their children.”144 While children are seen as vehicles to one’s immortality, they can, at the same time, ruin a man’s reputation and elicit a form of social death.145 Euripides provides an evocative comparison to the potential dangers of grown children in the Agamemnon. He describes an adorable and adored lion cub taken into a home. ἐν βίωτοι πρωτελείοις ἀμερον, εὐφιλόπαιδα καὶ γεραποίς ἐπίχαρτον. “Gentle it was in the prelude of its life, kindly to children, and a delight to the old.”146 But then, the cub grows up and destroys the home. Its true nature emerged and it showed no appreciation for the nurturing it had received from the family, rather, a blood bath ensued. ἐκ θεοῦ δ’ ἱερεύς τις ἀτάς δόμοις προσεθρεφθη. “A priest of ruin, by ordinance of god, it was reared in the house.”147 Much like this cub was reared and then destroyed his caregivers, one could see that children might also have this same potential. The tensions surrounding the production of children are clearly evident.

The joy of birth is not only experienced by the parents, but the extended community as well. Lacey sees the importance of having children in the ancient family and describes the ὁικός as a “living organism” where one who is childless “is visibly

143 Eur. Or. 542-543.
144 Euripides HF 292-293.
145 On gratitude to parents Hewitt 1931.
146 Eur. Ag 720-722.
147 ibid. 735-736.
dying.” So, the birth of a child expresses the very life blood of the oikos and demonstrates its viability. But yet the individual oikos is still not the only one affected by the birth. Society as a whole also experiences joy and hope at the coming of a new potential citizen or member of the community. 

The birth of children elicits joy and hope to an individual and a city, but alongside the blessings and benefits lurks the anxiety of possible miseries inherent in infancy and childhood. This seems to be a fairly common theme expressed in many different cultures. As the African myth at the beginning of this chapter suggests, it has been believed that it was because of the creation of children that man must die (become mortal). The expression of this anxiety is also revealed in the Greek world. After Medea’s decision to murder her own children, the chorus laments the woes of raising children.


149 French 1977: 12.
This I say, that those who have never
Had children, who know nothing of it,
In happiness have the advantage
Over those who are parents.
The childless, who never discover
Whether children turn out as a good thing
Or as something to cause pain, are spared
Many troubles in lacking this knowledge.
And those who have in their homes
The sweet presence of children, I see that their lives
Are all wasted away by their worries.
First they must think how to bring them up well and
How to leave them something to live on.
And then after this whether all their toil
Is for those who will turn out good or bad,
Is still an unanswered question.
And of one more trouble, the last of all,
That is common to mortals I tell.
For suppose you have found them enough for their living,
Suppose that the children have grown into youth
And have turned out good, still if god so wills it,
Death will away with your children's bodies,
And carry them off into Hades.
What is our profit, then, that for the sake of
Children the gods should pile upon mortals
After all else
This most terrible grief?\textsuperscript{150}

The potential for misery is unmistakable here. Infants are a "sweet presence" while at
the same time the raising of them can cause a "most terrible grief." Woes concerning
the correct way to raise a child successfully that will be acceptable to the community

\textsuperscript{150} Eur. Med. 1090-1115.
are trials enough, but even after all the care given to children, there is no certainty they will even survive to adulthood. Although the Seven Against Thebes did survive into adulthood, nevertheless, their loss is felt just as deeply by the chorus of mourning mothers who lament over the arrival of their sons’ bodies,

\[\text{ἄγαμόν μ' ἔτι δεῦρ' ἀεί}
\text{Χρόνος παλαιὸς πατήρ}
\text{ὡφελ' ἀμερᾶν κτίσαι.}
\text{τί γὰρ μ' ἔδει παιδῶν;}
\text{τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἠλπὶ ζον ἀν πεπονθέναι}
\text{πάθος περισσόν, εἰ γάμων ἀπεζύγην;}
\text{νῦν δ' ὥρα σαφέστατον}
\text{κακὸν, τέκνων φιλτάτων στέρεσθαί.}

"Would that Father Time had kept me unwed from my youth up even till now when I am old!—What need had I of children? I think I should not have suffered overmuch, had I never borne the marriage-yoke; but now I have my sorrow full in view, the loss of children dear."

The very potentiality of this misery is the core element of the Opheltes cult. The unfortunate death of this child demonstrates the possible agonies that could await any parent. A Roman parent captured this sentiment on a tombstone for his dead child.

\[\text{Discē quisque pius pater es vel mater que generasti:}
\text{Natōs habere bonum est, si non sint invida fata.}
\text{Sic tibi non rapiat mors invida tam cito natos.}
\text{ut meis atque tuis dignis leve terra preceris.}
\text{ut mors in volutum vivat semperque colatur.}

Learn this whoever you are, a worthy father or perchance a mother who has born children, To have offspring is a good thing, if only there were no jealous fates. For then, invidious death would not carry off your children so swiftly, Compelling you to beg the earth to rest lightly upon your children and mine. Who deserve such

\[151\text{ Eur. Supp. 786-793.}\]
treatment, and so that death must seem a living being
before our faces, requiring worship always.\textsuperscript{152}

Some have argued that because of these anxieties, affectionate feelings toward
children were “too expensive” emotionally, and emotional distancing was common. The
idea of “emotional expense” rests upon the premise that in pre-industrial societies, death
of children was so common an occurrence that one had to distance oneself emotionally
from one’s children who had a high probability of death. So, for mental stability,
parental/maternal detachment preserved one’s sanity in the ever present face of
death.\textsuperscript{153} Despite, and indeed because of, the very real possibility of infant mortality,
parents seemed to treat their newborns with extra special care. Even though the grief of
raising children was great, the social benefits and natural emotions associated with them
outweighed the potential dangers.\textsuperscript{154} When discussing the fact that weakness, not
affection, causes pain at a death, Solon warns that it is silly to refrain from having
children simply out of the fear of their death.

\textit{\’Astheneia gar, ouk eunoeia, lupas
aperontous epaigetai kai fobous anerapouis
anaskhtois upo lagon proo tuchn, ois oude
apolyneis egnwetai tou pothumenedou
parontos, tou mellothontos odyna as ei kai
tromous kai agwana.}

“For it is weakness, not kindness, that brings men
into endless pains and terrors when they are not trained by
reason to endure the assaults of fortune. Such men do not

\textsuperscript{152} CE 647; Shore 1997:68. on sentiments over dead children see Lattimore 1962: 187-191; Golden 1988; Garland 1985..

\textsuperscript{153} Stone 1977; Aries 1962; Hewitt 1931; Shorter 1976; Scheper-Hughes 1987: esp. 187-208; Gelles 1987: 37, 60-61; Golden 1988 I am in agreement with Golden here that demographics do not necessarily regulate emotions; also with Humphries 1983: 167 who states that one can hardly regulate one’s emotions based on perceived outcomes.

\textsuperscript{154} Humphries 1983 discusses examples of tremendous grief by parents.
even enjoy what they long for when they get it, but are filled with continual pangs, tremors, and struggles.\textsuperscript{155}

Even if a man remains unmarried and childless because of the fear of losing children, there would be another whose loss would pain him. Solon used Thales as an example that he had an affection for his nephew or even one of the servant's children, so a man cannot avoid affection for children entirely.\textsuperscript{156} Andromache proclaims that these troubles are worthwhile miseries ...πᾶσι δ' ἄνθρωποις ἄρ' ἡν ψυχὴ τέκνη. δόστις δ' αὐτ' ἀπειρος ἡν ψέγει, ἡσσον μὲν ἄργοι, δυστυχῶν δ' εὔδαμονει. “Ah! yes, his children are to every man as his own soul, and whoever sneers at this through inexperience, though he suffers less anguish, he has unfortunate happiness.”\textsuperscript{157} This sentiment she gave as she was saying farewell to her beloved infant Molossus who was being led to his death by Menelaos and Hermione. The pathos of this scene reflects that the benefits and significance of children for their parents and society outweigh the potential sorrows.

The liminality and social importance of infants can also be seen in their physiological otherness. Physically, infants exhibit an “otherness” that, while they can be identified as human, are characteristically opposite from their adult counterparts.

The terminology for infancy itself reveals this ambiguity.

The properties of the infant are so distinct from those of the older child that it is not surprising that all societies regard the first two years of life as a special period of development. Infants are often defined not by what they

\textsuperscript{155} Plut. Sol. 7.4.

\textsuperscript{156} Plut. Sol. 7. 2-3.

\textsuperscript{157} Eur. Andr. 418-420.
can do but by the absence of the qualities adults possess...  

A common term used for an infant is νηπιος literally meaning “no speech” (also reflected in the Latin “infans” = “unable to speak”) drawing the comparison to an adult ability that the child does not yet possess. One of the taxonomic identifications of humans is the ability to speak and while the child is indeed a human, it clearly lacks the characteristic and so does not yet completely belong to this taxonomic group. νεπος is also another variation of the term for infant. In this case a baby is being called “the footless one” and it is obviously referring to the adult characteristic of walking, of which the newly born are clearly incapable. So, two of the most common terms used to describe this age group highlight the very characteristics of the child that keeps him/her from fully identifying with even members of its own family, therefore emphasizing its state of otherness and liminality.

This “otherness” carried with it an additional sense of anxiety and importance that warranted special considerations for the child, both practical and religious. As Golden argues, children, especially newborns, exhibit an “otherness” that separates them from the rest of mankind- soft skin, lack of intelligence, lack of strength, inability to walk, requirement of special tools for their care (bottles, potty stools, cradles, walkers), and the need for swaddling clothes. They are “physically weak, morally incompetent, mentally incapable” and were seen as “moister and hotter” than adults, which caused them to be angrier and greedier. Children do not conform to the

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159 Small 1997: 141 on the modern conception of this infant inability.
identifiable characteristics of the adult community. They are human-like but have not
the bodily proportions of an adult; they have legs yet can not walk, hands yet they can
not effectively hold things, a voice but one that is unintelligible. Children were seen as
being more akin to animals than adult humans, and that accentuates their liminal
existence, spanning the bridge between species. ¹⁶¹ Socrates refused to admit that the
relationships among children and those among wild beasts were actually “friendships”
tας δὲ παιδών φιλίας καὶ τὰς τῶν θηρίων, ἀς ἡμεῖς τούτο τούτονα ἐπονομάζομεν, οὐκ ἀπεδέχετο εἶναι φιλίας ἐπανερωτάμενος: “while
as to the friendships of children and those of wild beasts, which we call by this name, he
refused to admit-when questioned upon the point- that they were friendships.” ¹⁶²
When a comparison was made of children’s need for supervision with the need of sheep
to have a herdsman Plato explains why children stand out among the animals ὁ δὲ
παις πάντων θηρίων ἐστὶ δυσμεταχειριστότατος· ὡς γάρ μάλιστα
ἐχει πηγήν τοῦ φρονεῖν ὑπὸ κατηρτυμένην, ἐπιβουλοῦν καὶ δριμύ
καὶ υβριστότατον θηρίων γίγνεται. “And of all wild creatures, the child is the
most intractable,...for insofar as it, above all others, possesses a fount of reason that is
as yet uncurbed, it is a treacherous, sly, and most insolent creature.”¹⁶³


¹⁶¹ A landmark case in late 19th c. America reflects this very concept. The case involves a little New York
girl named Mary Ellen who was cruelly abused by her foster parents. Mrs. Wheeler, a mission worker,
came upon the little girl’s sad circumstance but failed to gather the evidence needed to remove her from
the abusive couple. In desperation she sought help from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to
Animals. The Society’s counsel deliberated and judged that because “the child being an animal,” the
Society could step in. Payne 1916: 335-338. As a result of this case, The New York Society for the

¹⁶² Pl. Cleitophon 409 D-E.

¹⁶³ Pl. Leg. 7.808 D-E.
Because of the appearance of infants and also their behavior, they were compared with foreigners and other marginal people, i.e., those who are humans but do not meet the accepted characteristics of the community at hand: One can put a child to sleep by rocking and singing to it, putting the child under a sort of trance much like the Bacchants, because they both are being internally assailed by fear and frenzy.\textsuperscript{164}

\[\text{o kai \ \eta \ \epsilon p\iota s\iota t\iota m\iota \ \delta okei \ \epsilon i\nuai, \delta i \ \tau h\nu \ \psi u\chi\nu \ \iota \sigma t\iota i\nu \ \kappa i \nu o\mu e\nu\iota \ \gamma \alpha \rho \ \kappa a\iota \ \phi e\ro m\uacute{e}n\iota \ \iota \ \tau o\mu e \ \alpha i \ \iota \ \theta \acute{e}s\acute{h}ai \ \iota \ \tau o\mu e \ \delta \ \iota \ \alpha \nu o\nu \theta \acute{h}n \ \iota \ \tau o\mu e \ \d i o \ \k a \ i \ \tau a \ \pi a \ i \ \delta i a \ \k a i \ \o i \ \mu e \th u o\nu \tau e s \ k a i \ \o i \ \mu a i \ \nu \gamma e o\nu \tau e o i \ \a n o \eta \tau o i \ \d i \ \gamma \alpha \rho \ \tau o \ \tau o \ \tau o \ \theta \uacute{e} \mu o \ \tau o \ \iota \ \epsilon \nu \nu \acute{a} \rho \o x o\nu \tau o \ \iota \ \p l e i \ \iota \ \k i \nu \iota s i \ \iota \ \a u \tau o i \ \k a i \ \sigma \ \phi \o \delta \r o \tau \acute{a} \ \tau i \ \s u m \b a i \ \iota \ \nu e i \ \l h g \o \uacute{u} \ \gamma e s \ \d \ \tau a \ \tau o \ \tau i \ \epsilon \ \mu \phi \o \r \o \v e \ \tau e \ \tau o \ \i \ \gamma \i \nu \o \nu \tau a i \ \a \tau a \ \gamma \eta \nu .\]

"Knowledge seems to be what checks the soul; for when the soul is moved and travelling, it is not possible either to feel or to think. This is why children, the intoxicated and madmen cannot think; for owing to the quantity of heat within them the movement is very great and violent, but when this ceases they become more sensible; for as the mind is untroubled they can control it more."\textsuperscript{165}

Again, infants are compared to the marginal, in this case drunkards. Aristotle explains that since the upper parts of infants are so full of food they cannot even turn their necks for five months. He compares this condensation of moisture to the same that is experienced by the very drunk.\textsuperscript{166} A philosophical explanation of why man walks bipedally is that his proportions are in harmony and so allows for an erect posture. All other creatures have excessive weight at the top that "hampers motion of the intellect

\textsuperscript{164} Pl. \textit{Leg.} 7.790. also Wiedemann 1989:23ff.

\textsuperscript{165} Arist. \textit{[Pr./]} 30.14.957a.
and general sense” and causes the body to lurch forward onto all fours. This is known as “dwarfism” where the bigger proportion is at the top and small where the weight is supported. Infancy is the reverse of adulthood- νέοις δ᾽ οὖσι τούναντιον τὰ μὲν ἀνω μεγάλα, τὸ δὲ κάτω μικρὸν (διὸ καὶ ἔρπουσι, βαδίζειν δ᾽ οὖ δύνανται, τὸ δὲ πρῶτον οὖδ᾽ ἔρπουσιν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀκινήτις ζουσιν)· νάνοι γὰρ εἰσί τὰ παιδία πάντα “the upper portion is large and the lower is small and that is why infants cannot walk but crawl about, and at the very beginning cannot even crawl, but remain where they are. In other words, all children are dwarfs.” It follows, then, that infants do not have harmony in their proportions.

Plato expresses the dual nature of children when he recommends that in a child’s education he must be both “bridled” to guide his ignorance διὸ δὴ πολλοῖς αὐτῶν χαλίνοις τίσι δεῖ δεσμοῦν. “while at the same time he must be treated as is appropriate for a freeborn child.” This duality in a free child's semirational nature bridges the boundaries of society- he is at once a freeborn child and also deserving of the chastisement meant for slaves. As Prometheus says in Prometheus Bound, ...τὰν βροτοῖς δὲ πηματα/ ἀκούσας, ὡς σφας νηπίους ὄντας τὸ πρὶν ἐννοοῦς ἔθηκα καὶ φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους. “Rather listen to the sad story of mankind, who like children lived until I gave them understanding and a portion of reason.” The comparison with the early history of mankind and children here is

166 Aristotle On Sleeping and Waking 457a.
167 Arist. Part. An. 4.686a-b.
168 Pl. Leg. 7.808 D-E.
169 Aesch. PV 442-444.
interesting. The implication is that children, just like early mankind, have the potential to be powerful, thinking beings, but, they lack the necessary tools of reason to do so. They are primitive, uncivilized and irrational. This puts them securely into the marginal status.

In religious terms, an infant is in a perpetual state of marginality: it is alive, but it is not yet an accepted person; it is a human, yet at this stage it does not resemble a grown adult. Logically, one might wish to establish at what point this liminality begins and at what point it ends. But even the boundaries of this liminality is ambiguous and significant. Terms used to designate infants do not refer simply to parturient children. τὸ ἐμβρυόν refers to the embryo or fetus in the womb the word being comprised of βρῶν= to swell, to grow and εμ=in. Another term, τὸ βρέφος also means the unborn child in the womb but, interestingly, both of these terms as well as the adjective νηπίος are also used to denote infants that are still suckling. ὁ τόκος indicates offspring as well as a child in the fetal stage. There is, then, no distinction in the Greek vocabulary for a pre-parturient and a parturient child. Garland raises this fact to explain that the Greeks saw no distinction in the progressive stages of development where the fetus/infant feeds directly off of the mother. He uses this concept to support his argument about the acceptability of infanticide; there being no difference, then, between infanticide and abortion.\(^{170}\) Patterson argues that after the amphiromia and/or dekate the βρέφος is recognized and therefore could not be exposed and so the communal rituals mark the end of this ambiguity.\(^{171}\) She is convincing in her argument about


\(^{171}\) Patterson 1985.
exposure specifically, but I argue, along with Garland, that their ambiguous state is much longer than at most ten days. I also agree with Garland in that obviously no distinction was made based on the source of nourishment, but these terms are far more significant. They clearly verbalize the liminality of infancy where they bridge the gap between being and non-being. The terrifyingly liminal event of birth marks the halfway point for the being who is unborn and not yet alive and then is a parturient child who is not yet a person. The marginal status of the origin of life spans the long period from conception to weaning (~three years of age).

