

# Who protects children in the Roman religion? From whom? Some reflections concerning Carna, Ino, and Thesan, in connection with Mater Matuta

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### ABSTRACT

If we think of child protection in the Roman religion, the first goddess that comes to mind is Mater Matuta. This paper, however, does not focus directly on Mater Matuta, but on other divine figures to some extent related to her: Carna, Ino, and Thesan.

Carna-Cranaë-Cardea, the nymph of the thresholds was celebrated on the calends of June, just ten days after the ceremony in the temple of Mater Matuta. The cult of Ino and Melicertes arose in Italy, where they were called by the Greeks Leukothea and Palaemon, and by the Romans Matuta and Portunus. Thesan was the Etruscan goddess connected with the Dawn, like Mater Matuta. To some extent, these divine figures are all related to kourotrophia.

Incidentally, I will try to suggest that the Roman religious calendar from the 1st of June to the 11th of June was full of details which might allude to one another, with the aim of underlining the importance of human and divine kourotrophia, by using the concept of intertext in literary criticism.

### KEYWORDS

Mater Matura, Carna, Ino, Thesan, child protection

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper was part of a panel entitled “Religions Dominated by Mothering Women:<sup>1</sup> Unveiling Dynamics and Emotions in Religious Practices Involving Children in Danger, in the Ancient World.”<sup>2</sup> By placing a particular emphasis on the religious aspects of mothering practices, this panel aimed at reconstructing the embodied ritual experiences of women in their children care-taking functions, and, when traceable, the emotional involvement in performing them and between the people involved, by considering both archaeological and literary sources with examples from the ancient Near East, Sicily, Rome and its Empire.

I will start with a passage by Persius, in which we can find a realistic overview of what I would label, following Susan S. Sered’s example, “religion dominated by women”, i.e., religious practices performed exclusively by women as nurturers, healers, primary child care providers, and emotional supporters in cases of childhood diseases and premature death. These kinds of religions are an alternative to official, “dominated by men” religions; they distinguish themselves for being contingent, pragmatic, and tending to escape universals.<sup>3</sup> We can say that they deal to a great extent with what we label kourotophia in antiquity, as will be seen.

Then I will analyze narratives concerning three divine figures: Carna, Ino, and Thesan. They are all connected, to some extent, to Mater Matuta. The analysis will show, in my opinion, how ambivalently the ensemble of women gravitating towards an infant – including mothers, grandmothers, maternal aunts, (wet)nurses, and divine interlocutors – was perceived. The narratives seem to suggest that, at least theoretically, all these female figures – even the mother – could be either benevolent or malevolent towards the baby.

Incidentally, I will try to suggest that the Roman religious calendar from the 1st of June to the 11th of June was full of details which might allude to one another, with the aim of underlining the importance of human and divine kourotophia by using the concept of intertext in literary criticism.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. SERED, S. S.: *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister. Religions dominated by Women*. New York – Oxford 1994. A “mothering woman” is not necessarily a biological woman, she can also be a woman, who acts like a mother towards an infant (wet-nurses, nurses, adoptive mothers, step-mothers, elder sisters etc.). Inspired by Ruddick’s words (RUD-DICK, S.: *Maternal Thinking. Toward a Politics of Peace*. Boston 1989, 17), I proposed the following definition for “mother:” any child can have in their life one or more figures who collaborate (simultaneously or not) in pursuing preservation, growth, and social acceptance, but usually every child has in their life a figure – a “mother” – who takes care of them on a daily – or almost daily – base in order to pursue their preservation, growth, and social acceptance. Significant others can help this figure, but she/he performs this task in a preponderant way in comparison with others. This figure is often, but not always and not necessarily, the biological mother.

<sup>2</sup>The panel was chaired by myself and hosted the following papers: Claudia Lamburgo (University of Milan), *The power of keimelia. Protecting children with ancient stones*; José Nicolás Saiz López (University of Cantabria) and Pedro David Conesa Navarro (University of Murcia), *Under the care of gods: Divine protection of the newborn in Ancient Rome*; Michaela Kellová (Charles University of Prague), *“Who is his mother so I can curse him?” The role of the mother as a passive (dangerous) medium on curse tablets*; Nadia Pezzulla (Sapienza University of Rome), *Children Health and Death and the Relationship between Mother and Child in the Ancient Near East*.

<sup>3</sup>SERED (n. 1).



## PROTECTIVE AND DANGEROUS LIAISONS FOR THE INFANT

*Ecce avia aut metuens divum matertera cunis  
exemit puerum frontemque atque uda labella  
infami digito et lustralibus ante salivis  
expiat, urentis oculos inhibere perita.*

(Persius, *Satire* 2. 31–34)

Look – a grandma or superstitious aunt has lifted the boy from his cradle and first protects his forehead and wet lips with her wicked finger and magical saliva, an expert at warding off the withering evil eye.<sup>4</sup>

As he usually does, Persius (34–62 CE) shows his intolerant rejection of contemporary society and its decadent standards. *Satire* 2 is presented as a *genethliacon* or “birthday poem” to a friend and fellow student of Persius, Plotius Macrinus (whose name may suggest “long life”), but it becomes a fierce diatribe on prayer, a standard philosophical and satirical theme.