These terms also reflect another characteristic of the liminality of infants. Whereas adults are defined by their specific gender, an infant is seen as genderless. τὸ εὐβρον and τὸ βρέφος are neuter nouns, assigning no gender to the infant they describe. This philological example is reflected also in the medical literature. A Hippocratic treatise explains that passages in children’s bodies are too narrow to allow the agitation of the fluids which will differentiate the sexes among adults.\(^{172}\) Lack of gender was also recognized by Aristotle. He acknowledged that conception was complete at gender differentiation\(^{173}\) but full development of the sexual organs did not occur until puberty.\(^{174}\) Full development of functional sexual organs differentiates the genders and so Aristotelian theory implies that a pre-pubescent child is essentially genderless. If gender is one of the most basic defining characteristics of humankind,

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\(^{172}\) Genit. 2 (vii.472.16-474.4)

\(^{173}\) GA 737bII.

\(^{174}\) GA 728b22-32. See also Dean-Jones 1994:44-47.
and a child lacks even that association, the infant would most surely be seen as marginal in status. Puberty is the passage that finally draws the child into the world of adults.

Susceptibility of Marginal Beings

Oh, children, children, how fraught with peril are your years! - F. Dostoevsky

A heightened sense of anxiety would be felt concerning these infants who hover between established identifiable characteristics. It is a dangerous state in which to exist because the pendulum could swing either way at any moment from the path to becoming fully human or fully other. As a consequence of this liminality, the child always had one foot into misery and the grave, so to speak, while the other foot was planted in society and health. The recognized importance of infants to individuals and communities gave rise to even more increased anxiety for their well-being. The dangers connected with new life were a continual threat, particularly when the child was seen as being of this marginal status. These dangers could include disease, death, malformation, demonic attack or failure to conform to society's precepts of an acceptable citizen. More practically, infants are helpless and vulnerable and are completely reliant upon the adult world for their survival. Hypsipyle had failed to provide adequate care for her nursling and his almost immediate death resulted. It could be for this reason, although he never states it, that Plato advises nurses to carry their charges until the age of three. There is an “otherness” about these newcomers that could pose threats to society by attracting demonic presence upon them or by they
themselves turning on society and, therefore, they must carefully be “drawn into” society. The nurse is, then, one of the first in the infant’s life to see to it that the child is indeed safe. In all of the stages of childhood, this stage of life, then, is the most crucial in the “salvation” of the person if he is to become an accepted member of society. In this regard, it is not just in the interest of the family to whom the child was born, but the entire polis is, in a sense, at stake. The danger of leaving these potential outsiders to external attack must have been particularly compelling.

The process whereby an infant is “brought into” the community is particularly important in light of the societal attitudes concerning infancy and the potential benefit of the addition of a new member to the ὀίκος as well as the πόλις. According to Plato and Aristotle, children, and more specifically infants, are “raw material of the citizen community.”

Although born into a particular city, infants did not yet carry the traits attributable to that city. This “otherness” needed to be molded into recognizable characteristics, lest they became something “other” than what society allows; a process that must begin immediately after birth. Plato compares the physical nurturing process of infants to the “molding of wax” ὁ γενόμενον δὲ πλάττειν τε ὁιον κήριον ἐκ ύγρόν,...συγγενήν; δὴ καὶ τὰς τρφοῦς ἀναγκαζομεν...φρούσας, ἐκ τριετές ἀ ποτελεσθή τὸ γενόμενον; “where the child, while it is still soft, is swaddled and carried by its nurse until the age of three to prevent distortion of the limbs due to excessive pressure on them.”

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175 Golden 1990: 4, 190 n. 12.

176 Small 1997: 116 on cultural variations about children’s need to be molded.

177 Pl. Leg. 789-790 In her analysis of Roman children’s sarcophagi, Huskinson 1996 concluded that the images of children vary so drastically that the adult world saw that “a child is essentially an ‘unstable’
effort is being made to prevent the child from becoming physically more “other” than it already is. Aristotle also recognized the dangers of limb distortion and claimed that some resort to mechanical instruments to accomplish the job.\textsuperscript{178} He goes on to encourage that an infant be trained in the endurance of the elements to which an adult is subjected, but this training should be gradual.

For the psychological well being of the child, education of the soul must also begin immediately. \textsuperscript{179} And in contemplating such a process, \textsuperscript{180} in other words, the child must not only ultimately look like a member of the citizen-body, but it must also have the moral and psychological characteristics that identifies the rest of society.

Aristotle notes the value of education as it concerns the state.

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
\textit{άναγκαιον πρὸς τὴν πολιτείαν
βλέποντας παιδεύειν καὶ τοὺς
παιδὰς καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας, εἰπερ
τὸ διαφέρει πρὸς τὸ τὴν πόλιν εἶναι
σπουδαίον καὶ τοὺς παιδὰς εἶναι
σπουδαίους καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας σπουδαίας,}
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

being and that his or her image is still within their hands to make.” So, the belief in the “moldability” of children may have been common in the Greco-Roman world.

\textsuperscript{178} Arist. Pol. 1336a.

\textsuperscript{179} Pl. Leg. 791E.

\textsuperscript{180} Pl. Leg. 791D.
“Women and children must be trained by education with an eye to the constitution, if the virtues of either of them are supposed to make any difference in the virtues of the state. And they must make a difference: for the children grow up to be citizens, and half of the free persons in a state are women.”

To this end, Plato advised that an infant must be continuously rocked or “shaken” to overpower the internal motion, causing fear that by doing so would allow the soul to be calm and hence courageous (because the fear had been “conquered”) ή δ’ εὐανδρία/διδακτόν, εἰπερ καὶ βρέφος διδάσκεται λέγειν ἀκούειν θ’ δ’ μάθησιν οὐκ ἔχειν ἀδ’ ἄν μάθη τις, ταῦτα σφυζοθαί φίλει/ἐς γῆρας. οὕτω παιδας εὖ παιδεύετε. “Courage may be taught, for even a baby is taught to speak and hear things it cannot comprehend; and whatsoever a child learns, he loves to keep until the old age, so raise your children well.”

If the nurse is, according to Plato, to carry the child continuously throughout the first years of its life and Plato counsels that a child should be rocked constantly, then we can assume that the nurse would be the person who must carry out this direction. Our key myth illustrates precisely what may be in store if this advice is left unheeded.

It is also best to lead the child in moderation κυριώτατον γὰρ σὺν ἐμφύεται πᾶσι τότε τὸ πᾶν ἰθὸς διὰ ἐθὸς. “for because of the force of habit, it is in infancy that the whole character is most effectually determined.”

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181 Aristotle Pol. 1260b.
183 Pl. Leg. 792E.
or the molding process, must begin immediately after birth because even though the infant lacks cognitive functions, the force of habit remains into adulthood.\footnote{Beck 1964 on Greek education.}

Embedded in the Opheltes myth is this understanding of infant physical care in the necessity that Hypsipyle carry her charge constantly.\footnote{There is currently a national trend to resurrect this strategy of infant care. Small 1998. One can scarcely pick up a parenting book or magazine or scan the shelves of baby products without being encouraged to "wear your baby."} It is of utmost concern, then, that these infants who are so vital to the future of the state and its self-awareness be molded and trained so that while they eventually shed their physical otherness, they will shed their social otherness as well.

**Divine Connection of the Marginal**

**Ritual**

After the tragedy of the death of Opheltes was discovered and his body buried, funeral games were set up to honor the child. While these games continued to be practiced for centuries, ritual worship was also performed at the site. If this child was the object of ritual performance after death, could this also imply the use of rites to young children when they are alive? If the whole of infancy is a liminal or transitional period between the passage from non-existence to existence, and, according to van Gennep's theory, any rite of passage necessitates ritual as a precaution through that transition,\footnote{see p. 21 above.} then, the rituals that surrounded this period of life are clearly necessary.
Just as rituals guide a person through puberty, marriage, death, etc., these rituals that focus on or at least include infants guide the child on a safe passage through this crucial and dangerous time. Many rituals are known surrounding children and more specifically infants. There are several examples in tragedy of ritual accompanying the birth of a child or the nurturing of one. When Orestes returns home to seek vengeance for the murder of his father by his mother, he hears of Aegisthus performing birth rituals. He wonders at the purpose of the ritual Aegisthus was performing asking if they were τροφεία παιδών, ἕν πρὸ μέλλοντος τόκου; “in return for the bringing up of children or in anticipation of a birth?” In both of which, the father would be asking divine help and protection during such an important yet potentially dangerous event. At home, the mother also participates in the appropriate ritual. As a trick to ensnare her mother, Electra fakes a pregnancy so that she would have an excuse to ask her mother to visit her at home. Electra sends for Clytemnestra to ask about the ten purification rituals she must perform after the birth of her “pretend” child. Clytemnestra comes to her daughter but soon discovers the ruse and so we never do get to see what these rituals are. What we do learn is that there were such rituals concerning a new birth. An interesting ritual is mentioned in Euripides’ Ion when Creusa abandons her infant son. Athena steps in and gives the babe two dragons as guards. Euripides says this practice was still in use in Athens where ...δφεσίν ἐν χρυσηλάτοις τρέφειν τέκν. “...they bring up their children adorned with

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187 Eur. El. 626.

188 Eur. El. 652ff.
snakes of beaten gold.”¹⁸⁹ These amulets, then, provided safety for the vulnerable infant against potential dangerous attacks and served as protective rituals for that purpose.

More historically, we do know some rituals associated with infancy. The ἀμφιδρομία (amphidromia) in Athens was performed on the fifth or the seventh day after birth where the infant is carried at a run around the central hearth of the home. Some think this act is to help purify and strengthen the infant and establish it as a part of that particular ὀἰκος¹⁹⁰ or to ritually cleanse and protect the infant from the pollution of birth.¹⁹¹ Hamilton analyzed the sources for this ritual and concludes that either the nurse, mid-wife or possibly the mother ran around the child inspecting it to determine if it were fit to raise. Later there would be sacrifices to the gods, the child was named and presented before a large group of relatives.¹⁹² At the δεκατε or the tenth day ritual there was a separate ceremony where a banquet was held, complete with a sacrifice and where family and friends would be introduced to the child. It is generally accepted that these are ritual admittance ceremonies, recognizing the admittance of the child into society.¹⁹³ This could be one of the purposes of these ceremonies, but clearly their fundamental goal was to protect the child ritually in its delicate condition. At Sparta, the Tithenidia was a ritual focusing on infants. In the sanctuary of Artemis Korythalia,

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¹⁹⁰ Harrison 1962: 34; Blumner 1966:84.
¹⁹¹ Harrison 1968.
¹⁹² Hamilton 1984.
nurses stand in for the young babies and quite possibly sacrifice and dance orgiastically to bring growth upon the children. The Korythale, or budding branch, symbolizes Artemis’ jurisdiction over growth and by the nurses carrying them, call down this power on the children.¹⁹⁴

Beyond these formal rituals, an infant still exists in a dangerous state of liminality and must be more continually protected. As Euripides described, amulets were used as prophylactics, and we can recognize these in artistic representations of children where they bear an amulet on a rope strung across their torsos diagonally.¹⁹⁵ After the Eleusinian Mysteries, women were to dedicate to the goddess the clothing they had worn as initiates and could then take them home to be used as swaddling bands.¹⁹⁶ If the clothes themselves had absorbed some of the sacredness of the event then they could serve as a continual protection for the very needy child.

Other cults discussed by scholars that were meant to include children in the function of the city, namely the Diasia, Anthesteria, Oschophoria, Pyanopsia, and the Eleusinian Mysteries involved older children and on the whole seem to center around the child’s “coming of age.” If children were in need of continual ritual protection, integration into the religious society, and, knowing that infants were thought to learn by habit from the very beginning of life, infants must surely have played a part in ritual even if their participation was limited (i.e. their simple presence at the rite). During the nighttime journey of the Arrhephoroi on the Acropolis, the girls are thought to have


¹⁹⁵ Klein 1932; on other amulets see Blumner 1977: 72.

¹⁹⁶ Mylonas 279; Sch. Ar. Plu. 845; Parke 1977: 72.

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carried down into the underground precinct images of children or even live infants, returning with a stone in swaddlings. This recollection of Rhea's deceit is symbolic of the significance of infancy and their need for protection but may serve as an example of the participation of infants in cult.

The Apaturia was specifically a ritual of religious admittance celebrating and re-establishing the various phratries in Athens. On the third day, Koureots or Day of Youths, infant boys were officially admitted. This ritual seems to be solely based on the designation of a child to belong to a specific social group/phratry that could then be referred to later when the child was older and recognized by the state.197

Another Athenian festival that involved children is the Anthesteria that centers around the drinking of the new wine harvest. Children figure prominently in the festival, being crowned with flowers, given their own miniature wine-jugs with which to participate in the festivities, participating in swinging contests for girls and also infant crawling contests.198 For these reasons, Parke even labels this a "festival for children."199 Nilsson claims that this marks the end of babyhood.200 Despite the prominent position of children, and in most cases actual infants, there has been very little analysis as to why children are at the heart of the festival. Parke surmises the focus on flowers and blooms in spring represents the new bloom of youth as seen in children

197 Parke 1977: 89.
198 Parke 1977; Van Hoorn 1951.
199 Parke 1977: 107. Hamilton 1992 argues against the central use of children in this festival. Predominance of iconography of children on choes was not entirely related to the festival but they were used as gifts on various occasions.
200 Nilsson 1940: 34.
and whereas Dionysus is the god of the vine he is also therefore the god of growth and also, then of birth.\textsuperscript{201} The act of swinging is also argued to be an element of fertility where the child is imbued with the “germs of newly sprouting growths of spring.”\textsuperscript{202} Not explained is the curious mix of elements throughout this festival—flowers, wine, children, slaves and ghosts. If the connection between children and wine and blossoms is clear as being elements of creativity, it is less evident how slaves and the dead fit in. However, in light of my analysis about the infant condition, this connection becomes obvious. Slaves are a socially marginal group allowed to roam free in drinking and dancing during the festival and at the end revert back to their previous subservient condition. As a kindred group of the liminal, children must also take center stage. The incorporation of the spirits of the dead mingling with the living is a striking detail. Children, particularly infants, can symbolize the ever-lurking danger of death and in this festival of inversion death is allowed free reign, and at the close of the festivities is most significantly told to leave.\textsuperscript{203} Van Hoorn mentions the apotropaic objects needed during this aspect of the festival as protection against the wandering spirits. He notes particularly that children especially needed these talismans,\textsuperscript{204} but, as seems to be the trend among scholars discussing children, he does not say why they were more in need.

The analysis given in this study explains the increased danger infants faced. As a vulnerable, marginal being, a child needs this type of prophylactic to ward off any possible attack, especially when so many spirits were freely lurking about.

\textsuperscript{201} ibid.; also Burkert 1951: 216.

\textsuperscript{202} Van Hoorn 1951: 16.

\textsuperscript{203} on controversy of “Cares” vs “Keres” see Hamilton 1992: 50-51.
Infant Death and Burial

Returning again to our focus on the myth of Opheltes, it was near the burial place of the child where the Nemean athletic contests were established. Infant burial, then, is one of the central themes of this myth. With the high incidents of infant mortality, ancient Greek attitudes toward infant death reveal an extension of beliefs concerning the condition of the young in life. Just as infants were viewed as marginal beings in life, they seemed to experience a similar status among the dead. The burial practices concerning children illuminate our understanding of the ancient Greek attitudes about childhood. It seems that from early Greece through the Dark and Classical ages, even if the disposal of adult corpses vacillated between cremation and inhumation, infants and children were consistently buried and oftentimes buried in the home.\textsuperscript{205} If the burial of the dead and particularly criminals, a marginal subset of society, took place outside the limits of the city to prevent their pollution of it and which would also hinder their entrance into Hades,\textsuperscript{206} then the burial of infants within the home itself indicates there could be no potential for pollution from the infant corpse and that the family wanted to ensure that the child’s soul would make it as far as was possible for it into the afterlife. Hertz argues that in many cultures, the death of a newborn child was an “infra-social event; since society has not yet given anything of itself to the child,”\textsuperscript{207} and so the burial is conducted exclusively by the parents in private.

\textsuperscript{204} Van Hoom 1951: 19-20.
\textsuperscript{205} Ferguson 1989: 124-127; Kurtz and Boardman 1971.
\textsuperscript{206} Bremmer 1983: 90-92.
\textsuperscript{207} Hertz 1960: 84.
This may account for the ultimate private burial in Greece, namely in the home. The question concerning inhumation versus cremation has been debated by scholars and the inhumation of children as expressed in the Opheltes myth, as opposed to the cremation of full adults,\(^{208}\) has been thought to indicate a different status of the child in the afterlife. Bremmer disagrees and states that the type of burial has no connection to afterlife status but only to social status among the living.\(^{209}\) What is significant is the apparent lack of ceremony at child burials.\(^{210}\) Plutarch recognizes that funeral rites are absent for children according to the "ancestral and ancient usages and law."\(^{211}\) Some have explained this lack of funerary ceremony due to lack of affection for the infant,\(^{212}\) economic resources and also the incomplete transition of the soul into the world of the dead.\(^{213}\) Golden argues it could reflect sympathetic magic for the birth of more children or an unwillingness of the parent to say good-bye to their child forever.\(^{214}\) It might seem, however, that because children were thought to be in a closer relationship to the divine, this liminality would not require all the ceremony needed for an adult. Very few sources detail the resting place of infant souls after death and burial but the few that do

\(^{208}\) Plin. HN 7.72 "It is a universal custom not to cremate a person before the teething stage."


\(^{210}\) Bremmer 1983: 96 notes that around the world child burials are often simple or even "careless". Toynbee 1971, in his discussion of Roman burial practices, never specifically addressed infant burial.


\(^{212}\) Garland argues that this lack of affection only applies to newborns that die before the amphilomia. There is considerable grief, however, if death occurs before the Anthesteria, pp. 81-2.


clearly allot to them a position or condition apart from other “normal” souls.\(^{215}\) The titillating mention of infant souls given by Plato in the Myth of Er is significant. τῶν δὲ εὐθὺς γενομένων καὶ ὀλίγον χρόνον βιοῦντων περὶ ἄλλα ἔλεγεν οὐκ ἀξιαμνήμης: “Concerning infants who die at birth or live but a short time he had more to say, not worthy of mention.”\(^{216}\) Although Plato does not inform us exactly what it was he had to say on the topic, what is indicative is that these children were located in a spiritually marginal place after death. Since Er is recounting the plight of both sinners and good people, specifically describing where they go after death, the special reference to infants indicates that they are not counted among these two groups and, therefore, must go some place entirely different. They are not among the group to take the stairs up to heaven, nor are they part of the group that as sinners descend under the earth. They must reside in yet a different place in the afterlife. Their liminality in life translated into actual and perpetual liminality in death. It is also relevant to consider that whatever it was that allowed the other souls to continue on the journey of death, infants clearly lacked. In Homer’s nekuyia in the *Odyssey*, there is no mention at all of infants. However in Vergil's later work infant souls were the first thing heard over the River Styx and were followed by other marginal or aoroi souls (souls of the untimely dead): the falsely condemned, suicides, and suicides of lovers. An interesting statement comes from Sophocles that not to be born is best, “the second best is to have seen the light and then to go back quickly whence we came.” μὴ φύναι τὸν ἔποντα νὶκα λόγου. τὸ δ’, ἔπει φανή/ βύναι κεῖθεν ὑθεν περ ἥκειν πολὺ

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\(^{216}\) Pl. Resp. 10.613C.
This is an interesting commentary on the worth of life, and infants again emerge as the marginal, albeit more fortunate, beings. They had the "misfortune" of being born, yet they did not evolve into, what is implied, the "suffering" group of adults. They lived a short life but one that was without taint of adulthood - truly an age of innocence. The fate of babies who are obviously marginal seems to be perceived as a fortunate one. They not only escape the toils of adulthood but also the potential torment in the afterworld. Their essence is clearly different from that of the rest of society. Menander also expresses this belief "ο ν οι θεοί φιλοσοφούν, ἀποθνῄσκοντες νέοιοι." Those whom the gods love die young." So, the young soul is blessed not lamented.

The concept of the "untimely dead," or aoros souls, is well established in the Greek world. Infants who had died clearly fall within this realm. They did not have the chance to mature and officially join the community. Creusa, thinking that her infant son is dead, mourns that he is "Αἰδηδοῦ Ὑν ᾿αιδόμοις παῖδευται" in the house of Pluto a young guest." These "young guests", just like other aoros souls, had the power to return to the world of the living and either watch over their loved ones or haunt the living in search of vengeance.

Tragedy reflects many examples of this

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217 Soph. OC. 1224-1227.

218 Lattimore 1962. Lattimore's interpretation of this is that the children are not living with the gods after death but are chosen as fortunate to escape "the evils of life."


220 Eur. Ion ln. 953. On infants as aoroi souls: Lattimore 1962 says this term generally applied to older children but then concedes that abortions are sometimes included in this group.

221 Although Bremmer 1983: 73 does not agree that these marginal souls had the power to haunt; Lattimore 1962 also agrees that aoroi are not necessarily sinister.
belief. Euripides' *Hecuba* opens with the ghost of the murdered child Polydorus. His age is not clear, but he must have been rather young at his death because the ghost says that *...οὔτε γὰρ φέρειν ὅπλα οὔτε ἔγχος οἰς τῇ νεφεῷ θρακίον...* "...for my childish arm availed not to carry weapons or to wield the spear."  

He exemplifies an untimely dead in that his death robbed him of the opportunity to go to war where he might have been able to display his manhood and he was also one that was "unwept and unburied," characteristics that intensify his marginal status. As this condition would dictate, the opening of the tragedy shows him as a ghost hovering over his mother's head. An example in tragedy of the preoccupation of the aoros souls to search for vengeance can be seen in *Iphigeneia at Tauris*. In this version of the myth, the maiden was exchanged with a hind at the last moment before her intended sacrifice. She was taken, then, by Artemis to Tauris to become a priestess who sacrifices any lost Greek who comes to those shores. Although she is not technically dead and therefore does not qualify as aoros, Iphigeneia does represent the vengeance of the untimely dead because she was intended to have been one. In her story, she was to be sacrificed on behalf of the Greek fleet in order that they might sail off to Troy and so, in retribution, she spends her life robbing Greek sailors of their own lives.

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Expressions of Divine Will

There are several examples of children’s connection to and communication with the divine sphere. Although sources that mention the use of mandic, or prophetic, children are later than the era of focus in this study, we can assume that the same issues and beliefs about children as those in the classical period were at use. Apulian notes the use of young boys as mediums\textsuperscript{223} and Iamblichus explains that “the young and rather simple persons” are the individuals most capable of acting as mediums.\textsuperscript{224} Mediums become intermediaries between the divine and human worlds. They could either read the will of the gods through individual reason or divinatory practices, or they can become the vehicle through which the gods enter to reveal their desires. Similarly, those most liable to this ἐνθοσυλασμός, or divine possession, according to Olympiodorus, are children and country people because of their simpleness and lack of imagination, coinciding with Plutarch’s mention of the country-girl Pythia.\textsuperscript{225} Sexual purity is also a factor, as is a child’s “greater suggestibility,”\textsuperscript{226} which also implies simpleness.\textsuperscript{227} This idea that an uncluttered mind acts as a canvas upon which the divine can effect their desires places children in a different relationship with the gods from normal adults who have a host of concerns and ideas in their minds that preclude them from divine connection. But let us examine another circumstance. Pausanias

\textsuperscript{223} Apul. Apol. 42

\textsuperscript{224} Iambl. Myst. 157.14

\textsuperscript{225} Plut. Pyth. Orac. 22.405c

\textsuperscript{226} Hopfner 1926: 65ff.

\textsuperscript{227} see also Dodds 1951: 263 n. 70; 297, 309 n. 115.
mentions the foundation story of the Sanctuary of Persuasion located in Sikyon where seven boys and seven girls were sent to the river Sythas to pray to Apollo and Artemis in order that they lift a plague. Due to their supplications, the gods were persuaded to lift the plague and thereafter on festival days to Apollo, boys were sent to that same river to bring the gods into the sanctuary of Persuasion and then on to Apollo's temple.228 In this instance, the abilities of children, not the adults of the community, were the key to persuade the gods successfully to effect an end to the plague. Also, the children are seen to have a heightened communication and power over the gods to enable them to call the gods forth and bring them into the sacred precinct. It might seem, then, from this example that simpleness or purity were not the main factors in this heightened dialogue with the gods. The children were not passive receptacles through which a sacred act was performed, rather, they were active players conversing with the divine. This elevation of status would hardly seem to be the result of simplicity alone.

A more powerful characteristic is likely. A child's state of liminality would be just the condition necessary.229 A liminal being, by nature, is one who is floating between established norms of identification. This limbo, as we have seen, results in an increased vulnerability to danger. If this state heightens ones receptiveness to peril, then, the avenues are also open to communication with the divine. The gods and daemons could also take advantage of this opportunity in the young to express their will. Infants are, in fact, so “other” “they transcend the usual human limitations and enter into a

228 Paus. 2.7.7

229 This study had identified the liminality of children under the age of 3, but the liminality would linger until the child was officially recognized as an adult, which allows for the use of older, liminal children in divine communication.
privileged relationship with the gods." If these children are not fully within the realm of humanity, then they must be also existing in a realm outside the human sphere. I think, beyond this, and in a more practical sense, adults in a community listened to the children more because of this perceived connection with the gods.

In another example, the children were the only ones to surmise the true epithet of Artemis at Kondylae. Children playing around the statue of Artemis tied a rope they found around her neck and sang that Artemis was hanged. The adults heard this and stoned the children to death. Plague immediately ravaged the Kaphyans so that women were miscarrying. The Pythian priestess informed the adults of their grave error in not listening to the children and in killing them and she passed on the message from the divine to bury the children and honor them annually with offerings. The goddess clearly approved of her new epithet given her by the children because of her wrath against the adults. The children, not the adults, were able to read the goddess correctly and it was they whom the goddess supported and for whom she demanded continued honor. In this example we see several factors at work. The young were the only ones

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230 Golden 1990: 3.

231 Among the Fang in Africa, artistic representations of ancestor spirits were depicted with infantile characteristics because newborns were considered closest to the ancestor world having just come from there. These infants were thought to have just arrived from there and were slowly being weaned away through time into the human sphere.

232 As Golden argued, the extreme "otherness" of children, particularly infants, made them seem to be capable of stepping onto the other side of their liminality into a heightened state of communication with the divine.

233 On the metaphorical "strangled" voice in myth see Loraux 1987; Rhyman 1995.

234 Paus. 8.23.6.

235 Helen King 1985: 118 discusses this myth and identifies Artemis' role here as the protector of children and she equates this epithet with gynecological strangulation, yet she does not analyze WHY the children had the potential to correctly "read" the truth in the goddess.
to identify correctly the nature of Artemis at this location, something the adult community was incapable of doing. Secondly, the goddess clearly supported the children above the rest of the community, having established a closer connection to them. And finally, the command of the goddess brings us back to Ophelles. In both instances, the children were to be promptly buried and honored yearly by the community. The preeminence of these children in terms of acceptable adult recognition is significant. In neither circumstance was it sufficient to pay respects to the young dead after the tragedies but continued honor was necessary. The adult community must be reminded of the importance and power of children, the special affections to them from the gods and the power of Artemis herself.

Children play an interesting role in the Bacchae when the Bacchants in their frenzy swoop down on towns ... ἡρπαζον μὲν ἐκ δόμων τεκνα · ὀπόσα δ᾽ ἐπὶ ἤμοις θεσάν, οὐ δεσμῶν ὑπὸ/πρὸς ἐκεῖν οὐδ᾽ ἐπιπτεν εἰς μέλαν πέδον,/οὐ χαλκὸς, οὐ σιδηρὸς· ἐπὶ δὲ βοστρύχωις/
πῦρ ἐφερν,οὐδ᾽ ἔκαλεν. “They caught up little children from their homes, high on their shoulders, babes unheld, that swayed and laughed and fell not; all a wreck they made; Yea, bronze and iron did shatter, and in play struck hither and thither, yet no wound had they...” 236 The frenzied Bacchants and also the babes are unharmed, indicating they are both protected by the gods. The Bacchants are in the midst of their “possession” by the god and are obviously under his protection, but the children have not gone through any of the rituals the women have in order to gain this protection.

They were simply snatched right out of their homes. That the children, nevertheless, remained unharmed indicates they are in this protected status by nature.

Children are also seen as powerful tools of persuasion in the human sphere when Iphigeneia uses her infant brother, Orestes, as she tries to dissuade her father from sacrificing her. αἱ σήματα τοι/καν νηπίων γε τῶν κακῶν ἐγγίγνεται./ιδοῦ σιωπῶν λίσσεται σ’ ὀδ’, ὃ πάτερ. “O father, see! Even the children understand when sorrow comes! He asks for mercy though he cannot speak.”

The use of the infant Orestes seems to be the last desperate attempt at dissuasion. In the opening scene of *Oedipus*, a plague is raging through the city of Thebes and a group of what I believe to be infants/toddlers are supplicating Oedipus for relief. Ὄ τέκνα, Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαι νέα τροφῆ, “O children, latest to be reared from the stock of Kadmus.”

They are the young “who cannot yet fly far.” οἱ μὲν οὖδὲν ὑπάρχω μακρὰν/πτεροθαί σεινοντες,... indicating a tender young age, but as the priest must speak for them indicates possible infancy or toddlerhood. It is significant that the tragedy opens up with a congregation of infants. There had been numerous supplicants whom Oedipus had only agreed to hear through a messenger. This group of toddlers was the only group that Oedipus chose to meet with personally. Oedipus seems to be acknowledging some special status of the young by separating them from the rest of the citizenry and granting them a personal hearing. If children were seen as having

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237 Eur. ἸΑ 1243-4.

238 Soph. ὈΤ. 1.

239 Soph. ὈΤ 16-17.

240 Sifakis 1979 mentions this scene but says nothing about it because the children so not themselves speak.
heightened prophetic powers or divine connection, Oedipus' actions are more than understandable.

**Social Indicators**

Another effect of infant liminality emerges in the belief that children serve as powerful indicators of society and that their well-being presages the well-being of the state. Herodotus describes an Egyptian experiment to discern which race on earth was the oldest. Two children were raised among the flocks, never being spoken to by a human, to see which language they spoke first. After two years, the first word spoken by the children was a Phrygian word, which to the Egyptians solved the question about the first race.241 What Herodotus is describing is an early experiment in sociology and indicates an interest in infants and what they can tell us about our human existence, however flawed it may be. Incidents relating to children serve as metaphorical prognostication of events and is reflected in the primary message in the Opheltes myth.

In our key myth, the presence of Opheltes and his nurse Hypsipyle during the search for water and his subsequent death had far-reaching implications for the Seven Against Thebes and reflects the significance of children to society in general. When Polynices and his companions met up with Opheltes and his nurse, there was a glimmer of hope that relief might come to their parched throats. Here Opheltes symbolizes hope and prosperity, hence his name “bringer of increase”. However, soon thereafter, his death marked the first of a long string of deaths in an ill-fated expedition.

241 Hdt. 2.2.
It is here he earns his name Archemoros, "beginner of doom." Beyond the principal message, the myth instructs us in other equally important issues concerning infants.

For the interests of society, small children represent a kind of litmus test concerning the well-being of the community. Their presence indicates the vitality and hopeful future of the state while catastrophic events involving children marked an inevitable danger. The idea that children are the future of the state is illustrated in tragedy. When Andromache and her son, Molossus, are saved from the murderous plot of Hermione and Menelaus, Thetis promises that the child will begin a new line of kings combining and carrying on the family lines of Achilles and the city of Troy.

...βασιλέα δ' ἐκ τοῦ δε χρῆ
ἀλλον δ' ἀλλοι διαπεράν Μολοσίας
εὐδαιμονούντας.

For it is fated that his descendants one through another will rule over Molossia in happiness.\(^{242}\)

Generations in a blood line as well as an entire race are embodied in a child. It is interesting that Molossus will represent both the continuation of a specific man's name as well as a society as a whole, displaying once again the duality in a child. Euripides again focuses on the theme that a child is the future of the state when, in \textit{The Trojan Women}, a death decree is pronounced for Hector's infant son, Astyanax, who is the embodiment of the continuation of the Trojan line. With all of the Trojan men either dead or missing, this small child is himself the only seed for a resurrection of the city of Troy. For this reason, the Greeks sentence him to death as a completion of their destruction of the city. They have already demolished the city itself and its citizens and

\(^{242}\) Eur. \textit{Andr.} 1247-1249.
now they will extinguish any possibility of a future resurgence. Luckily the
conventions of tragedy do not allow us to witness the piteous deed but we do see the
babe's grandmother, Hecuba, presiding over the burial. She chides the Greeks for their
tremendous fear of the boy and she says that his tombstone should read: “There lieth
here a babe whom the Greeks feared and in their fear slew him.”

In her misery, Hecuba is angered at the intense fear of a mere infant, but, seen in the context of the
social significance of infancy, this fear is perfectly justifiable. The child Astyanax is
the tiny embodiment of an entire race and the potentiality of its return.

Ill fortune for a state is also represented in children. Herodotus mentions that a
state’s imminent disaster will be foretold in the deaths of the children. He clearly states
that “great evils” are preceded by warnings communicated through the well-being of the
children. One hundred Chian (youths) were sent to Delphi and ninety-eight of them
contracted an illness and died. Only two of them returned home. Then a school room
roof collapsed during school hours killing one hundred nineteen children. Soon, the
Chians were engaged in a seafight with Histiaeus in which they were totally defeated.

κατά μέν σφί σημεία δ' θεός προέδρευε, μετά δὲ ταύτα ἡ ναυμαχία ἐν
ὑπολογούσα ἐς γόνυ τὴν πόλιν ἔβαλε, “God showed them these signs;
thereafter, the sea fight broke upon them and brought the city to its knees...”

In mythology the birth of certain individuals that pose potential danger to the family or
state are accompanied by omens or other warnings. The threat is seen even at birth.

243 cf Herod’s killing of all the children under the age of 2.

244 Hdt. 6.27.
Oedipus was born with an omen that he would literally kill his father, necessitating his mutilation and exposure. Cyrus was born accompanying a dream of Astyages, his grandfather, that a vine shading all of Asia emanated from his daughter’s loins. Interpreters concluded that to signify the child would take Astyages’ throne. Cyrus, too, was sent to be exposed in an attempt to avert the usurpation about to be caused by the infant. The birth of Paris foretold even greater disaster. His mother, Hecuba, dreamt she gave birth to a firebrand and so the child was exposed. Having been rescued from exposure and later grown, his identity was revealed—Cassandra prophesied that he would be the destruction of Troy. Here, the whole city groans under the birth of this particular infant. Also, Plutarch tells us that among many portents surrounding the conception and birth of Alexander, the most ominous was that the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus burned at the same time Alexander the Great was born. This was thought to signal the destruction of Asia.

εἰκότως γάρ ἐφη καταφλεξῆναι τὸν νεῶν τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἀσχολούμενης περὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου μαίων. δόσοι δὲ τῶν μάγων ἐνέφεσω διατρίβοντες ἔτυχον, τὸ περὶ νεῶν πάδος ἠγούμενοι πάθους ἔτερον σημείον εἶνα, διέθεσιν τὰ πρόσωπα τυπόμενοι καὶ βοῶντες ἄτην δῆμα καὶ συμφορὰν μεγάλην τῇ Ἀσίᾳ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην τετοκέναι.