He is critical of the hidden intentions behind most prayers. Most men, Persius argues, offer the most selfless prayers in public, and in private wish for the opposite. In fact, I would say that it is not a case that, right after, Persius states:

*tunc manibus quatit et spem macram supplice voto  
nunc Licini in campos, nunc Crassi mittit in aedis.*

(Persius, *Satire* 2. 35–36)

Then she rocks him in her arms and in earnest prayer launches the scrawny prospect now towards Licinus’ estates, now towards Crassus’ palace.

What we have here are a grandmother<sup>5</sup> or a maternal aunt who is trying to protect the new-born who was sleeping in the cradle (and therefore is a new-born), from the evil eye (*urentis oculus*, 2. 31). She is *metuens divum* (2. 31), full of fear of the gods, that is, superstitious, not exactly a good quality. The superstitious wet-nurse is stigmatized as dangerous by the Greek physician Soranus of Ephesus (2. 19).<sup>6</sup> In order to do so, she uses the middle finger, which was used for insulting gestures and was hence the appropriate finger for warding off the evil eye (see 31–34 above). They also use saliva (*atque uda labella* / *infami digito et lustralibus ante salivis*, 32–33, above), a quite suggestive substance connected with human humors: unpleasant on the one hand, but also, being related somehow to blood, milk, and sperm, an extremely intimate human fluid on the other. The spittle is put on the forehead and on the lips of the baby. *Lustralis* normally refers to the sphere of established religion, and its use with “spittle” highlights the magical nature of this female practice. Pliny the Elder writes an entire Chapter of the *Naturalis Historia* (28. 7) on the properties of human spittle. In particular, he states that “upon the entrance of a stranger, or when a person looks at an infant while asleep, it is usual for the nurse to spit three times upon the ground; and this, although infants are under the especial

<sup>4</sup>Translations by S. Morton Braund, Loeb Classical Library 91 (2004), available on-line: DOI: 10.4159/DLCL.persius-satires.2004 (accessed 19 Dec. 18).

<sup>5</sup>Whether maternal or paternal is difficult to say; I would suggest maternal, since she is somehow associated with the *matertera*, the maternal aunt. It must be said, however, that the paternal grandmother usually lived with the infant.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. PEDRUCCI, G.: *Maternità e allattamenti nel mondo greco e romano*. Roma 2018, 55.



guardianship of the god Fascinus, the protector, not of infants only, but of generals as well”.<sup>7</sup> Persius also mentions the nurse: at the end of this story, he affirms “I entrust no prayers to a nurse” (*ast ego nutrici non mando vota*, v. 39).

But let us take a step back for a moment. These two women seem to be benevolent towards the baby, but, on purpose or not, after having tried to protect him from the evil eye, they put him in danger by shaking the new-born with their hands. Soranus in his *Gynaecology* (2. 19), for instance, warns parents that a bad nurse can dangerously shake a crying baby.

They also indirectly put the baby in danger by wetting the lips of such a small and fragile creature with adult saliva,<sup>8</sup> and maybe also by carrying him around. In fact, after the ritual against the evil eye, they bring the baby to Licinus’ estates and Crassus’ palace, both fabulously rich, to proudly show him and hope for a good marriage (it is clearly a baby boy). These details also suggest that we are dealing with respectable citizens, not poor plebs<sup>9</sup> (cf. 2. 35–36, above).

To sum up, from Persius’ text we gain the following information: there are female figures (grandmothers, maternal aunts, wet-nurses), different from the mother, who are active agents in the vicinity of a new-born. They probably wish to protect the baby, in particular from the evil eye – and in this way, we learn that the evil eye could affect young children – but, in doing so, they can also put the baby in danger.<sup>10</sup> They are superstitious, ambitious, and possibly – we can assume – maladroit. One of these women is definitely old (*avia*), which makes her an even more doubtful character.<sup>11</sup> They can all be reliable figures, but, in the very end, they are not the child’s mother. And not even the mother – as I will try to argue – is a completely trustworthy character.

In this regard, a text by Statius, *Theb.* 5. 613–633, can be enlightening: Opheltes’ mother, Eurydice, blames the nurse, Hypsipyle, – and I would add herself – for the death of her son. Hypsipyle’s carelessness was the cause of the loss. But the nurse is destroyed by grief as well. Indeed, according to Publilius Sirus (*Sent.* 659): *secundus est a matre nutricis dolor* (“the grief of

<sup>7</sup>Translated by J. Bostock and H. T. Riley, London–New York 1893, available on-line <https://archive.org/details/naturalhistoryp00bostgoog/page/n4> (accessed 19 Dec. 18).