It was no wonder that the temple of Artemis was burned down, since the goddess was busy bringing Alexander into the world. But all the Magi who were then at Ephesus, looking upon the temple’s disaster as a sign of further disaster, ran about beating their faces and crying aloud that woe and great calamity for Asia had that day been born.246

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245 Hdt. 1. 108.

246 Plut. Alex. 3.3-4.
Mythologically, the danger of a newborn can be seen on a grandiose scale. So, the family of the newborn may not always be the recipient of the danger but the child’s impact on the world at least is sometimes thought to be signalled at its birth. Similarly, Opheltes also served as an indicator of both future fortune and misfortune alike due to his infant condition.

We have seen throughout this chapter that the adult perception of the child was wrought with conflicting attitudes of joy and apprehension. It is within the very characteristics of infants that engendered a sense of foreboding into the power these little creatures possessed and also an overpowering need to protect these children from many dangers that threatened it. State interest in childrearing, therefore, may be seen as crucial for the continuation of community strength and morale. For these reasons there were written and unwritten laws concerning the care of infants and children. After Plato discusses the unwritten laws of infant care, he admits that all women should follow these precepts and when they are followed the household will be managed well.

If an individual household is in order, then καὶ χρώμενος εὖ τὴν τε οἶκιαν καὶ πόλιν ἄμα τὴν αὐτοῦ δοικῶν εὖδαιμονόι “both his household and his state may achieve happiness.”247 The state, the individual οἶκος and infants are, then, inextricably connected. Once we have gained an understanding into the relationship between adults and children, we can more fully appreciate the course of care for their young.

247 Pl. Leg. 7.790B.
CHAPTER 4

SURROGATE CHILD-CARE

Universality of surrogate child-care

The second major element of the myth of Opheltes centers around the negligent care given by the child’s nurse, Hypsipyle. She was given care of her charge by the boy’s father even though his mother, Eurydice, was present and capable of nurturing the child herself. This raises the question about how common a practice it was for someone other than the mother herself to care for infants. It also touches on the issue of the safety in this kind of childcare. In the Opheltes case, Hypsipyle, in the end, offered anything but safe and successful care. What comment is being made about the reliability, efficacy and necessity of surrogate childcare? The first issue here is the necessity of infant care in general. In light of the ancient attitude concerning the condition and the importance of children, there was a heightened sense of anxiety about the successful passage of children through this marginal period into the “safer” period of adolescence.\(^\text{248}\) The many dangers such as illness and possibly death that lurk in childhood, particularly infancy, threatened this successful passage. From the moment a child is born it is in need of care on three levels: physical, psychological and religious. The most obvious necessity for an infant is the feeding of milk, the only intake of food

\(^{248}\) By “safer” I mean that, physically and socially, they have more fully shed their “otherness.”
for the first period of life.\textsuperscript{249} This need for nursing is extended to encompass a host of other daily needs for the baby, increasing the importance of the infant's caretaker, since infants were seen as soft, marginal beings that were in constant need of shaping and also in need of protection from allowing their "otherness" to become too "other."

Plato advises that children be carried for the first two to three years so their limbs would not become distorted by the exertion of too much pressure on them. Their little bodies should be made accustomed to the elements to which an adult is exposed. Therefore, someone must constantly be in the presence of the babe to see to these needs and also to detect a possible illness or problem. This explains the crucial element of Hypsipyle's negligence when she set the baby down contrary to accepted norms at the time. In addition, the caretaker attends to the child's psychological needs and molds the child's character to be acceptable in society. The seeds of appropriate and inappropriate qualities are present in the newborn and effort must be taken to foster and accentuate the appropriate qualities and minimize the undesirable ones. As an example, crying and sleeplessness, being caused by the internal motion of fear that leads to cowardice, must be overcome with the external motion of rocking to implant courage. So, if fear is present in an infant and overcomes a child, crying, sleeplessness and cowardice result. The act of rocking was a method by which this negative trait could be surmounted by its opposite, courage. Plato even advises that the best surroundings for an infant is on the sea where it would receive continual rocking,\textsuperscript{250} but since this would not be possible in

\textsuperscript{249} Aristotle takes note of this need, Arist. Pol. VII. 1336a.

\textsuperscript{250} Pl. Leg. 790.
most cases, the caretaker should rock the child as much as possible.\textsuperscript{251} The need to prevail over the negative is a constant and ongoing one. Because a child is an integral part of the state, it must also be molded to fit the state’s conception of its citizenry and, therefore, must be molded “to suit the form of government under which he lives.”\textsuperscript{252} And so, the child cannot be allowed to exhibit just any traits, but only those that conform to the structure of the state as a whole. Education, then, is the process of integration for the child into the state and is an essential part of nurturing that must be initiated in infancy. Quintilian says that the process of training an orator specifically must begin \textit{ab infantia}\textsuperscript{253} and Aristotle specifies that the beginning of infant education is the rattle of Archytas, “a capital invention,” which amuses them and prevents them from breaking anything in the house.

\begin{quote}
καὶ τὴν ἀρχύτου πλαταγῆν οἴεσθαι γε νέσθαι καλῶς, ἢν διδάσκῃ τοῖς παιδίοις ὀπως χρώμενοι τὰυτή μηδὲν καταγυώσαν τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκίαν· οὐ γὰρ δύναται τὸ νέον ἡσυχάζειν.
\end{quote}

... and one must think Archytas’ rattle a good invention, which people give to children in order that while occupied with this they may not break any of the furniture; for young things cannot keep still.\textsuperscript{254}

In comparison with Plato’s advice on how to conquer fear in an infant, Aristotle’s solution is similar in that the inappropriate behavior is supplanted or overridden by a

\textsuperscript{251} Arist. \textit{Pol.} VII 1336a.

\textsuperscript{252} Arist. \textit{Pol.} VIII 1337a.

\textsuperscript{253} Book 1.1.

\textsuperscript{254} Arist. \textit{Pol.} VIII 1340b.
more positive one. He goes on to equate the rattle of infancy with formal education for older children. Lastly, children also have religious needs. Aside from formal rituals inducting them into society, infants, as marginal beings, must be protected from an external attack by demons as the discussion of protective amulets above has shown. Due to the many needs during infancy, a constant caretaker must be present to guide the child safely through this period of life.

Let us now examine what person it would be who would accept this caretaking role. On one level, the state itself would serve as the general caregiver for all its children. Just as an individual person and the seek to perpetuate themselves through the birth of children, so too the community as a whole survives through the procreative process. The polis is, after all, an association of many and so a new life would also reflect the growing strength of society. Laws concerning the benefits to parents on producing children express this idea. Even the word for offspring means also interest, indicating the inherent benefit of children. The state also has a vested interest in the well-being of small children because their safety is in direct relation to that of the state. If the children prosper, the future of the state is felt to be more secure. Because of this, society has a vested interest in the newborn and a desire to see it flourish successfully. In Aristotle's Politics, the state's interest in the birth of a child becomes abundantly clear in that everyone is a part of the state, so .

255 In the Roman , an infant is immediately given an amulet, , to help in this protection but one can assume that the constant attendance of the caretaker also serves this purpose to some extent. see Blumner 1966: 83-84.

256 Plut. Lyc. 15.1-2; Lys. 30.5; Mar. 227ff; Arist. Pol. 2.1270b.

the care of each part is inseparable from the care of the whole.\textsuperscript{258} So, the rearing/nurturing of small children is, in its literal sense, the rearing/nurturing of the state. Here we can see that a newborn not only reflects the growing strength of an individual family but also the state in general.

Plato takes this concept further when he documents Socrates’ ideal state μηκανώμεοι διὸς μηδείς ποτέ τὸ γεγενημένον αὐτῷ ἰδία γνώσις το, νυμφοῦσί δὲ πάντες πάντας αὐτοὺς ὀμογενεῖς, “where no one should recognize his own offspring but society as a whole should be regarded as his family.”\textsuperscript{259} Therefore, the state takes over as parent to nurse and rear the child and all biological ties are not only unknown but irrelevant.\textsuperscript{260} This is obviously an extreme view, but, the importance of the state as parent symbolizes the relationship a state has with a newborn and the significance that child holds for the future of the state. When the children of Heracles are in danger of being murdered by Lycus and they have come to Athens in the hope of protection, Amphitryon argues for Athenian aid. He proclaims that Hellas herself should be protecting them. Here he has verbalized the idea that children are, in essence, the children of the state and it is ultimately the obligation of the state to protect them. Pausanias says that “Corinth nursed” the abandoned infant Oedipus,\textsuperscript{261} also

\textsuperscript{258} Arist. \textit{Pol.} VIII 1337a; Stanton 1990: 7.

\textsuperscript{259} Pl. \textit{Tr}. 18 C-D.

\textsuperscript{260} This scenario is the basis for Lois Lowry’s book \textit{The Giver} where a highly controlled society uses women as Birthmothers and then the children are assigned to other parents in the community to be raised. In this way each member of society is groomed most effectively for the best interests of the state. Also the same theme in \textit{Handmaid’s Tale} and \textit{A Brave New World}.

\textsuperscript{261} Paus. 10.5.3.
exemplifying the idea that “it takes a village to raise a child.” In her study on mothering in modern Greece, Doumanis noted two recent trends. The traditional one she observed employed an intricate and continual network of women in the village, caring and watching out for the collective young. Women in the modern cities, such as Athens, who have broken with tradition by moving away from family were saddled with the frustrating task of accomplishing the job of childraising solo. The traditional procedure reflects this ancient philosophy that the biological parents are not, and should not, be the sole caretakers of the very young.

The most logical and immediate caretakers would be the infant's own mother and father. Psychologically, it is a natural instinct for a parent to have the desire to protect and nurture his/her young. But, in the ancient world, the parent was not always the first candidate to assume the role as caregiver. Nurses, sisters/brothers, grandparents and, as seen above, society even stepped in to nurture and protect infants and children when parents were not around to do so, and even when they were. Parents did, however, feel the strong desire to assist and love their own children, whether they had additional help in the task of nurturing or not.

A choral proclamation states, δίκαια τούς τεκόντας ὧφελεῖν τέκνα/ πατέρα τε πρέσβυν τὴν τε κοινωνόν γάμων. “Tis only right that parents should

262 African proverb; Clinton 1996.

263 Doumanis 1983.

264 In her 1973 study of the art of breastfeeding, Raphael 1973 notes that cross-culturally there is a tradition to “mother the mother” before, during and after the birth of a child. This technique is accomplished by other experienced mothers to help the woman through the fairly difficult transition into motherhood. This tradition is performed in part to secure the successful nurture and feeding of the newborn, increasing its chances of survival. So, again, we see a community stepping into the child-care role for the sake of the infant 20-23.

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help their children." The reference here is to "help" and not to "raise" indicating a distinction between the parents' role as a giver of aid and not a giver of nurture, a duty that generally seemed to fall to others. This is a very important point because I will argue below that it was a common practice to employ or use a surrogate care-giver for an infant in order to perform the day-to-day tasks of infant nurture. This is not to say, however, that parents, particularly mothers, did not love and protect their young even if a surrogate were used. As we shall see, it was just not necessary, or not safe, that only the mother cared for the baby. Important for the parent was to maintain his/her affection for their young and offer aid to the child when it was needed. In the tragedy Madness of Heracles, the underlying theme is the significance of and the protection of the children of Heracles. It is an extraordinary analysis of the different elements in a society that come together to protect children ranging from the grandfather, Amphitryon, their mother, Megara, and finally their father, Heracles. Amphitryon, in his hope for his own son's return (so that he, then, might save the children), is concerned that the children are emotionally protected from the danger, and tells Megara to soothe them with lies. ἄλλης ἡσύχας καὶ δακρυφόλους τέκνων/ πηγάς ἀφαίρει καὶ παρευκῆλε λόγοις/ κλέπτουσα μύθοις ἀθλίους κλοπᾶς ὀμοιώς. Megara announces her desire to protect her children and adds, ἐγὼ φίλῳ μέν τέκνα πᾶς γὰρ οὗ φίλῳ ἀτικτόν, ἀμόχθησα; "I love my children; strange if I did not love those whom I labored to bring forth!" When Heracles finally enters to rescue

265 Eur. HF. 583-584.

266 Eur. HF. 98-100.

267 ibid. 280-281.
the children, he also verbalizes his desire to be their protector. After all of his heroic deeds, he says that none of them would be noble if he did not try to save his children. τὲ γὰρ μ᾽ ἀμύνειν μᾶλλον ἦ διάμαρτι χρή/ καὶ παισὶ καὶ γέροντι:
χαίροντων πόνοι/ μάτην γὰρ αὐτοὺς τᾶνδε μᾶλλον ἠνυσα. For whom should I defend above my wife and sons and aged sire? Great toils, farewell! Vainly I wrought them, leaving these unhelped.268 The following image is a touching one where Heracles leads his children into the house like a ship towing smaller vessels behind. He has stepped into his role as paternal protector. . . . καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἀναίνομαι/ θεράπευμα τέκνων, πάντα τάνθρωπων ἱσά. / φιλοῦσι παιδας οἴ τ᾽ ἄμείνονες βροτῶν/ οἴ τ᾽ οὐδὲν δυνεὶς· χρήμασιν δὲ διὰφοροὶ/ χοὐσίν, οἴ δ᾽ οὐ· πᾶν δὲ φιλότεκνον γένος. "...for I do not reject the care of my children, here all mankind are equal; all love their children, both those of high estate and those having nothing; in wealth they differ; some have, others do not; but all the human race loves its offspring."269 A universal sentiment is expressed here and it proves that parental/maternal attachment is not necessarily a given.270 Agamemnon's acceptance of care for his children is revealed in Iphigeneia's plea to him not to sacrifice her, τί δ᾽ ἀρ᾽ ἐγὼ σέ;...πάτερ/ πόνων τιθηνούς ἀποδοῦσα σοὶ τροφὰς;
“What shall I do? ...Pay you for all your nursing care of me?”271 Although the reason for the young girl's pleadings is imminent murder, which will be discussed below,

268 ibid 574-576.

269 ibid. 632-636.

270 see p. 107 on parental/ maternal detachment.

271 Eur. IΑ 1228, 1230.
Agamemnon had, in the past, cared for his own offspring. When Creusa abandoned her infant son, Ion, it was Apollo who nurtured him.\textsuperscript{272} Apollo represents the divine form of mortal paternal care and protection. All of these citations seem to be reiterating the obvious natural instinct of parental affection and desire to help their young.

Instances of maternal care is more frequent because the mother, having borne the child, is more closely associated with the care of the infant.\textsuperscript{273} Tragedy gives us glimpses into the relationship of mother and child where the mother tenderly protects and cares for her infant. Iphigeneia fondly remembers the tiny brother she left behind at the time of her intended sacrifice, τὸν δέ Ἀργεὶ διαθέντα κλαίω σύγγγονών, ὃν ἔλιπον ἐπιμαστί ὑπὸν/ ἔτι βρέφος, ἔτι νέον, ἔτι θάλας/ ἐν χερσὶ ματρὸς πρὸς στέρνοις τῷ/ Ἀργεὶ σκηπτούχον Ὀρέστην. \textquoteleft\textquoteleft At Argos I bewail my brother whom I left an infant at the breast, a beauteous bud, whose opening charms then blossomed in his mother's arms;\textquoteright\textquoteright A charming scene of mother and budding infant reiterates this tender bond to the mind of the audience. The fate of this relationship between the infant, Orestes, and his mother, however, could not have escaped the listeners' minds. In the moment of crisis, Clytemnestra begs for Achilles' help when she learns of her husband's dastardly deceit concerning their daughter δεινὸν τὸ τίκτειν καὶ φέρει φίλτρον μέγα/ πᾶσιν τε κοινὸν ὡσθ' υπερκάμμενην τέκνων. \textquoteleft\textquoteleft There speaks a mother's heart, the thrill of love; she will

\textsuperscript{272} Eur. \textit{Ion} 1601.

\textsuperscript{273} On mother's care \textquoteleft\textquoteleft by nature\textquoteright Lerner 1968: 38-42.

\textsuperscript{274} Eur. \textit{IT} 230-234.
dare all things for her children's sake." Maternal protection here is strong and almost desperate. Even death does not prevent Alcestis from trying to protect and care for her children. Her last prayer to the Spirit of the hearth is for them to, τέκνα

ὄφρανεύοντας τάμα... / μηδ' ὀδηρώντας ὑπεχόστ' ἀπόλλυμαι/ θανεῖν ὀδύρους παιδας,... "Take care of my children for me,... do not let them die like me... untimely." As well as long, happy lives, she also prays for a generous wife for her son and a good husband for her daughter, extending her concern for their well-being far beyond childhood and into their adulthood. Despite these touching and natural scenes of the mother/child relationship, I will argue that this does not reflect a universal image in ancient Greece. Because the mother’s role is so crucial to the development and survival of a child, literature explores the extremes of both positive and negative aspects of this power. The exalted image of mother as a loving, selfless caregiver is often memorialized, but literature also gives rise to the fear that a mother’s power engenders. Nancy Schepere-Hughes studied this distortion and noted that a genre of nightmarish mothers evolves from it. This is certainly true for the image of mothers in ancient Greece.

Images of maternal breastfeeding are also seen throughout tragedy. As mentioned above, Iphigeneia remembers her infant brother at their mother's breast presumably nursing, ἑρείτε, παῖδος μητέρων θεραμμέναι. "Take heart

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275 Eur. IA 917-918.
277 Schepere-Hughes 1987: 3.
children nourished by your mother's milk."²⁷⁸ is a direct reference to actual maternal nursing as is Polyxena's words of farewell to her mother as she is led off to die ὃ 
στερνα μαστοὶ θεῖ, διὶ μ', ἔθερψαθ' ἡδεῶς. "Ah! Bosom and breast that fed me 
with sweet food!"²⁷⁹ Orestes wrestles with his emotions as he builds the courage to 
help in the plot to murder his own mother φεῦ. πῶς γὰρ κτάνω νῦν, ἢ μ', ἔθεσε 
kατεκν; "Alas! how can I slay her that bore and suckled me?"²⁸⁰ The chorus of 
mothers of the slain Seven Against Thebes bemoan all the wasted care they lavished on 
their now dead sons. ἰὼ ἰὼ· ποῦ δὲ πόνος ἐμὼν τεκνων; ποὺ λοχευμάτων 
χάρις/ ἱροφαί τε ματρός δυναὶ τ' ὄμματων τέλη/ καὶ φίλαι 
προσβολαί προσώπων; "Woe is thee! Where is now the toil I spent upon my sons? 
What thanks for childbirth? Where the mother's nursing care, the sleepless devotion of 
her eyes? the loving touch of her face?"²⁸¹ These examples of maternal affection from 
tragedy stand out, however, sharply against the remaining instances of troubled 
maternal relationships and unsuccessful child care. Again, I refer to the use of tragedy 
as a reflection of social norms and in these examples we see some tender instances of 
maternal affection. The audience must have identified with these scenes and therefore 
they may serve as an element of verisimilitude in the tragedy.