<sup>8</sup>The risk of transmitting illnesses via the nurse’s saliva (see the usage of chewed food during the weaning) is clearly attested in Soranus, Galen, Mnesiteus; see DASEN, V.: *Le sourire d’Omphale. Maternité et petite enfance dans l’Antiquité*. Rennes 2015, 258.

<sup>9</sup>Moreover, according to SMITH, C. J.: Worshipping Mater Matuta: ritual and context. In BISPHAM, E. – SMITH, C. J. (eds): *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy: Evidence and Experience*. Edinburgh 2000, 136–55, 151–152, there is the echo of Augustan condemnation of excessive luxury and a possible allusion to the fact that, during the Matralia, women commend their nephews to Matuta in the hope that afterwards Fortuna – who is linked with Servius Tullius’ birth and childhood – will bless them and give them a royal destiny. For the link between Mater Matuta and Fortuna at the Forum Boarium, see *infra*.

<sup>10</sup>How often and how much a child can be put in danger is suggested a few lines above (vv. 12–13), when Persius gives the example of a prayer for the death of a pupil, in order to inherit in his place. See HARVEY, R. A.: *A Commentary on Persius*. Leiden 1981, 56ff.

<sup>11</sup>BREMMER, J. N.: La donna anziana: libertà e indipendenza. In ARRIGONI, G. (ed.): *Le donne in Grecia*. Roma–Bari 1985, 275–298; PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 215–229.



the nurse is only second to that of the mother”), but in this case, the pain of Hypsipyle seems to be even more excruciating than that of the biological mother: she claims the attachment link and the proximal relationship with the baby.<sup>12</sup>

In general, scholars always take for granted that the (wet)nurse was beloved and attached to the master’s offspring, but, as I have tried to argue, reality was much more complex. After all, they were mothers who had to give up their own children and rear alien children. Love and devotion is just one side of the coin, the one we can easily gain from the majority of sources we have, that is, that of funereal documentation.<sup>13</sup> We have plenty of other clues that make us think that aristocratic parents – both mother and father – did not fully trust the people who took care of their babies – not even the *matertera*, the maternal aunt, the figure who most seemed to have a shared intimacy with the mother and her offspring (for example, she could even breastfeed the nephew/niece).<sup>14</sup> Her role as a “second mother”<sup>15</sup> was institutionalized in Rome by the existence of a festival in honour of Mater Matuta called Matralia, during which only free women in their first marriage might take part and their prayers were not for their own children but for those of their sisters.<sup>16</sup> Only matronae were admitted, that is, women who had Roman citizenship and were married to a freeman, and were supposed to be honourable wives and mothers: it is likely

<sup>12</sup>SOERINK, J.: Tragic/Epic: Statius’ Thebaid and Euripides’ Hypsipyle. In AUGOUSTAKIS, A. (ed.): *Flavian Literature and Its Greek Past*. Leiden 2014, 171–191; PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 81ff. This episode was already presented in Greek tragedy, see CASTELLANETA, S.: «Un tintinnio di sonagli»: gli «strumenti» della nutrice nell’Ipsipile di Euripide. In A. COPPOLA ET AL. (ed.): *Gli oggetti sulla scena teatrale ateniese. Funzione, rappresentazione, comunicazione. Giornate internazionali di studio, Università degli Studi di Padova, 1-2 dicembre 2015*. Padova 2016, 45–56. But we also have completely different negative example of a nurse: see for instance Daene in Hom. *Od.* 15. 403–484: the baby does love her, but she doesn’t return his love.

<sup>13</sup>JOSHEI, S. R.: Nurturing the Master’s Child. Slavery and the Roman Child Nurse. *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12.1 (1986) 3–22 (with a parallel with slavery in the United States of America: slaves after emancipation acted differently in comparison with masters’ expectations); HUSKINSON, J.: Picturing the Roman Family. In RAWSON, B. (ed.): *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Malden 2011, 522–541; PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 38ff.

<sup>14</sup>BETTINI, M.: Su alcuni modelli antropologici della Roma più arcaica: Designazioni linguistiche e pratiche culturali, II. *Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici* 2 (1979) 9–41; BETTINI, M.: *Antropologia e cultura Romana*. Roma 1986, 77–112; PEDRUCCI, G. – SCAPINI, M.: Il ruolo della balia e di altre figure vicarie legate all’infanzia nella religione greca e romana: Arreforie e Matralia a confronto. In PASCHE-GUIGNARD, F. – PEDRUCCI, G. – SCAPINI, M. (eds): *Maternità e politeismi / Motherhood(s) and Polytheisms*. Bologna 2017, 333–366, 392, 342; PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 34ff., 57ff.