Hesiod describes conditions of human life in the age of the Silver Race of man 
which were by no means the Golden ideal but at least they were far better than the

²⁷⁸ Aesch. Sept. 792.
²⁷⁹ Eur. Hec. 424.
²⁸⁰ Eur. El. 969.
²⁸¹ Eur. Suppl. 1133-1137.
present age where ἀλλ' ἐκατόν μὲν παῖς ἔτεα παρὰ μητέρι κεδνὴ/ ἕτοιμαν ἀτάλλων, μεγά νῆπιος, ὅ ἐνι οἶκῳ. "a child was brought up by the side of his dear mother for a hundred years, playing in his house as a mere baby."282

As Hesiod continues, these infants then mature after 100 years and their demise is imminent. Sinfulness and irreverence to the gods incurred the wrath of Zeus and they were hidden away in the earth. Hesiod’s Silver Age scenario expresses several levels of interpretation. On one level, he recognizes that it was only after the period of infancy where the capability of sin arose and therefore incurred divine wrath. The period of infancy is, then, a period of innocence which entitles the child to a century of nurture. On another level, Hesiod is painting an image of an ideal, an infant utopia. Here, the near perfect ideal for infant care is expressed where the mother acts as the primary caregiver and the child enjoys one hundred years of blissful infancy. Hesiod's point is clear, however, that although this is the ideal, man is now far from the age of the Race of Silver and therefore this utopian period of infancy is gone. The ideal is clearly not met.

There are many more references in tragedy, however, to the care of infants and children performed by those other than the parents themselves, often when the mother was also present and capable of accepting the task. For the specific task of nursing infants, there is considerable evidence to conclude that hired nurses were frequently used by all social classes in Greece.283 This is not to say that no mother undertook the

282 Hes. WD. 130-131.

task to nurse her own child, only that wet-nursing was a common practice. These nurses took over the actual nursing of infants as well as assume the role as nurturer and protector of children. These wet-nurses employed by a parent were generally slaves or sometimes low-born professionals who were given the infant to nurse and provide care until the child was two to three years of age and often beyond. Karydas examines the nurse as an influential authority figure within the family as a whole.\textsuperscript{284} As our myth of the infant Opheltes illustrates, Hypsipyle was a slave charged by Lykurgus to provide childcare for the boy. In some instances, nurses were employed when the mother had died or was away from the child either temporarily or permanently. Ion, having been exposed by his mother as an infant, was raised by a priestess in the temple of Apollo at Delphi. \textit{οὐπόποτ' ἔγνων ματον· ἱδ' ἐθρηψέμε.../φοίβου προφητίν μητέρ' ὡς νομίζομεν. "I never knew a breast. She nourished me... the priestess of Apollo: as a mother I call her."}\textsuperscript{285} With the abandonment of the child by his mother, Apollo entrusted his son to another woman in order to save his life. This priestess took on the role of mother completely. When the mother of Rhesus, a Muse, refused to accept the care of her child, she threw him into his father, the Strymon River, \textit{ἐκτραφεὶς κάλλιστα παρθένων ὑπὸ/θρήκης ἀνάσων πρῶτος ἡθ' ἀνδρῶν, τέκνων. "...and he received and to no mortal nursing gave his child, but to the Maidens of the wave. And well they nursed you,"}\textsuperscript{286} Ge nursed her grandson, Zeus, when Rhea was unable to care for her own child herself because of the danger posed by

\textsuperscript{284} Karydas 1998.

\textsuperscript{285} Eur. \textit{Ion} 319.

\textsuperscript{286} Eur. \textit{Rhes}. 930- 931.
her husband Cronos. The “trick” was necessary to protect the life of Zeus and so a nurse was the only means of escape.\textsuperscript{287} In all of these instances, the nurse plays a positive and crucial role that led to the survival of these children.

Oftentimes, however, the use of a nurse was employed under the supervision of the mother herself as in our case with Eurydice and Hypsipyle. When Iphigeneia finally recognizes the true identity of her brother, she recalls, τότ' ἐτὶ βρέφος ἔλιπον ἔλιπον ἀγκάλας/ σὲ νεαρὸν τροφὸν νεαρὸν ἐν δόμοις. “Thee yet an infant in your nurse’s arms I left, a babe I left thee in the house.”\textsuperscript{288} This is an interesting point to which I will return later, but as we know, Iphigeneia also recalled her last image of her brother in their mother’s arms. We do not know of any estrangement between Clytemnestra and Orestes during his infancy and so we must assume that the nurse was employed as one of Orestes’ caregivers under Clytemnestra’s supervision. It is this nurse of Orestes, Cilissa, who mourns the false news of his death. φίλον δ’ Ὀρέστην, τὴς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβῆν, ἃν δὲ ξέρωνα ὑποτάσσεσθαι ἐξεγερέναι... ἐν διπλᾶς ἐκ τάσσε χειρωναζ ἵασ/ ἔχουσα Ὀρέστην ἐξεδεξάμην πατρὶ. “darling Orestes! I wore out my life for him. I took him from his mother, brought him up... I, with these two handicrafts, received Orestes from the hand of his father.”\textsuperscript{289} In Ovid, Myrrha tragically falls in love with her own father.

When in frustration she turns to commit suicide, it was her nurse who bared her own

\textsuperscript{287} Hes. \textit{Theog.} Cronos ate all of his children when they were born, so Rhea gave him a swaddled rock to swallow rather than her newborn Zeus. He was hidden away on the island of Crete and nursed by others including a goat and bees.

\textsuperscript{288} Eur. \textit{IT} 834-835.

\textsuperscript{289} Aesch. \textit{Cho.} 749-750, 761-762.
breasts and pleaded with Myrrha to tell her her troubles. *instat anus canosque suos et inania nudans ubera/ per cunal alimentaque prima precatur, ut sibi/ committat, quicquid dolet.* “She stood making a show of her gray hair, her skinny old useless breasts, begging her, by her cradle, her baby milk, to tell her all her troubles.”

Euripides’ Medea also employed a nurse for her children even though she was still physically available for them.

The nurse, then, was employed by the parents to perform all the menial tasks associated with infant care while the mother simply presided over the household. There are many examples of grave steles erected by the nurse, not the mother, for infants who had died, and many sources attest to the strong affection developed between them which often extended into the child’s adulthood. Dyfri Williams analyzed a red-figure hydria with a scene of a seated woman handing over an infant to another woman. Williams interprets this scene as a celebration of woman’s functions: production of children, raising the young and household management. If this, indeed, is a synopsis of the place and function of women, then it seems the handing over of infants to a surrogate care-giver was at least a common and uncontroversial part of motherhood.

Men were also used as child caregivers. An old man, who had been a servant of Agamemnon’s in the past, wonders about the young daughter of his master ὑπὸ ποι. 

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290 Ovid *Met.* 10. 391-393.


This old man also served as caregiver to Orestes and, even possibly, Agamemnon himself. It was he who nurture these children but he also stepped into the role as protector; it was he, he says, who snatched Orestes from death. Phoinix reminisces about how he cared for young Achilles and how he would hold the babe on his knees, cut up his food for him and suffered many a soiled shirt when the child would spit up wine on him. The Kouretes were called the “nurses” to the infant Zeus as well as “guardians,” according to the Cretan story, the Kouretes are said to be the nurses and the guardians of Zeus. Therefore, we see that surrogate caregivers of many types fulfilled many of the parents' roles while the parents were actually present in the household. According to legend, animals could also be employed to act as wet-nurses to infants. In certain variations of the deceit of Rhea to protect the infant Zeus, bees acted as wet-nurses and also nymphs nursed the baby with

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297 Strabo *x.*472. See Harrison 1962:23ff for a discussion of the Kouretes as the focus of a Cretan initiation cult for boys.
the milk of the goat, Almalthea. A he-goat cared for the abandoned infant Attis and a
deer nursed Telephos, Herakles’ son.\textsuperscript{298}

Although there have been a few studies recently on this practice in Rome,\textsuperscript{299} unfortunately there have been surprisingly few works concerning the Greek use of wet-
nurses.\textsuperscript{300} Dixon discusses the Roman use of the practice and the general lack of
intimacy between mother and child.\textsuperscript{301} Bradley examines Roman wet-nursing practices
and the sexual regulations associated with it, arguing that it was prevalent among all
classes of Roman society.\textsuperscript{302} He compiled a list of possible reasons for its use. First
and foremost, the possibility of the death of the mother or the physical inability of the
mother to nurse her own child necessitated the use of a wet-nurse. In this instance,
there would be a safeguard to ensure that the infant would have all necessities met
which would aid in its survival. Bradley also states that, for the upper class, it may have
been used due to vanity of the mother- to avoid disfigurement and free the woman
socially so that she was not bound at home for the child's care- and also because of the
view that the practice of nursing infants was a labor not fit for the aristocracy. For these
reasons, the employment of a wet-nurse would excuse the mother from the
unpleasantness associated with infant care. Bradley explains the practice of wet-nursing
among slaves because the master might order a slave child to be wet-nursed by another

\textsuperscript{298} Paus. 7.17.5 (on Attis), 9.31.1 (on Telephos). Calder 1983 on the possibility of this practice in rural
Greece.


\textsuperscript{300} Rosaria (1917); references in Golden; Bradley 1991; Herfst 1922.

\textsuperscript{301} Dixon 1988.

\textsuperscript{302} Bradley 1991.
slave to enable the mother to return to her duties immediately and also allow another conception sooner. Economically, this would benefit the master by consolidating infant care to fewer women, thereby allowing more productive work by the remainder and also providing the opportunity for the production of more slaves. This argument, however, does not explain the practice among the middle class. Finally, Bradley argues that a compelling reason for wet-nursing may lie in the lack of concern for infants or the need of the parents to emotionally distance themselves from the infant because of the ever present danger of infant mortality, an “emotional prophylactic” as he calls it. The reasons for wet-nursing that Bradley sites may very possible find parallels among the Greeks also employing wet-nurses, however, this particular argument does not seem to apply to Greek culture in my interpretation of the parental conception of the child. As I have argued above, because of the significance of children in the lives of the Greeks and also because there seems to be no lack of affection for children at this time, the theory of an “emotional prophylactic” is not persuasive. Rather, in the Greek context, it is more reasonable to conclude that the reality of possible infant death results in an elevated concern for the well-being of the child and therefore a “constant medical alert” surrounded the infant. The very benefit of a child to the family and state and the anxiety associated with infancy precluded the possibility of an attempt at emotional distancing. Bradley, I think, rightly suggests that the reasons for the practice of wet-nursing are elusive and that the important issue is the effect of this practice on the

303 Piers 1978: 44-55 discusses the same reasoning behind the Medieval and Renaissance use of wet-nurses.

304 Golden 1990: 84.
family and society as a whole. Bradley has, however, overlooked two very important motives for the use of surrogate care: religious demands and patriarchal order. Piers discusses the use of wet-nurses from the 14th-17th c. when they were employed to care for the numbers of unwanted and orphaned children. Contrary to these “unwanted” babies, the Greeks employed a wet-nurse specifically for wanted children. The importance of child-care necessitated competent help.

**Religious Need for Surrogacy**

On a religious level, the child needs constant care because of its delicate liminal state. An effective caregiver and protector is needed in the face of these potential demonic and other types of attacks, and the mother could be the one person who would be incapable of supplying successful protection. Rather, she might be the cause to call down even more threatening attacks upon the child. In the presence of the divine, a parent’s, particularly a mother’s, devotion on behalf of her children could invoke the envy or the wrath of the demons. Of the many dangers lurking around the nursery, demons were a significant threat. These child-killing demons could exhibit monstrous wrath in their pursuit of revenge. It was the goal and life purpose for a woman to bear and nurture children. If that goal has been impeded, the anger is unstoppable even from beyond the grave. The case of Psamathe illustrates this point. She became a child-devouring demon after death due to the fact that her own child, Linus, died. Child-killing demons were a constant threat to infants and were thought to lurk around them in wait. As Johnston argues, the Erinyes were one of the main groups of these demons

305 Piers 1978: 44-55.
and as the name of one of them reveals ("She who Envies"), they were targeting women and their children due to their envy.\textsuperscript{306} Another example is the fate of Niobe and her children. When Niobe boasted her rich motherhood\textsuperscript{307} to Leto who had only given birth to two children, all of her offspring were shot dead by Leto’s children. Although Leto was a successful mother, the insult infuriated her as well as her possible envy in the truth Niobe spoke. The woman had been more prolific than herself. The punishment for this hubris was the murder of Niobe’s children, the very ones that caused Niobe’s pride. Niobe herself remained unharmed; it was her children who were vulnerable to the other mother’s wrath. If demons, or gods, were acting out of jealousy of a mother, then as part of the protection parents provided for their infants, they would include surrogate care. A surrogate care-giver could more safely care for the child by deflecting a demon’s envy elsewhere. Along with the day-to-day concerns for protecting infants from this danger, one of the times that a mother and her child would be most vulnerable was during religious observances. It was at times like these where the worshipper would come face to face with the divine and risk the possibility of incurring envy. A surrogate, or as African-Americans call them “othermothers,”\textsuperscript{308} for religious this activity would then assure the gods’ protection for the child itself without potentially tainting the ritual with the presence of the mother


\textsuperscript{307} Her children number anywhere from 10-20 in various versions. \textit{Il.} 24.604; Ovid \textit{Met.} 6.182-3; Apollod. 3.5.6; Hes. fr. 183 M-W.

\textsuperscript{308} O’Brien 1998: 4
Aside from a hired nurse, a person well suited for surrogacy is the maternal aunt of the child. Helen left her child, Hermione, with her sister, Clytemnestra, when she left for Troy with Paris. Ino took in her nephew, Bacchus, to nurse and raise at the death of her sister, Semele. It seems that the connection of sisters goes beyond their own family ties and includes ties and responsibilities to the next generation. γυναῖκα γὰρ δὴ συμπονεῖν γυναῖκι χρή. “For it is necessary for a woman to help her sister.” Women, and particularly sisters, had special obligations to one another and can almost be seen as interchangeable. The troubles to one directly affect the other. Nowhere is this idea more powerfully reflected than in the murder of Pentheus. Agave and her sisters were divinely enthused and shared in the grisly dismemberment of the son and nephew respectively. If one was to commit a heinous act, they all were almost obliged to join in.

Plutarch expressly explains the religious necessity of surrogacy by a sibling, αὐτοῦ γὰρ ὑἱὸν ἐπαχθές ἵσως ἐγκομιάζειν, ἀδελφόν δὲ σωμῶν καὶ οὗ φίλαυτον ἄλλα φιλόκαλον καὶ θείον ὡς ἁληθῶς; δόκει γὰρ μοι καὶ τούνομα καλῶς ὑπηγείσθαι πρὸς εὔνοιαν ἀδελφίδῶν καὶ ἀγάπησιν. “for it is, perhaps, offensive to praise one’s own son, yet to praise a brother’s is a noble thing, not inspired by selfishness, but honorable and truly divine; for it seems to me that the very name (theios= “uncle” and “divine”) admirably points the way to goodwill and

309 Eur. Or. 63ff.
311 Eur. Bacch.
affection for nephews.” He illustrates his point with the mention of Heracles’ love and special attachment for his nephew, Iolaus, despite the sixty-eight sons of his own, and also Ino who took and cared for her nephew, Bacchus. The Romans adopted this idea and, based on the Ino/Leucothea myth where the nephew is subsequently deified with the help of his aunt, worshipped the cult of Mater Matuta. aι Ρωμαίων γυναικες...ου τους εαυτων παιδας αλλα τους των αδελφων εναγκαλιζοντα και τιμωσιν. “the women of Rome... take in their arms and honor, not their own, but their sister’s children.” It is, then, obvious that despite the mother’s presence a surrogate is used for religious worship and it could be because the sister would not incite envy and therefore the danger of a demon’s wrath. Ovid verbalizes the benefits of this act.

non tamen hanc pro stirpe sua pia mater adoret:
ipsa parum felix visa suisse parens.
alterius prolem melius mandabitis illi:
utilior Baccho quam fuit ipsa suis.

“Nevertheless, let not an affectionate mother pray to her on behalf of her own offspring; she (Ino) proved to be no lucky parent. You will do better to commend to her care the progeny of another; she was more serviceable to Bacchus than she was to her own children.”

Ino as a surrogate caregiver to her nephew was successful but as a mother she was tragically a failure.

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312 Plut. De frat. amor. 492 C.
313 Ibid. 492 D.
314 Ovid Fast. 6.559-562.
315 Ovid Met. 4-512-530.
Another example of a religious surrogate is found at the Athenian Amphidromia, where it was the nurse who ran the newborn around the hearth.\textsuperscript{316} Similarly, a nurse will spit toward a stranger passing by the infant over which she has charge as a way of deflecting dangerous envy and thereby protecting the child.\textsuperscript{317} The mythic example of Demeter immortalizing Demophoon in the fire reflects the power and importance in this capacity of childcare. The divine nurse is offering the child the ultimate in protection when she attempts to deify the child. It is interesting that the mother of the child interrupts the process by seeing her child placed in the flames and screams at the woman, thereby ruining Demophoon’s chances of immortality. She was not imposing destructive envy on her son, but she was the only one who stood in the way of her child’s perpetual safety. A surrogate caregiver would be considered a necessity for the safe passage of the child through these dangerous years.

An interesting example of the function of the nurse in the ritual protection of the child is in the Spartan rite of the Tithenidia. In this “festival for babies,” the infants themselves are represented by their nurses who perform the sacred rites meant to call upon Artemis Korythalia to send growth down upon them. Again, it is not the mothers who act on behalf of their own children, it is a surrogate caregiver, one who nurses the child safely.\textsuperscript{318} Calame explains Artemis’ role as kourothrophos to the young amid the other deities also governing childbirth. His argument is worthy of repeating here. In his analysis, Hera serves as protector of married women and children and Deme
focuses her power more on the mother herself and motherhood. Both of these goddesses are more connected with the legitimate procreation within society than on the newborn. Athena, in her interest for young girls, is governing those who will potentially bear future citizens. Dionysus and his orgiastic rites are meant to harness the positive behavior of women as mothers by releasing the potentially dangerous tendency that is latent within them. Eileithyia’s responsibilities revolve around the labor and birth itself releasing the woman from her burden. Artemis alone seems to command the forces of growth in the infant itself.\textsuperscript{319} Her only concern is the newborn itself and not the mother. Noting the virginity of the goddess and her connection with the nurses at the Tithenidia, she can be viewed as the divine example of surrogate care. Where productive women as mothers are far too dangerous to children, the surrogates both mortal and divine virgin step in to ensure successful growth and protection for the child.

\textbf{Male Dominance}

In a society dominated by men, women were controlled on many different levels in their daily lives and activities.\textsuperscript{320} Women were restrained from an active social and political life among men;\textsuperscript{321} they were encouraged to remain indoors and were never

\textsuperscript{319} Calame 1997: 98-167.


\textsuperscript{321} Not all scholars or even the ancients themselves would have agreed with the total subservience of women. See Dewald 1981 for a discussion about the perception of the importance and power of women in Herodotus’ Histories.
considered to be citizens; their legal rights were more restricted than men and upon marriage they were to leave their own family to assimilate into the family of her husband. Legislation was also passed to curtail the powers that women did exercise. In the reforms of Solon, women's mourning and lamentation at funerals were restricted because of the perceived power engendered in their actions and songs of lament. These were strictly reduced and replaced with a eulogy offered by a man.\textsuperscript{322} In this example, an attempt was made to reduce the power of women and substitute it with the power of a man. The only power left truly in the hands of women was the raising and nurturing of the husband's children. The influence of a mother on an infant who is in her constant care is profound and I argue that a significant reason for the male tolerance of surrogate care was, in part, an attempt to lessen even that important role. By hiring a surrogate care-giver, the father could not only lessen the contact between mother and child and, therefore, the bond between them, but he would be reasserting his power as the head of the family and patriarch over his progeny. Even Zeus, it has been argued, feared "matriarchal ambition."\textsuperscript{323} This objective would not be overtly expressed, but it is revealed in what I consider as the subliminal social perceptions of the nature of woman and her lack of capacity to fulfill totally her duties as a mother. In this regard, women/mothers were seen as contaminants, irrelevant, emotionally unstable and, therefore, obviously not fit to offer the primary care to her own children.\textsuperscript{324} The main

\textsuperscript{322} Holst-Warhaft 1992.

\textsuperscript{323} Downing 1989: 79.

\textsuperscript{324} Wet-nurses, who were obviously also female, would be safer because they had no other vested interest in the family.
source of evidence in this view comes from drama because we have no other forms of extant literature discussing family care. We catch glimpses of this issue when it is presented in a public forum primarily in the form of drama. Writers in the Hellenic period give us occasional but important insights into the social mores and aspiration to infant care. Rabinowitz argues that tragedy, made by men with men as the focus, creates an image of women that supports the ideal of male dominance in society.\textsuperscript{325} We turn now to those works in search of answers to some of the enigmas embedded in the Opheltes myth.

Since a child is the product of its parents and it was hoped, particularly by the fathers, that it would carry on the noble traits of the family. But, it was also possible the child could inherit less desirable traits as well. The evidence in tragedy seems to suggest that the mother was the greatest source for this contamination. When Andromache and Molossus were threatened with death by Hermione, Neoptolemus' wife, Peleus chides Menelaos about the character of his daughter.

\begin{verbatim}
κάγῳ μὲν δύδων τῷ γαμούντι μὴ τε σοι κῆδος ξυνάψαι μὴ τεῖλασθαι λαβεῖν κακῆς γυναικὸς πόλον· ἐκφέροντι γὰρ μητρὶ ὁνείδη, τούτῳ καὶ σκοπεῖτε μοι, μην ἀπαναςέται, ἐσθλὴς θυγατέρῳ ἐκ μητρὸς λαβεῖν.
\end{verbatim}

"As for me, I told that amorous boy (Neoptolemus) not to make a marriage alliance with you or take into his home an evil mother's child; for daughters reproduce their mother's faults. Take heed suitors, choose the daughter of a good mother."\textsuperscript{326}

\textsuperscript{325} Rabinowitz 1992.

\textsuperscript{326} Eur.andr. 619-623.
It is Helen who notoriously had abandoned her husband and daughter to follow the Trojan prince, Paris, precipitating the ten year war with Troy and who has passed these negative qualities of womanhood onto her child. According to Peleus, Helen's infidelity and dishonor were passed on to Hermione and have contaminated her, and so Hermione's jealousy and violent plans, therefore, stem directly from her mother. Iphigeneia also suffers from maternal contamination in the form of a familial curse. ἐξ ἀρχῆς μοι δυσδαίμων δαίμων τὰς ματρός ζώναι. “From the beginning to me my mother's spousal fate was accursed.”327 The woman who gave Iphigeneia life is also the one who tainted her with the curse plaguing the entire royal family at Mycenae.

When discussing the steps to produce the best possible child, Aristotle says that the parents must not only be of the best age for conception (women at eighteen and men at thirty-seven) but they should both have moderate constitutions.328 She must take care of herself with exercise and a good diet and worship every day the gods who preside over childbirth. τὴν μέντοι δίαΝοιν τοῦνάι ἀν τῶν σωμάτων ῥαθυμοτέρως ἀρμόττει ἐνένεν ἀπολαύοντα γὰρ φαίνεται τὰ γεννώμενα τῆς ἔχουσις ἀσπερ καὶ τὰ φυσώμενα τῆς γῆς. “As regards the mind, however, on the contrary, it suits them to pass the time more indolently than as regards their bodies for the offspring derive their natures from their mothers as plants do from earth.”329 And so, the mental, emotional, and ethical qualities of the mother must be carefully guarded, lest those easily acquired female weaknesses are passed on to the child. Harrison

327 Eur. IT 203-5.


argues that the myth of the birth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus was an attempt to mythologically rectify this problem. "The birth from the male womb is to rid the child from the infection of his mother- to turn him from a woman-thing into a man-thing."\textsuperscript{330}

A mother could also physically contaminate her child by nursing within the first three to five days after birth. The "first-milk", or colostrum, was thought actually to injure the child and be potentially fatal. (Probably because it didn't look like milk)\textsuperscript{331} According to Aristotle, this "first-milk" period was considerably longer. \textit{τὸ δὲ γάλα τὸ γινόμενον πρῶτον τῶν ἐπὶ μυνῶν ἀκριβείαν ἔστιν· ἀλλ' ὅμως τὰ τε παιδία γόνιμα καὶ τὸ γάλα χρήσιμον.} "The milk produced earlier that the seventh month is unfit for use; but as soon as the child is fit to live, the milk is fit to use."\textsuperscript{332} For this reason, a wet-nurse was absolutely crucial in the first days of an infant's life in providing it food. After this initial period, a mother, if she so chooses, could then assume the nursing herself. This is striking even in cases where the mother intends to raise/nurse her children herself, she still needs a wet-nurse because, in this early period, the mother is the only person viewed as a danger to the well-being of the newborn. She constitutes, in fact, the greatest risk to the child's health and well-being.

Concomitant to the concept of maternal contamination of the character of the infant, is the belief of the biological irrelevancy of the mother. An actual blood bond often was not recognized between the mother and the infant she bore. In some cases no

\textsuperscript{330} Harrison 1962: 36.

\textsuperscript{331} Small 1997: 201-6 on modern cross-cultural perceptions about "good" vs. "bad" milk.

\textsuperscript{332} Arist. \textit{HA} IX (VII) 5 -note also that this implies a moment where an infant is deemed viable. see also Fildes 1986: 20. We must note that Aristotle may be referring to the month of parturition. If the child is born in the seventh month than the mother's milk is unfit, rather than the milk produced the seventh month after birth.
genetic connection was seen at all. During the trial of Orestes for matricide, the question of his blood relation to his victim became a crucial factor in determining his degree of guilt. The chorus claims that because Agamemnon was not a blood-relative of Clytemnestra the murder she committed did not merit the more serious crime against one's own kin, matricide. Orestes' defense of this charge revolves, then, around the answer to the question of whether he is, in fact, a blood-relative of his mother. Apollo argues that he is not. ὡμὲν ἐστὶ μήτηρ ἡ κεκλημένου τεκνοῦ τοκεύς, τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου τίκτει δ' ὁ θεός κυνω, ἢ δ' ἀπερξένης ἐσωθεν ἐρνος. ὁ δὲ ἐς ἐμπάτηθε θεός. "The mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger, she preserves a stranger's seed, if no god interferes."

He cites Athena as an example that mothers are not the true parent of the child because she was born of a man and has no mother at all. With this line of defense, Orestes would not be found guilty of blood murder since he was not genetically related to his mother. The jury was equally divided and Athena cast the deciding vote, siding with Orestes. One of the reasons for doing so concerned this question of maternity and she ruled that she too sees no merit in the mother's genetic contribution compared to father's. This decided, Orestes was justified in avenging the murder of his father, his true blood relative.

333 Aesch. Eum. 661.

334 Gargarin 1975: 120-132 and that mothers are not relatives of their children. also duBois 1988.
When comparing the female anatomy to that of man, Aristotle argues that a woman's body is cooler, a fact explaining many characteristic features of women such as weakness, smallness, impaired intellectual faculties, and other behavioral disorders. This lack of body heat not only prohibits a woman's body to manufacture enough blood which is then converted into the perfection of the body (the implication here, then, is that women's bodies were imperfect) but also it prevents her from producing blood capable of supplying a "soul of a new individual."\(^{335}\) Men, on the other hand, have very hot bodies and so the very hot seminal fluid was potent enough to create life and pass on a soul to this new being. According to Aristotle, then, a woman's seed is useless in the process of conception and she would indeed be a nurse to "a stranger's seed," not the true biological mother of the new life. Herophilus also supports this belief concerning the mother's non-participation in conception. He identified the ovaries and seed of a woman and the ducts connecting them to the uterus but thought this then empties through the bladder. The female seed completely bypasses the reproductive center and is, therefore, not even a part of the conception of an infant. The menstrual flow was the "only contribution to reproduction"\(^{336}\) provided by the mother. Soranus agreed with Herophilus and Aristotle on this point. Prevailing medical opinion and myth give evidence against the belief in an actual genetic bond between mother and child, and the trial of Orestes gives mythical and legal precedents to this belief. Explanations about conception and the origin of life will often reflect the social structure of the community that held this belief. In patriarchal societies, the "spiritual

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\(^{335}\) Fanthom 1994: 191.

\(^{336}\) ibid. 195.
and physical contribution to conception” emphasizes the father’s role, and in a
matriarchy the mother’s role is emphasized. The evidence for the Greek conception
follows this same precept. In parts of India where this patriarchal emphasis is prevalent,
the irrelevancy of the mother in conception translates into her irrelevancy in child
nurturing. “... her passive role in conception also precludes her from having custody
rights over her children.”337 For the Greeks, I argue, the same holds true in that
maternal nurturing was not thought to be appropriate.

Aside from women’s rather passive role in conception, they were also seen as
medically imbalanced and prone to psychotic episodes. In general, Aristotle’s
definition of health is a person who is in moral and self-control and so the ill are those
do not have moral choice or self control. Healing, then, is regaining control but this
refers only to men because they alone have the power to control their minds. A woman,
on the other hand, is a natural patient, since even in health she cannot exercise full self-
control.338 So, because of their innate nature to lack control over their own minds and
bodies, women were potential emotional and irrational timebombs.339 To make matters
worse, they are equipped with a womb that could dislodge itself and wander throughout
the body causing a variety of catastrophic effects, namely, strangulation, hysteria and

337 Cohn 1987: 23.


339 A very entertaining yet pertinent argument is made concerning the nature of dangerous females in the
movie Jurassic Park. Warner 1994 discusses the set up of the laboratory in which female dinosaurs are
raised. The universal femaleness of its creatures was to control them for they could not breed themselves,
yet, by mid-movie, they “craftily mutated” some of their own genes to enable themselves to
parthenogenically reproduce. All control by the male scientists was lost and even the gates used to
restrain the dinosaurs were smashed by them. This is quite a contemporary equivalent to the ancient male
fantasies about the latent danger of women unleashed.
even death.\textsuperscript{340} With these potential breakdowns lurking about women, it is no wonder that prevailing social opinions prompted a father to think twice about allowing his wife to raise and nurture his child. Athenian tragedy exposes this perceived weakness in women and exaggerates it through impossibilities of what can happen if this weakness goes unchecked.\textsuperscript{341} Women are necessary in society to provide soil for seed germination but they also have the potential to destroy the male-controlled \textit{polis} and even culture itself. Female is to nature as male is to culture expresses the analogy of the wild nature of woman in her instability and irrationality that only the male sphere can contain through cultural institutions and beliefs.

Despite her confinement within the household in Athenian life, woman in Greek myth is associated with animals and the wild; the untamed female must submit to the civilizing effects of the marriage yoke before she can begin to be envisioned as cultured.\textsuperscript{342}

The danger of woman, and of a wife in particular, is also the result of the perceived “foreignness” of the wife in her husband’s household. Upon the marriage of a man and woman, the woman is the one to leave her biological family to join the household of her husband, becoming, as it were, an outsider in her new family.\textsuperscript{343}

Walcot offers a discussion of what seems to be a fairly common theme of “terrible women” as mothers citing mythological sources as well as evidence about the

\textsuperscript{340} On “The Wandering Womb” see Adair 1996; Lefkowitz 1981: ch. 2; Dean-Jones 1994: 69ff.

\textsuperscript{341} Cantarella 1987:17 argues that the mythological view of matriarchy was not really a matriarchy because both examples of matriarchal societies, namely the Amazons and Lemmians, were not “normal” societies. The women ruled only women. These myths, then, express the\textit{ potential} of female power gone astray and not the record of a matriarchal past. also Bamberger 1974.

\textsuperscript{342} Foley 1981a:134.

\textsuperscript{343} Gargarin 1975: 102 “Women were simultaneously part of and apart from the \textit{polis}.”
characters of Socrates’ wife and Plato’s mother.\textsuperscript{344} In literature, Clytemnestra symbolizes the proverbial “bad wife” in her infidelity, deceit against and murder of her husband, but she also displays characteristics of a “bad mother” and symbolizes the dangers surrounding maternal care. She not only sends away her only son in exile but also stands by and allows the marriage of her daughter, Electra, to a peasant man who is socially far beneath her in status.\textsuperscript{345} Aeschylus' account of this family’s dysfunction emphasizes her lack of positive nurturing and her deceit with her own son. As she pleads for her life with Orestes, she recalls \textit{ἐπὶ σχές, ὅπαι, τόνδε δ’ αἰδεσα, τέκνον, μαστόν, πρὸς φ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρὶς γεύων ἀμα/ οὐλοί σεν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφεῖς γάλα. “Oh take pity, child, before this breast where many a time, a drowsing baby, you would feed and with soft gums sucked in the milk that made you strong.”\textsuperscript{346}} It has already been noted that Clytemnestra most likely did not do as she claims but that the nurse, Cilissa, instead raised and suckled him. Aeschylus had previously included in the play Cilissa's litany of duties she performed in the care of Orestes after she “took him from his mother.”\textsuperscript{347} Clytemnestra’s plea, which the author has exposed to the reader, is a blatant lie. Evoking a tender mother-infant image and maternal care served only for her own purpose of self-preservation. This is a striking comment by Aeschylus on the tenuous bond between mother and child.

\textsuperscript{344} Walcot 1987.

\textsuperscript{345} Eur. El. 112ff.

\textsuperscript{346} Aesch. Cho. 896-898.

\textsuperscript{347} see p. 104 above.
Abandonment and neglect is another danger of maternal abuse. The abandonment of infants is believed to have been a common practice in the ancient world and would have been, most likely, a decision made by the father. In at least one instance in tragedy, the mother acted alone. After bearing a son to Apollo, Creusa abandons her baby in a basket. When he is grown and learns of his own history he claims, "χρόνον γὰρ δὲν μ᾽ ἔχρην ἐν ἀγκάλαις/μητρός τρυφήσαι καὶ τι τερφθῆναι βίου/ἀπεστειλένην φιλτάτης μητρός τροφῆς. "for the time when in a mother's arms I in her fondness should have known some joy in life, from that sweet care was I estranged a mother's nurture," and continues, ὡς γὰρ ὀμήτωρ ἀπάτωρ τε γεγώργμένος/τοὺς φρέσνατοις/Φοῖβον ναοῦς θεραπεύω. "A mother's fondness and a father's care I never knew: the temple of the god claims them my service, for it nurtured me."
The Muse, mother of Rhesus, also abandoned her child by throwing him to his father, the river and the daughter of the Sangarios river abandoned her son, Attis, who was then raised by a he-goat. In these examples, mothers refused to take on the responsibility of raising their own children, abandoning their care of them and literally taking over the authority of the father. Whether or not mothers historically made this type of decision, which is highly unlikely, it is significant to note the number of instances in tragedies where the mother

348 Boswell 1988; Cameron 1932; Wilson 1988;

349 On a discussion of the modern decision for abortion see Bracken et al 1978.

350 Eur. Ion 1375.

351 ibid. 108.