<sup>15</sup>*Matertera est soror matris, quasi mater altera* (Festo 121L). Cf.: BETTINI: Su alcuni modelli (n. 14) 25; BREMMER, J. N.: *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity. Collected Essays I*. Tübingen 2017, 359. *Tu quoque Dryadum materteram [...] germana genitus, prope filius ore pio veneror [...] Discebas in me, matertera, mater uti fieres* (Aus. *Par.* 25 “To you also, Dryadia my aunt, in mournful strains I, whom your sister bare, almost your son, – do reverence with loving lips [...] You learned, my aunt, to be a mother to me; therefore now I, a son, offer you this sad token of my love.” Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White. Loeb Classical Library 96, available on-line DOI: 10.4159/DCLL.ausonius-parentalia.1919 (accessed 19 Dec. 18). Ausonius was a gallo-roman poet during the 4th c. CE. The figure of the *matertera* was still important. I want to highlight the use of the term *filius*, ie., the “maternal” apprenticeship she made with the nephew. See BETTINI: Su alcuni modelli (n. 14) 35; BETTINI: *Antropologia* (n. 14) 86. See also PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 57. Two *togatae* entitled *Materterae* exist: of the one by Afranius we have a few verses in which the dying mother gives custody of her young daughter to her sister. The father is likely absent. BETTINI: Su alcuni modelli (n. 14) 28–34, collected several inscriptions in which the *matertera* has a role in rearing a child with only one parent or no parents at all. Following an ancient custom, the *matertera* and not the mother took the nuptial *omina* for the maiden (Cic. *Div.* 1. 104 – Cecilia calls the niece *mea puella*; Val. Max. 1. 5. 4).

<sup>16</sup>Plut. *Cam.* 5. 2; *Quaest. Rom.* 17 (= 267e Stephanus).



that all the participants had children, and a sort of “mutual exchange” among sisters took place.<sup>17</sup>

Again, examples of bad *materterae* exist in Roman sources. This is the case of the maleficent sisters of Psyche, who is about to give birth to Love’s son.<sup>18</sup> Ino, also, is a *matertera* to Dionysus. She is not a danger for him, but she is a danger to her son, Melicertes because she kidnaps him and exposes him to many dangers. Amata, too, the “archetypal” *matertera* character in Latin literature (Serv. *Aen.* 7. 366), is a model of love and devotion for her nephew Turnus, indeed; but at the very end, she is the cause of Turnus’ death (which also leads to her suicide) and, moreover, she is an extremely dangerous mother for her own sons.<sup>19</sup>

## CARNA

In any case, the most suspicious childcare giver was certainly the wet-nurse – probably because she was a servant with no blood-tie to the family. This becomes crystal clear if we consider the elaboration of the “folkloric” figure of the bad nurse,<sup>20</sup> often, if not always, associated with the nocturnal bird *strix*, a sort of “ancestress” of the medieval witch, as we will see. But, again, reality is much more multifaceted than we tend to think, and at least this is so in the case of Proca’s nurse, who saves him from striges, while his parents do nothing. This is the story which involves Carna.

Carna-Cranaë-Cardia is the nymph of the threshold. Ovid (*Fasti* 6. 101–182) recalls a myth in which Janus, in exchange for sexual intercourse with her, gave Carna a branch of hawthorn that had the power to ward off bad influences from thresholds.<sup>21</sup> Carna used the plant for this purpose to protect the very young baby boy, Proca (five days old) (*Fasti* 6. 143). She was called by his nurse, once the nurse realized that the child was the victim of striges, nocturnal winged creatures (*noctis aves*), which can come into the house during the night to suck infants’ blood:

*sunt avidae volucres, non quae Phineia mensis  
guttura fraudabant, sed genus inde trahunt:*

<sup>17</sup>The statue of the goddess (and that of Fortune, in the twin temple at the Forum Boarium) was then crowned with a garland, by one of the matrons who had not yet lost a husband (Tert. *De monog.* 17. 3). For the link between Mater Matuta and Fortuna at the Forum Boarium, see *infra*.

<sup>18</sup>Apul. *Met.* 5. 14. BETTINI: *Antropologia* (n. 14) 82.

<sup>19</sup>Verg. *Aen.* 7. 57; 12. 54–80 (v. 74: Turnus calls her *mater*). From the comment Ad *Aen.* 7. 51, we learn that Latinus had two sons, but Amata killed or blinded them, see BETTINI: *Antropologia* (n. 14) 110 for details. We should also recall the paternal aunt of Nero, who was accused of acting as a sorceress and of harming the nephew, see: Suet. *Ner.* 6f.; Tac. *Ann.* 12. 64f.

<sup>20</sup>The gap between the idealized portrait of the (wet)nurse (see in particular Sor. 2. 19) and reality is explained by LAES, C.: *The Educated Midwife in the Roman Empire. An example of differential equations*. In HORSTMANSHOFF, M. (ed.): *Hippocrates and Medical Education. Selected papers presented at the 12. International Hippocrates Colloquium, Universiteit Leiden, 24-26 August 2005* Leiden–Boston 2010, 261–286, by using the concept of differential equations. Cf. *infra*. For the *strix*, see CHERUBINI, L.: *Strix. La strega nella cultura romana*. Torino 2010. Cf. PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 105–111.