352 Paus. 7.17.5.
abandons her child, in one way or another. The message here must have been intended to show the coldness and unpredictability of mothers. Hera, after producing the deformed Hephaestus on her own, threw the child out of heaven in a malicious act of both maternal neglect and abuse.

Medea is the most notorious of mothers who actually killed her own children, but she is not the only murderous mother. Ino, along with her husband Athamas, kills their children as does Procris her own son Itys. In a Bacchic frenzy with other maenads Agave tears Pentheus, her own son, apart, decapitating him herself. In fact, the ὀπαραγμός, or tearing apart, of a mother’s own children is central to the mythical Dionysiac ritual and it has been argued that this negation of woman, wife and mother is its core purpose. But let us look at this purpose closer. An inversion of acceptable behavior in myth/cult implies that under controlled circumstances, the negative behavior is to be released, re-establishing the acceptable conduct expected by society. It would then, logically, have been believed that women harbor this latent aggression against their own offspring and that it is such a powerful urge that it must be released annually in a safe manner or society would suffer. Participating in the Dionysiac mystery cults offered this release.

With such a list of abusive mothers from legend, it is necessary to analyze the causes attributed to their actions and this, in turn, may reflect a general attitude about a woman's emotional capacity and abilities to perform motherly duties. In categorizing these abuses, shame, love or revenge drove these women to push aside any feelings of maternal protectiveness and cause their own children harm. This could be reflective of

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what men believed were pressures playing upon women preventing them from being able to nurture their infants successfully themselves. As Arthur states, women were potentially dangerous because of the association of women with the "destructive and violent power of ἑρως". With strict social norms dictating the proper role and behavior of respectable women, any breach of these norms could bring catastrophic consequences to the life and reputation of the offender. Therefore, we learn through legends that illegitimate births had extreme consequences. Out of shame for the union with Apollo and the resulting birth, Creusa chooses to expose her infant rather than suffer the social consequences in her own life. As she admits years later, this decision was laden with traumatic misgivings. ἐὰν παιδάγγις ἔσεν ἔτη ἡρως ἐκτείνοντα μοι. "If you had seen the child stretching out its hands to me!" What a tender and pathetic moment between mother and infant. However, even this entreaty is not enough to prevent her from carrying out her resolve. The social and emotional pressures far outweighed her natural desires and she was unable to fight the tension. Rhesus' mother also experienced shame at her pregnancy and when she gave birth, threw the child into the river that was his father. The perception of virginity became the more powerful force upon this young mother and she acted in a vain attempt to regain that which was lost. Hera's abuse of her child stemmed from shame also but it was a much different kind of shame guiding her. She had created Hephaestus (out of spite for Zeus) and so, it being her choice to bear the child, presumably she was

355 Eur. Ion 961.
prepared to raise him. The child's deformities produced horror in the realization that this result could only be blamed on herself, and out of shame for the unsuccessful creation of a normal, healthy child, she was prompted to hurl him to earth. These examples show how powerful shame born out of the social perception of the importance of virginity was as a motivating factor for these tragic women. These responses to vanity or revenge were so powerful as to nullify maternal affections and make the child the victim and recipient of the violent elements of the human condition.

Eros also becomes an overriding factor in a woman's capacity for decision-making concerning her children. Helen's notorious "abduction" prompted her to leave behind her daughter Hermione at Mycenae. Yet on careful analysis one realizes, she was not violently abducted but rather went willingly with the Trojan prince, Paris, in the ultimate act of infidelity in which she abandoned her own city, husband and even her child. If love was the motivating factor in her actions, then it clearly took precedence over her responsibilities as a wife and mother. Similarly, Evadne was willing to leave her children orphans in her suicide because she could not bear life without her husband.357 Clytemnestra also fell into this destructive spell when she became involved with a lover Aegisthus in her husband's absence. Some might claim it was revenge for Agamemnon's murder of their daughter and his introduction of Cassandra into their house that precipitated her infamous actions. In some sense they did, but her response to the revenge boiling inside of her was played out in the murder of her husband and his new lover, completing the hateful love triangle with her love of

Aegisthus. Her treatment of her children prior to Agamemnon’s homecoming was prompted by her love for Aegisthus. The reason for her exile of Orestes and the heartless marriage of her daughter to a person drastically her social inferior lay in her relationship with Aegisthus and the need to remove any hindrances for their future and his power. Orestes recognizes this when he notes that γυναίκες ἀνδρῶν, ὥς ξέν, οὐ παῖδων φίλοι. “Women are friends of their husbands not their children.”

Downing has recognized this phenomenon and in her discussion on the choices Hera makes, she notes that for Hera her role as wife takes precedence over that of mother. “Although she is a mother, she is not mother as mother but mother as wife.” If this ideology is recognized, then a reader can more understand why a mother’s children are sometimes disposable to her.

Althaea also represents love, this time sibling love, and loyalty to those other than a mother’s children. When the Destinies told her that the log in the fire represented the life span of her son, Meleager, she immediately removed it in order to prolong his life. When he grew to be a young man, Meleager killed his uncles and in a fit of rage, Althaea threw the log back into the fire to be consumed, thereby killing her son. Her loyalty and affections lay more with her brother than with her son and her choice of action was an immediate one. In another instance of familial loyalty over a woman’s own children, Antigone was willing to die for her brother, not her potential children or

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358 Eur. El. 265. Scrimshaw 1984 noted in her universal study of infanticide that one of the most powerful factors to “force” a mother to kill her child is the fear of losing her husband due to social rules for abstinence during nursing.

359 Downing 1989: 76.
her husband.\textsuperscript{360} Intaphernes makes a similar choice when she chose her brother’s life as the only one to be saved out of her family.\textsuperscript{361} Pomeroy argues that this stronger attachment is justifiable due to lesser maternal attachments, high infant mortality and patriarchal authority over the child which heightens the sibling bond.\textsuperscript{362} On a strictly pragmatic level, however, one could argue that the husband and children could always be replaced, a brother cannot, so the sibling bond could be deemed the strongest. This may sound strange to the modern ear but as these examples show Hellenic literature expresses that this concept was at least understood by society. Beekes discusses the Greek concept that more children can be produced in the future and so other issues or people can take precedence over one’s children.\textsuperscript{363}

One of the disastrous consequences of love occurs after it has soured and assumes the form of revenge. Procne and Medea represent the extremes to which a woman was thought to carry her hatred against her former lover/husband. In Procne’s case, her husband committed a horrendous crime of deceit and sexual assault. When bringing Philomela, Procne’s sister, back to his homesick wife, he raped the sister and then cut out her tongue in an effort to silence her about the crime. He then abandoned her and returned home and falsely informed Procne of her sister's death. When it was revealed to her the fate of her dear sister, rage engulfed her and she contemplated

\textit{magnum quodcumque paravi; quid sit, adhuc dubito.} “I am prepared for some great

\textsuperscript{360} Eut. Med. 905-912.

\textsuperscript{361} Hdt. 3.119.

\textsuperscript{362} Pomeroy 1975: 101. also Visser 1986: 152.

\textsuperscript{363} Beekes 1986.
act of boldness, but what it is I do not know, I wish I did.”\textsuperscript{364} At that moment her small five year old son, Itys, entered the room and her decision was made. She would murder him in revenge for the father’s crime and also because she thought she could see the father in the person of the son.

\textit{ut tamen accessit natus matrice salutem
attulit et parvis adduxit colla lacertis
mixtaque blanditiis puerilibus oscula junxit,
nota quidem est genetrix, infractaque constitit ira
invitique oculi lacrimis maduere coactis;}

“But when the little fellow came close and put both arms around his mother, and kissed her in appealing boyish fashion, she was moved to tenderness; against her will her eyes filled up with tears, her purpose wavered.”\textsuperscript{365}

Much as Creusa had struggled to complete her abandonment of her son because of his little arms reaching up to her, so, too, Procne hesitated with the love she felt for her son. Then, she glanced back at her sister. \textit{alter blanditiis, rapta silet altera lingua?/ quam vocat hic matrem, cur non vocat illa sororem. “And why should one make pretty speeches, the other be dumb, and ravished tongue unable to tell of ravish? Since he calls me mother, why does she not say sister?”}\textsuperscript{366} The love for her sister and the sorrow for her injury as well as the rage for her husband who committed the crime, blinded her to her own offspring and she was able to block out her affections for Itys as she dragged him away and stabbed him in the chest. Then she gleefully fed him to Tereus. The affection and maternal care she felt for the boy was entirely erased in her

\textsuperscript{364} Ovid. \textit{Met}. 618-619.
\textsuperscript{365} ibid. 624-628.
\textsuperscript{366} ibid. 6.620
quest for vengeance on behalf of her beloved sister. Her punishment of Tereus for his crime would be that she tried to stop the continuation of his line and deprive him of the benefits of children. Love and revenge are demonstrated to be stronger than maternal desires.

The most famous murderer of children is Medea. She too experienced the humiliating loss of the love of her husband. At the beginning of the tragedy, the children’s nurse is concerned with the mental state of Medea and the welfare of the children. She notes that both parents have allowed other priorities to skew their judgment and care of their children. Jason neglects his children for the new bride and, concerning Medea, τι δέ σοι παῖδες πατρός ἀμπλακίας/ μετέχουσί; τι τούθ' ἔχεις; οἴμοι/ τέκνα, μή τι πάθηθ' ὡς ὑπεραλγώ. “How can your children share in their father’s wickedness? Why do you hate them? Oh children, how much I fear that something may happen!”

Medea berates men for what she sees as a gross misunderstanding of women’s role as mothers, bemoaning women's lot to marry and raise children and the injustice of men’s conception of pleasure. κακῶς φονούντες· ὡς τρίς ἀν παρ' ἄσπιδας στήναι θέλομ' ἀν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἀπαξ. “How wrong they are! I would very much rather stand three times in the front of battle than bear one child.”

Medea represents here all the pressures playing upon women beyond the well-being of her children—marriage, pleasure, pride and social pressures that, in the end, usurp the importance of her own children. She

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367 Eur. Med. 84.
368 ibid. 116-118.
369 ibid. 250-251.
resolves to kill her children in order to harm Jason but, just as her murderous counterparts, she hesitates, struggling with the swell of affection for the babes. καὶ μὴ κακισθῆς μηδὲ ἀναμνησθῆς τέκνων/ ὡς φίλταθ', ὡς ἐτίκτες, “And do not be a coward, do not think of them, how sweet they are, and how you are their mother.”370 In the end, her maternal impulses were subdued and she slaughtered her own offspring.371 When Jason confronts her about her recent crime, he recognizes the instigating factor in her decision. λέχους σφε κής ἰωσας ὕπνοικα κτανεὶν; “For the sake of pleasure in the bed you killed them.”372 Medea makes no apologies for this reason and even adds the second reason to the list herself, σμικρὸν γυναικὶ πήμα τούτῳ εἶναι δοκεῖς;/οίδ' ὤνκετ' εἰσί· τούτῳ γάρ σε δηξεῖσαι. “Is love so small a pain, do you think, for a woman?...The children are dead. I say this to make you suffer.”373 The fear that a woman’s priorities could be so awry that she would allow marital pressures to supersede the importance of the welfare of her children would have inflamed societal attitudes about the emotional stability of mothers and their capacity to successfully care for their children.

Two other legendary mothers murdered their children, Agave and Ino. This weakness, however, their madness was brought upon them by the gods. They were not

370 ibid. 1246-1247.
371 March 1990 argues that Euripides’ portrayal of Medea is rather sympathetic because he shows her as a human and not a witch. However, I disagree. Her humanity, or commonness, in this version only substantiates the possibility of this type of destructive behavior in women throughout the community. Visser 1986 discusses Medea in terms of her blood vs. married families and argues that in myth mothers who deliberately murder their own children is very rare. I disagree. The evidence she uses contradicts her theory and she never takes into account abusive or neglectful mothers in her analysis. For extensive discussions on various interpretations of Medea see Johnston 1997; Visser 1986.
372 Eur Med. 1367.
373 ibid. 1368 and 1370.
prompted by normal social interaction. Agave had the misfortune of having a too-
curious son who slipped in unlawfully to watch the secret rites of Dionysus. For this, he
was torn limb from limb by the Bacchants, one of whom was his own mother. Agave, not recognizing her child in her Bacchic frenzy, herself beheaded him. Although this
was an unintentional killing- one that went unrecognized by her because she thought
she was killing an animal- it still falls into the class of maternal homicide of a child
because as we have seen, it was a latent madness that the rites helped to harmless
escape. In the Ino myth, Hera was enraged that Ino was nursing Bacchus, the
illlegitimate child of her husband, so she sent a madness upon Ino and her husband,
Athamas, causing them to kill their own children. Athamas shot Learchus and Ino
plunged into the sea with Melicertes. In these two myths, the murder of one’s
children was committed by women, not willfully nor with premeditation, but under the
external forces and possessions of the gods. Agave’s case, however, could be
questioned as she volitionally took her womanly worship so far as to be unable to see
reality when it was screaming before her very eyes.

In a more comical vein, Aristophanes portrays women’s overriding priority to
sex when Lysistrata suggests a “sex strike” to force the men of Athens to strike up a
peace treaty with Sparta. Her plan is met with vociferous objections from the women
who claim they would be willing to do anything, including walk through fire or die, to
stop the war- anything, that is, except give up sex. In this comic exaggeration of
women’s priorities, all women’s rationale falls aside where sex is concerned. If their

374 Ovid’s version has Ino trying to save Melicertes by jumping into the sea.
own lives do not take precedence over this issue, it is not surprising then, to learn that these mothers, by barricading themselves on the Acropolis, are also neglecting the care of their children and so, are risking their lives, too. Myrrhine’s husband repeatedly comes to beg for sex from his wife and one attempt was made using their baby as a lure. αὐτὴν, τὰ πᾶσχεις; οὐδεὶς ἔλεεις τὸ παιδίον ἀλουτον ὅν κἀθηλον ἐκτὸν ἡμέραν; “Where’s your maternal instinct? He hasn’t been washed or fed for a week. How can you be so pitiless?”

Myrrhine responds that she feels for the boy, not her husband, yet, in the end, the child is given back to the slave to take back home. During Lysistrata’s reproach to the women for their ridiculousness, she says that women are sluts and the οὐκ ἐτοις ἁφ' ἡμῶν εἰσιν αἱ τρῳδιαι. οὐδὲν γαρ ἔσων πλὴν Ποσειδῶν καὶ σκάφη. “It is not without reason that tragedies are made from us. For we are nothing but full of Poseidon and cradles.”

The overwhelming desire for sex clearly outweighs the emotions and responsibilities of motherhood.

With this litany of maternal neglect and abuse, an even more compelling case is made when one compares the motivating factors of the mothers’ abusive behavior to that of the fathers’. Jason has surely put aside his children due to his upcoming marriage, but politics and social decorum dictate these actions. He claims that his new marriage to the princess is a strategic political move that will, in the end, benefit his whole existing family. One assumes that he would justify his neglect of his children with the fact that for now he must focus on his new bride in order to make the marriage work. His new marriage is also necessitated by his need to produce legitimate heirs.

375 Ar. Lys. 880-881.

376 Ar. Lys. 138-139,
Medea is not even Greek and so the children she bore to him are in a socially precarious position in Corinth. His new marriage will not only safeguard these children, but it will also provide him with true Greek heirs for himself as a man. Social conditions seem almost to justify his ill-treatment of his children.

For paternal parallels to the legendary maternal homicides, one also sees a clear distinction in causes.\textsuperscript{377} Ironically, Heracles, after he successfully rescues his children from death at the hands of Lycus, slaughters them all in his house. The wrath of Hera and Iris resulted in his divine madness that drove him to unwittingly kill his own family while he thought he was killing his enemies. He is heartbroken when he regains his composure but this madness was immediately blamed on Hera’s jealousy and cruelty.\textsuperscript{378} She had inflicted this madness upon him specifically so that he would do such a deed. Heracles, then, emerges as the victim of divine wrath and is completely free of all culpability. Ajax faced a similar fate with his son in his madness, but fortunately for him, the boy’s mother, the slave Tecmessa, keeps the child away from his raging father out of the very fear that he could harm the boy in his madness. Once Ajax’s insanity subsides, he seems to reestablish the tender bond with his son when he delivers his touching good-bye. He has flirted with disaster sent by the gods but was able to escape disaster and reassert his paternal bond. Agamemnon’s slaughter of his own daughter is also demanded by a goddess but his decision was made as the commander of the Greek fleet. Religiously, politically, militarily, and socially, he had no other choice but to

\textsuperscript{377} Daly and Wilson 1984: 501 discusses varied psychological reasons for infanticide but according to their chart, on the whole, mothers committed infanticide more than fathers.

\textsuperscript{378} Eur. HF 1 i27ff.
follow the command of the goddess. Finally, Thyestes’ most horrific crime was literally eating his own children. Even in this instance, the father escapes blame. Due to the family curse which is inescapable, his brother kills the children and serves them up to their oblivious father. His was an excuse of total ignorance.

The contrast between causes for maternal abuse versus paternal abuse are striking. In no instance is the father to blame or his capability for parenting and affectionate love for his children questioned. All the women, on the other hand, have skewed priorities where their children’s well-being falls somewhere after love and social reputation. 379 Not only this, but all were crimes of premeditation, even with conscious wrestling with their maternal affections and countervailing emotions. They were cold-blooded abusers who saw their children as simply a means for getting back at a loved or hated one or the children were seen as an actual impediment to some romantic, social or power goal or objective. This is an interesting stereotype revealing man’s attempt to maintain intellectual and moral superiority over his wife. The literature including the stories of these women were written by men, for a generally male audience, and so, clearly some socially instructive point was intended. 380 On the other hand, some have argued that this characterization is a reflection of a very real condition of women as mothers. Dyson argues that women “in meeting the ultimate demands of wifelhood, she must set aside those of motherhood.” 381 Adrienne Rich lists

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379 Moss and Jones 1974 on economic class as a dictate of maternal attitudes and actions. On a modern example of maternal murder see Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, Beloved. see also O’Brien 1998.