<sup>21</sup>Ov. *Fasti* 6. 101–102: *dea cardinis haec est: numine clausa aperit, claudit aperta suo*. She is clearly described as goddess of thresholds. Nevertheless, this power, at least to me, sounds pretty much as the description of pregnancy and childbirth (see SISSA, G.: *Le corps virginal. La virginité féminine en Grèce ancienne*. Paris 1987; PEDRUCCI [n. 6] 225). A possible, subtle allusion linked to her task of protecting new-born?



*grande caput, stantes oculi, rostra apta rapinis,  
canities pinnis, unguibus hamus inest.  
nocte volant puerosque petunt nutricis egentes  
et vitiant cunis corpora rapta suis.  
carpere dicuntur lactentia viscera rostris  
et plenum poto sanguine guttur habent,  
est illis strigibus nomen; sed nominis huius  
causa, quod horrendum stridere nocte solent,  
sive igitur nascuntur aves seu carmine fiunt  
naeniaque in volucres Marsa figurat anus,  
in thalamos venere Procae.*

(Ovid, *Fasti* 6. 130–144)

There are some greedy birds, not those that cheated Phineus of his meal, though descended from that race: Their heads are large, their eyes stick out, their beaks fit for tearing, their feathers are grey, their claws hooked. They fly by night, attacking children with absent nurses, And defiling their bodies, snatched from the cradle. They're said to rend the flesh of infants with their beaks, And their throats are full of the blood they drink. They're called screech-owls, and the reason for the name is the horrible screeching they usually make at night. Whether they're born as birds, or whether they're made so by spells, old women transformed to birds by Marsian magic, They still entered Proca's bedroom).<sup>22</sup>

According to Ovid, the myth would therefore explain both the traditional use of hawthorn branches to hunt striges and the fact that Carna was considered a protective deity for children.

The story takes place inside the household. The nurse is the heroine because she is the one who immediately arrives when the baby cries, understands the problem and finds the solution, while the parents just cry (it must be said that nurses were the only ones in charge of taking care of the baby during the night, so it would be unlikely if the parents had responded before the nurse).

*Proca natus in illis  
praeda recens avium quinque diebus erat,  
pectoraque exsorbent avidis infantia linguis;  
at puer infelix vagit opemque petit.  
territa voce sui nutrix accurrit alumni  
et rigido sectas invenit ungue genas,  
quid faceret? color oris erat, qui frondibus olim  
esse solet seris, quas nova laesit hiems.  
pervenit ad Cranen et rem docet, illa "timorem  
pone: tuus sospes" dixit "alumnus erit."  
venerat ad cunas: flebant materque paterque:  
"sistite vos lacrimas, ipsa medebor" ait.*

(Ovid, *Fasti* 6. 144–154)

They still entered Proca's bedroom. Proca was fresh prey for the birds, a child of five days old. They sucked at the infant's chest, with greedy tongues: And the wretched child screamed for help. Scared at his cry, the nurse ran to her ward, And found his cheeks slashed by their sharp claws. What could she do? The colour of the child's face Was that of late leaves nipped by an early frost. She went to

<sup>22</sup>Translation by A. S. Kline 2005 available on-line <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/OvidFastiBkSix.php> accessed 7 Nov. 2019. See also Hor. *Epod.* 5. 19–20: *et uncta turpis ova ranae Sanguine plumamque nocturnae strigis*: With the feathers and eggs of nocturnal screech-owls All smeared with the blood of vile toads (translation by A. S. Kline 2005: <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceEpodesAndCarmenSaeculare.php> accessed 7 Nov. 2019). Cf. Petr. *Sat.* 63. 8.





Cranaë and told her: Cranaë said: “Don’t be afraid: your little ward will be safe.” She approached the cradle: the parents wept: “Restrain your tears”, she said, “I’ll heal him.”<sup>23</sup>

The nurse is the one who watches over the new-born, and she does it properly. She offers a young sow,<sup>24</sup> to take the place of the baby (from Proca to *porca*, v. 158). In this narrative, she is a totally positive character, who is part of, and acts inside, the familia. And Carnaë, through the mediation of the nurse, gave protection from the possible negative influences outside the threshold, that is to say, outside the family unit. Inside/outside. After the birth of a child, the aristocratic household was open to visits from relatives, neighbors, clients etc.<sup>25</sup> Evil in this case comes from outside, from a completely alien creature. But it can also come from inside, as I am trying to argue.

As Mary Douglas<sup>26</sup> notes in *Natural Symbols*, “it is well-enough recognized among anthropologists that witchcraft beliefs flourish where there is ambiguity in the patterning of roles”. Where there is a belief in witches, then, we must seek the cultural ambiguity and resulting anxiety from which it arises. With this in mind, let us turn to a sepulchral inscription from Rome, composed at some point during the early Principate, that commemorates the death of a four-year-old named Jucundus (CIL VI 19747 = ILS 8522 = CLE 987). The final lines of this epitaph are quite illuminating:

*eripuit me saga manus crudelis, ubique cum manet in terris et nocit arte sua. vos vestros natos concustodite parentes, ni dolor in toto pectore fixsus eat.* (CIL VI 19747 = ILS 8522 = CLE 987)

A cruel and cunning hand seized me, while she remains everywhere on earth and does harm with her craft. You parents, guard your children closely, lest grief be fastened in your whole heart.<sup>27</sup>

The inscription is a direct first-person statement by the dead child Jucundus that includes a command to all parents to guard their children (better, presumably, than he himself had been guarded). The tone of Jucundus’s epitaph is accusatory and so reflects the guilt of the parents who commissioned it.<sup>28</sup> That is to say, the guilt of both his parents (concustodia): father and mother seem to be at the same level and share the same responsibilities towards the offspring.<sup>29</sup> This reminds us of Statius’ passage (*Theb.* 5. 613–33, above): the mother is also guilty of Opheltes’ death, and she seems to be aware of this.

Proca’s story seems to go in the same direction. The inclusion of the nurse in the tale highlights (perhaps inadvertently) the conspicuous absence of Proca’s parents from the activities. It is the nurse who notices the infant’s affliction, while it is the nymph Carnaë who remedies it; insofar as they have any presence at all in the story, the parents are perfunctorily off to the side weeping, incapable of either diagnosing, treating, or even interacting with their child.

<sup>23</sup>Ov. *Fasti* 6. 144–154. Translation by A. S. Kline 2005: <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceEpodesAndCarmenSaeculare.php> (accessed 7 Nov. 2019).

<sup>24</sup>Which, at least under the Principate, might have recalled the sacrifice of the pregnant sow to Tellus during the night between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June on the occasion of the *Ludi Saeculares*. See *infra*.

<sup>25</sup>HÄNNINEN, M.-L.: From Womb to Family. Rituals and Social Conventions Connected to Roman Birth. In MUSTAKALLIO, K. ET AL. (ed.): *Hoping for Continuity. Childhood, Education and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Rome 2005, 49–59, here 59.

<sup>26</sup>DOUGLAS, M.: *Natural Symbols. Explorations in cosmology*. London 1970, 107.

<sup>27</sup>Translation from McDONOUGH, C. M.: Carna, Proca and the Strix on the Kalends of June. *TAPA* 127 (1997) 315–344, here 322. The *saga* was a sort of witch, see BETTINI, M.: *Nascere. Storie di donne, donnole, madri ed eroi*. Torino 1998, 293–295. Cf. PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 228.

<sup>28</sup>McDONOUGH (n. 27) 321–322.

<sup>29</sup>PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 45–46.





McDonough links Carnaë's cult to the Matralia, by emphasizing their contiguity in the Roman religious calendar: Carnaë was celebrated at the calends of June, just ten days before the ceremony in the temple of Mater Matuta. The link between the two is mainly based on their function of safeguarding human health in general. McDonough considers in particular votive items discovered at the temple of Mater Matuta in Satricum, which include not only statuettes of the mother-and-child variety but also ex voto models of the inner organs of the human body. Such votive items indicate concern both for the health of children as well as for the well-being of the *viscera*, a set of associated ideas expressed also by the legend of June 1st with respect to Carnaë.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, Mater Matuta, like Carnaë, is a protective, benevolent deity towards children. However, there is some negativity hidden in both narratives. Carnaë obtains her power after being deprived of her virginity by treacherous Janus:<sup>31</sup> her control of liminal space (which enables her to protect Proca from external threats) is a way of counteracting bodily invasion;<sup>32</sup> the narrative concerning the foundation of the Matralia is also made of gendered violence and infants in danger.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, she protects the baby with the help of a magic potion (*medicamen*, v. 157), which is typically used by suspicious women.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup>McDONOUGH (n. 27). For votives in Satricum, see also BETTINI: Su alcuni modelli (n. 14) 10. For the protection of inner organs, see Macrob. *Sat.* 1. 12. 32–33.

<sup>31</sup>Sexual insult and gendered violence are often present in narratives concerning female fertility, founder heroes. See MASTROCINQUE, A.: *Bona Dea and the Cult of Roman Women*. Stuttgart 2014; SCAPINI, M.: *Le stanze di Dioniso. Contenuti rituali e committenti delle scene dionisiache domestiche tra Roma e Pompei*. Getafe 2016. SMITH (n. 9) 144, hypothesizes elements of sexual violence both in S. Omobono (which might be connected with the Eos's seizure of Kephalos, see COARELLI, F.: *Il Foro Boario dalle origini alla fine della Repubblica*. Rome 1988, 226–230) and Satricum, in relation with Athena and Heracles, and put these scenes in relation with the ciste of Pranaeste (where Fortuna Primigenia was worshipped). He concludes: "rite of passage and ritualised violence are intended to contribute to a civic outcome, in which the community achieves good order and perpetuation."

<sup>32</sup>McDONOUGH (n. 27) 331–332.