381 Dyson 1988: 15-16.
several historical examples of cases of maternal violence against her children. She mentions the medieval practice of infanticide because of church law against bastards where the women were more likely punished due to the fact that the fathers would be hard to prove. In colonial America she cites the case of two women who killed their children as a backlash against the theological view that claimed only men could have a direct relationship with God. Victorian England had strict repercussions on a woman raped and the Japanese limit of contraception and abortion laws both resulted in maternal infanticide. The argument that Rich makes, amid a very dark examination of contemporary mothers oscillating between love and hate of their children, is that this violence is an understandable response to the oppressive institution of “patriarchal motherhood.” Her phrase here implies the patriarchal power over women in the legal system, religious thought, social reputation and the home itself and this sometimes generates violence in women against the only thing under their control. There is also a psychiatric syndrome, recently being acknowledged, that is believed to manifest itself most often in mothers. Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy is a disorder where, in an attempt to elicit attention, a mother will intentionally injure her child and/or demand hospitalization and painful, complicated testing for the child. The

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383 This term was recently coined in 1976 by psychiatrists noting a deviation from the recognized psychiatric disorder Munchausen Syndrome. The latter disorder is characterized by self-inflicted injuries or fabricated illnesses to gain attention. Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy was noted that the same conditions apply, only the injuries are directed at the subject’s (namely the mother) child. The Syndrome is not yet officially recognized in the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM III-R but the disorder is gaining wider interest in the field. Money 1986; J. Money and J. Werlin 1976. Schepers-Hughes 1987 discusses contemporary examples of maternal infanticide but argues that these cases are motivated by economic and biological standards and not by “maternal inadequacies.” One might also note the often cited “Baby Blues” that affects a significant portion of mothers soon after giving birth. Reheagold 1964 addresses maternal violence postpartum but also as a symptom of post injuries to the psyche or as a result of mental disorders.
ancient uneasiness concerning women in their maternal role seems to be reflected in contemporary society.

The plot of Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* centers precisely around the issue of the defamation of women’s character in tragedy. A group of women have met to discuss the fate of Euripides who, they say, has continually berated women in his plays and so defamed their characters that men come home suspicious of their wives and so they keep an eagle’s watch over them. At least in this literary sense, the social affect of tragic characterization is recognized. The comic irony in the argument of the women is that they are so inflamed by Euripides’ portrayal of them as deceitful cheats, that husbands are alerted to stay at their bedsides and therefore they are unable to carry out a plan to buy babies to pass off as their own. Aristophanes’ portrayal surely does nothing to minimize the “damage” done by Euripides.\(^{384}\) If there were a valid point being made by the women similar to these comic ones, the situation is not rectified by this comedy, rather, he seems to be validating the less admirable characteristics of the “fairer” sex. The characterization of the deceitful and untrustworthy wife in terms of infants is reflected in the women’s complaints that close guarding prevents them from the serious business of buying a baby when necessary, such as when a girl was born but a boy was needed or when conception had not taken place but a “false” pregnancy was “coming due”. Motherhood is, then, an obligation to be fulfilled by any means and the ideal tender mother-infant bond is strikingly absent. Aristophanes pokes fun at this, too, when the discovered “spy” snatches up a nearby infant as a shield for himself. The

\(^{384}\) Zeitlin 1981 argues that Euripides had so “feminized Greek culture” that Aristophanes’ comment is that he belonged “with the women.”
mother pleads for the "child’s" safety until the swaddled "infant" is revealed to be a bottle of wine. At his threats of "sacrificing" the "child" (dumping the wine) the woman goes into a fit of panic begging him to "spare the child." Mnesilochus’ response exposes the flaw in the woman’s character: "A loving mother truly." An image of drunken, deceitful and self-centered women emerges, further questioning women’s ability to selflessly and conscientiously raise a child. The inversion of circumstances commonly seen in comedy comes at the end of the play where Euripides agrees not to denigrate women in his tragedies anymore, a concession adopted only because of the aggressive behavior of the women not from any logical arguments concerning the invalidity of his claims.  

The perception of an emotionally unstable mother seems to be prevalent among Hellenic males, and could be yet another means that men used to justify their oppression of their wives and women in general. Demand argues against the theory that for women, death in childbirth was equated to man’s heroic death in battle, which would then symbolize the recognition of women’s contribution to and honor received from society. She cites ancient medical texts and funerary reliefs as evidence that the attitudes surrounding women’s sexuality and death in birth are examples of the "subordination of women in the development of a patriarchal state" through "the

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385 Padel 1985 3-19 argues that male attempts at superiority were revealed in fantasies about women in literature, especially tragedy. Her argument focuses on the male fantasy of female daemonic possession as a reason for women’s inferiority.

386 Lefkowitz 1986: 112 argues that Greek men were not afraid of women and did on occasion recognize their merit, but they remained wary of women in general.

387 Richter 1961:42. She here analyzes a funerary stele of a woman tenderly holding a child’s head and says that this could be a form of heroization.
control of men over women's reproductivity." This rationale is reflected in Hesiod's dim view of mothers that man is consigned to rely on a useless, conniving woman to bear his children and so he must control her for the sake of receiving children from her. There was also the possibility of a woman using her nursing to cover up an act of indiscretion as Lysias describes. Eratosthenes' wife nursed her child and so, to facilitate this, she moved to the downstairs apartment while her husband moved to the upstairs one. It was because of this situation that she was able to entertain a frequent male guest which ultimately resulted in the adulterer's murder. To depict mothers as the most dangerous influence for infants and necessitate the use of a surrogate caretaker would then break down the mother-infant bond robbing the woman of her responsibility and honor in childraising.

Because of the extreme importance of an infant to a father, family and state, competent child-care is crucial. In a patriarchal society, such as ancient Greece was, the power left to women would be in managing the daily tasks of the household and bearing and raising children. If women were considered biologically unstable and at times contaminating to their own children, their ability to be effective mothers would be questioned. With the potential social pressures playing upon them at the same time,

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388 Demand 1994:xx and 145. Other examples of male subordination of women: Holst-Worhoff 1992 on restrictions on women's lament; Humphreys 1983:85-87- restrictions against visiting tombs of non-kin preventing worship of cults to the dead, women's excessive grief and the possibility of women meeting strange men at funerals.


children would not be considered safe in their care alone. The husband’s dominance could be extended into the household realm by employing a surrogate to care for his children and by removing the last vestige of power that a woman could wield, namely motherhood. For this reason, nurses were employed to raise the infant with more certainty of success and safety then if the mother herself cared for the child.

Cult of Inversion

Returning then to our central myth, Hphsipyle was hired by Opheltes’ father to care for the young boy even though his mother was present and presumably capable of handling the task herself. If nursing care was at least a prominent feature of the archaic and classical ages, it might be troubling to see this myth focus on a very unsuccessful example of its use. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a close analysis of the different versions reveal that in no instance was the blame for the boy’s death placed on Hypsipyle. From the mythic viewpoint, the focus is on the unfortuante tragedy and not the culpability of a negligent nurse. It would seem, then, in light of all the evidence, this cult functioned in its element of inversion. If the opposite of what society desires happens in the myth, then worship at this cult would inspire normal and successful childcare in the community. This would not be the only case for a cult of inversion, the Anthesteria festival in Athens providing a good example of another instance. Here, in this festival the slaves and the dead are allowed freedoms otherwise denied them. At the close of the ceremony, society returns to its orderly hierarchy. So, by allowing an inversion of normalcy, then true normalcy in the community is ensured. Burkert discusses this

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phenomenon by arguing that anxieties in the community are dealt with safely through myth and ritual entertaining the opposite of what society desires. In this way, the Opheltes myth can be seen. The anxious need for productive child-care is played out in the mythic example of child-care gone tragically bad.

394 ibid.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In our attempt as historians to bring to light the ideologies and events of the ancient world, comprehensive studies of wide ranging aspects of ancient life are ongoing. In this study, the focus has been on the Archaic and Classical Greek conception of the infant and its care. Although there are a few philosophical treatises dealing with infants and recommendations for their care, there are no ancient sources that explicitly examine the nature of children or the practice of surrogate infant care. The relative silence about these topics can be paralleled by the lack of modern expository treatment of women in the ancient world. As the women’s historians have had to draw from varied sources and references to reconstruct ancient womanhood, so, too, has this study drawn from wide-ranging references to understand the ancient Greek concept of childhood. I argue that the child was considered liminal throughout the period of infancy (up to the age of three) because it exhibited many characteristics that were seen as “other” to the adult community. Passing ancient references and descriptions bear this out. This liminal nature helps to explain many rituals surrounding infants and the perceived power within them. The other crucial element in the lives of newborn children was that their care was often provided by a nurse and not the natural care-giver, the mother. This study shows that religious needs dictated this to some
extent, but the social trepidation about the power and instability of women warranted this breach of nature. This practice also helped to support the social institution of male dominance.

A fair number of studies have been conducted on the ancient family and very recently many excellent studies of the child. The present inquiry makes use of these works, but focuses on two areas of childhood that have not been fully analyzed, namely infancy and wet-nursing, or surrogate care-giving. The focus here has been to offer an understanding of how the adult community viewed the nature of the new-born and why it was fairly common place that someone other than the mother would care for the child. Concerning the topic of nursing, there have been many critical analyses on the practice in the Roman world, but unfortunately very little attention has been given to the Greek practice. Therefore, here we have examined references to child-care and also to the attitude toward women/mothers in order to develop one possible explanation for the use of nurses.

The myth of the death of the infant Opheltes offers an excellent paradigm to guide us through this search. This myth most certainly would have been known by many because of its position as the foundation story for the panhellenic games. An examination of the variations of the myth reveals that there were several significant and unchanging elements. These offer many key observations to help elucidate the quest for the infant. The central position the boy held is significant as is his tragic death and his dual name, all of which reflect a belief in infant marginality. The most striking element is the inclusion of his nurse in such a crucial role- the one to facilitate his death by putting him on the ground- and one that evoked pity in the myth rather than
condemnation. One means of interpretation is to see this myth as an example of a cult of inversion.

Recent excavations at the site of Nemea reveal that a Heroon has been found most certainly attributed to the infant Opheltes. Due to the nature of the material evidence found within the temenos, the cultic activity that went on there was both fairly popular and of a chthonic nature. An examination of the other three sites for panhellenic competition then give us some understanding of the possible importance of the Opheltes myth/worship. Among these four foundation myths, three center around infants: Opheltes at Nemea, Melikertes at Isthmia, and Apollo at Delphi. Two of these three myths focused on snake encounters where Opheltes is killed by them and Apollo kills them. Two of these same three are myths that culminate in the infants’ death: Opheltes and Melikertes. What we can see from this analysis is that because infancy is central to most of the foundation myths, there must have been a fair concern for infancy and the well-being of infants. Also the death of infants was of a nature serious enough, at least in the cases of Opheltes and Melikertes, to warrant funeral games in their honor. There may have been other issues recognized here, but clearly the nature of infancy and their care is among them. The myth of Opheltes stands out from among them. This myth was chosen as the "key" myth to this study because Opheltes was fully mortal, his infant age is crucial to the events in the story, and the surrogate care-giver is central to the plot.

From our evidence, it was argued that the period of infancy was deemed to be a liminal state in a person’s life. Liminality was defined as being a state in which one does not fully conform to the characteristic identities of the society of which it is a part.
This ambiguity in the characteristics of small children can be seen in many aspects, one of which is the nature of adult reaction to a newborn child. The arrival of a baby brought joy at the increase the child provided to the family and state as well as fulfillment to the parents, while at the same time giving cause of worry and misery to them. This ambiguity is clearly reflected in our “key” myth in the names of the boy as Opheltes and Archemoros.

The most obvious liminal traits in infants are those many characteristics of adulthood that they lack. They are incapable of speaking, walking and “thinking.” Their bodily proportions are nothing like grown adults but, as Aristotle notes, they are dwarfs instead. Many ancient references compare small children to other liminal or “marginal” beings such as foreigners, drunkards and animals. The words used for infancy also reflect this belief in that no distinction is made between a fetus and a child and in several, no gender is even supplied.

Following our key myth, then, the vulnerability of Opheltes led directly to his death. The liminal nature of the child did, in fact, leave it susceptible to attack, malformation and death. For this reason, great care was given to guide and mold the child through its liminality so that it might emerge into adolescence and adulthood bearing all the traits necessary for it to fit into society.

The liminality of infants warranted inclusion in religious rituals or connection with the divine in two ways. First, rituals used in connection with children emphasized their purificatory function, recognition into the family or passage through toddlerhood. It was also noted that an infant’s liminal existence in life also translated into a liminal existence in death. Even burial of the very young was handled in a manner distinct
from the rest of society. Again, returning to Opheltes, one must be reminded of the central element of his burial and subsequent commemoration.

The second way that infant liminality dictated religious action was in their perceived connection to the gods. These children were many times used in a manner to connect with the divine or they were the ones, of their own accord, who could successfully access the divine. It was argued that their liminal status allowed this communication because they were not fully of this world and so must, then, be able to reach to the other side, the divine side. An extension of this was seen as children being indicators of society. Children most naturally are seen as indicators of the health of society. A city with many thriving children is a thriving city, but a catastrophe involving children only presages a city’s downfall. This phenomena is also evident in our key myth where he serves as both “bringer of increase” and “beginner of doom” for the seven commanders against Thebes.

This liminal status of infants as explored in this study is most certainly rooted in reality. Any parent could attest to the earthshaking love and awe of their newborn infant while at the same time wrestle with the near crippling worry about their welfare. This almost otherworldly miracle of life is also so inherently different from us and so enormously vulnerable. By viewing infants as liminal, parents would be able to understand a tragic death of their child as being a potentiality of the baby’s condition rather than their own misdoing, thereby relieving personal burden and guilt. Aristotle claimed that myth was cathartic\textsuperscript{395} by playing out our latent anxieties with the world and then allowing us respite from these fears. As infant welfare and potential death was

\footnote{Arist. Poet. 6.}
such an ever present concern, these myths encode our fears and help us to deal with them.

Once an analysis of the nature of infancy was complete, an examination of surrogate care could be undertaken. We saw Plato’s recommendation for infant handling; it was established that these liminal beings were in constant need of care and protection, so it was logical to examine who it was that actually rendered care to them. Ultimately, the state had interest in its own children and so had an interest in their care. While Plato’s ideal called for complete state control of child-care with even the prohibition that one should recognize one’s biological parent, the reality of state child-care was far less encompassing. But, nevertheless, the state was concerned and, at least theoretically, cared for its own.

Many examples can be found of the parents, both mother and father, caring for their own children. There are also countless references of care given by a surrogate care-giver. These “nurses” in mythology have been women, men, and even animals and bees. There is considerable evidence that wet-nurses were employed in ancient Greece, sometimes even under the supervision of the mother herself. The nurse is, after all, one of the stock characters in myth and literature. It is not the goal of this study to argue that no parent raised or loved their own children. The issue, rather, is what ideology supported or even necessitated “otherness” and made their use recognizable and condoned by society. The first reason analyzed was that in certain circumstances the religious need dictated their use. There was a pervasive belief in child-killing demons that would strike at any moment if the child was not guarded. But because these demons were once women themselves who were not successful mothers, they would
target kids of successful mothers out of envy and jealousy. "If I don’t have any, then you shouldn’t either," they might seem to have said. Therefore, no matter how well meaning and capable the mother, she simply invites potential danger onto her child. There are many examples of surrogates stepping in for the mother to perform necessary rituals for the child. The sister of the mother, or the nurse, were often the surrogate of choice.

What is necessary, then, is to consider the ideology behind the use of surrogate care. It was argued that the use of surrogates was a means whereby men could further dominate women in this highly patriarchal society. It is a common understanding of archaic and classical Greece that women played an inferior role to men in society, being denied any power in the public sphere. Their power could only be exerted in the home. But the bearing and raising of children has a tremendous influence on society. Denying mothers the care of their own infants would be to reestablish the male power in the last sphere of life.

Many influences on the ancient man would not only support his use of a nurse for purposes of power but also raise enough doubt and trepidation about the mother’s capability to nurture a child anyway. It was seen that the mother had the potential to contaminate the child, passing her undesirable qualities on to her child through her milk or biologically. There were also philosophical and medical theories that proved the mother’s passive role in conception or at least a weak contribution to it. Medically a woman was prone to mental imbalance and could actually poison her child if she nursed it in the days immediately following birth.
Once these theories were established, an examination of mothers in myth bore out a striking expression of the potential dangers of mothers. In myth after myth, women abuse, neglect and kill their children. A comparison of the same behaviors exhibited in men revealed extraordinary differences. While men could cruelly threat their children also, it was always necessitated by a more significant action or the gods simply “made them do it.” Women, on the other hand, time and time again, turn away from their children with malice and forethought putting their own reputation, siblings or love above them. These ideologies would have saturated the Greek male experience and would have produced either a sympathy for the use of surrogates in the face of these unpredictable, maligned wives and mothers or they would practice it in their own family.

Returning to our key myth, the existence of the nurse Hypsipyle conforms to the common use of the nurse but the question then remains, why does she kill the child, albeit involuntarily? What a contradiction to the other nurses, both real and mythic, who were seen as kind and loving and protecting. I argue that this is an example of an inversion myth, showing the horrific consequences if the social order is not progressing well. In explicating the worst outcome of a practice, then, social harmony and balance will once again prevail. And all for the protection of these little young ones.

In general, surrogate care and its expressions in myth offered one more means of protection for the extremely vulnerable infant, offering, specifically to the father, a feeling of control in what must have seemed a powerless parental duty. An interesting phenomenon arises when one compares the ancient ideology of surrogate care to the modern rationalizations for daycare. For the ancient Greek male, the farming out of
children to potential strangers disintegrated women's power and reinforced her inferiority to the male sphere. Today the same practice is employed in the use of institutional daycare, but the justification now is to enhance the power and independence of women by her participating fully in the world of men. We see both ends of the spectrum in terms of women's place in society, but we must also note that neither is for the benefit of the child. We seem to be ultimately selfish creatures who, in pursuit of our own agenda, manipulate the lives of our children, even though our collective futures rest in their hands.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