<sup>33</sup>Moreover, Mater Matuta is connected – even though indirectly – with the protection of boundaries through the *dea minuta* Tutelina, who derives her name from Tutela. See GREEN, C. M.: *Holding the Line: Women, Ritual and the Protection of Rome*. In AHEARNE-KROLL, S. P. – HOLLOWAY, P. A. – KELHOFER, J. (eds): *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Tübingen 2010, 279–295, here 283–284. Tutela appears in the myth that gives the aetiology for the *Feriae Ancillarum*, the festival of handmaidens, which occurred on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July in Rome. Tutela is the leader of the *ancillae*, the eponymous handmaidens of the festival. The same day also honoured Juno Caprotina. Plutarch and Macrobius (Plut. *Cam.* 33. See also Plut. *Rom.* 29; Macrob. *Sat.* 1. 11. 35–40) connect this ceremony to an event that occurred shortly after the Gallic fire. The Latins, perhaps as a pretext for war, demanded from the Romans freeborn virgins in marriage. A Roman serving-maid named Tutela/Tutula came up with an idea. She told the magistrates to send her to the enemy with other maid-servants, all dressed up like *matronae*: she had a plan. The magistrates did what they had been told, and sent the girls to the Latins, who had their military camp near Rome. During the night, the maidens stole the enemies' swords, while Tutela climbed a high wild fig-tree (in Latin *caprificus*) and made light signals towards Rome. On cue, the Roman soldiers attacked the Latin camp and killed a lot of enemies. This legend would explain the origin of the sacrifices made on that day by female servants under a *caprificus*. Plutarch, in *Romulus* 29, adds that on that day the serving-maidens also run about in companies and strike each other and throw stones at one another, in order to recall their ancient exploit alongside the Roman soldiers. Varro (*LL* 6. 18), moreover, mentions a rod, *virga*, used by the women in that circumstance. Scholars (ERKELL, H.: *Varroniana. Topographisches und Religionsgeschichtliches zu Varro, De lingua Latina. ORom* 13 [1981] 35–39, here 38–39, and MASTROCINQUE [n. 31]) have interpreted this celebration, too, as a ritual of fertility. Therefore, during this festival, we also find issues concerning fertility, defence of boundaries, and whipped servants.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 203, 332.



## INO/MATER MATUTA

At this point, we should recall who Mater Matura is, the narrative to which she is linked, and her relationship with Ino, which will also explain the subsequent insertion of Thesan in my discourse. Mater Matuta is an ancient Italic deity linked to the dawn: *matuta*, in fact, must be likely related to the adjective *matutinus*, “of the morning”.<sup>35</sup> According to an alternative etymology, the term would be instead connected to the family of the adjective *manus* (= old Latin, *bonus*, good), of the adverb *mane* (= of good hour) and of the adjective *maturus* (= ripe, mature): therefore, the goddess would be considered, originally as the one who favoured maturation, growth, literally the construction of the offspring.<sup>36</sup> In any case, this deity was identified with the Greek heroine Ino, who became a goddess under the name of Leucothea, as attested by Ovid and Plutarch, following Cicero.<sup>37</sup>

Ino was the second wife of the Minyan king Athamas, the mother of Learchus and Melicertes, daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia,<sup>38</sup> stepmother of Phrixus and Helle, and was one of the three sisters of Semele, the mortal woman of the house of Cadmus who gave birth to Dionysus. The three sisters were Agave, Autonoe and Ino, who is famous for being Dionysus’s wet-nurse, but she was also his maternal aunt. Ino was therefore a mother, step-mother, wet-nurse, and *matertera*: what an interesting character!

We first meet her as step-mother. In the back-story of Jason and the Golden Fleece, Phrixus and Helle, twin children of Athamas and Nephele, were hated by their stepmother, Ino. She roasted all the crop seeds of Boeotia so they would not grow. The local farmers, frightened of famine, asked an oracle for assistance. Ino bribed the men sent to the oracle to lie and tell the others that the oracle required the sacrifice of Phrixus. Athamas reluctantly agreed, but the twins were rescued by a flying golden ram sent by Nephele, their natural mother. Helle fell off the ram into the Hellespont (the Sea of Helle) and drowned, but Phrixus survived all the way to Colchis, where King Aetes took him and gave to him his daughter, Chalciope, in marriage. In gratitude, Phrixus gave the king the golden fleece of the ram.<sup>39</sup>

Ino later raised Dionysus, her nephew, the son of Zeus and of her sister Semele, whose birth caused Hera’s jealousy. In vengeance, Hera struck Athamas with insanity and made him slay one of his sons, Learchus, thinking he was a ram, and causing him to set out in frenetic pursuit of Ino. To escape him, Ino threw herself into the sea with her son Melicertes. Both were afterwards worshipped as marine divinities: Ino as Leukothea (“the white goddess”), Melicertes as Palaemon. In another version by Apollodorus, Ino was also stricken with insanity and killed

<sup>35</sup>Lucr. 5. 656–657: *Tempore item certo roseam Matuta per oras / aetheris auroram differt et lumina pandit.*

<sup>36</sup>According to BETTINI: Su alcuni modelli (n. 14) 37ff., the abstract noun *\*matus* (with the addition of the suffix *-to*) indicates the growth of the body, cf. *maturus*. Therefore, Mater Matura was mainly involved in the “construction” of the infant, not in its generation, see PERFIGLI, M.: *Indigitamenta. Divinità funzionali e funzionalità divina nella religione romana*. Pisa 2004, 152–153. See also ROSE, H. J.: Two roman rites. *Classical Quarterly* 28 (1934) 156–158. A. ERNOUT and A. MEILLET, in the *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots*, s.v. *Matuta*, derive it from *matutinus*, but they also make a connection with *maturus*.

<sup>37</sup>Cic. *Tusc.* 1. 28; *Nat. D.* 3. 48. Archaeological findings seem to suggest an earlier dating, see: BLOCH, R.: Ilithyè, Leucothée et Thesan. *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 112–113 (1968) 366–375; BLOCH, R.: Un mode d’interprétation à deux degrés. De l’Uni de Pyrgi à Ilithyè et Leucothée. *Archeologia classica* 21 (1969) 58–65.

<sup>38</sup>Hes. *Theog.* 975–976.

<sup>39</sup>Apollod. 1. 9. 1; Ov. *Fasti* 3. 851–876; 6. 552–557; Paus. 1. 44. 7–8.



Melicertes by boiling him in a cauldron, and then took the cauldron and jumped into the sea with it. A compassionate Zeus transfigured her and Melicertes as Leukothea and Palaemon.<sup>40</sup>

According to a version of the myth mentioned in the *Fasti* by Ovid (6. 501–528), Ino and Melicertes reached the coasts of Italy. Here, near the Aventine hill, there was a wood inhabited by the Italic Maenads. Juno, pursuing her revenge, had also driven these women crazy, making them suspicious towards the strange new woman and her child. The Maenads, therefore, tried to kidnap Melicertes, but he was rescued by Hercules, who was grazing the oxen of Geryon nearby and about to rape the young maidens. Then, the cult of Ino and Melicertes arose, and they were called by the Greeks, “Leukothea and Palaemon”, and by the Romans, “Matuta and Portunus”, as Ovid’s prophetess Carmenta had foretold (6. 529–547). It is interesting that the woman whom Juno had made a sort of “anti-mother”, Ino, is now identified with Leucothea/Mater Matuta. Ovid, in particular, points out how in fact Ino/Leukothea was not an exemplary mother, but that she was a good aunt for Dionysus/Bacchus.<sup>41</sup>

Again, we find Ino portrayed as an extremely dangerous step-mother in Hyginus,<sup>42</sup> but at the same time as a protective mother towards her own offspring (*Fab.* 4): Athamas married Themisto as he believed his second wife, Ino, was dead, but Ino turned out to be alive and to have been on Mount Parnassus with the Maenads. Athamas had her brought home without telling anyone, but Themisto found out and decided to kill Ino’s children for revenge. She had never seen Ino in person, however, and took her for a servant, and ordered the “servant” to dress all her own children in white clothing, and Ino’s in black. Themisto then proceeded to kill all the black-clothed children, who, as it turned out, were not Ino’s offspring but her own. As a consequence, Themisto killed herself. According to a shorter version in *Fab.* 1, the clothing swap is attributed to a nurse’s mistake and Ino isn’t involved. Therefore, the death is not caused by the wicked step-mother, but by an incompetent nurse.

The story narrated by Ovid in the *Fasti* was the basis for the Matralia festival. There is one further intriguing detail one should take into account. Normally, slaves were not allowed to take part in the solemnities, or to enter the temple of the goddess. One slave, however, during the Matralia, was admitted by the matrons, but only to be exposed to a humiliating treatment, for one of the matrons gave her a blow on the cheek and then sent her away from the temple. Ancient sources tried to explain this from their usual etiological perspective. The rivalry between Ino/Mater Matuta and the concubine of Athamas, for example, according to Ovid and Plutarch,<sup>43</sup> would explain the fact that the deified heroine hated servile women: therefore, the prohibition to enter her Roman temple, and – Plutarch states – the lashes.

This narrative might contain a kernel of truth. The matrons on that occasion took with them the children of their sisters, but not their own, held them in their arms, and prayed for their

<sup>40</sup>Apollod. 3. 4. 3. Cf. Ov. *Met.* 4. 416–542. On the cult of Leukothea and her son in Italy, see BONNET, C.: Le culte de Leucothéa et de Mélécerte, en Grèce, au Proche-Orient et en Italie. *SMSR* 52 (1986) 53–71. In this narrative, there are impressive analogies between Ino and Medea, who, incidentally, was worshiped in Corinth as protectress of children in one of the temples dedicated to Hera, close to the harbour. See BRELICH, A.: I figli di Medeia. *SMSR* 30 (1959) 213–254.

<sup>41</sup>Ov. *Fasti* 6. 559–561. See also: Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 17; *De fraterno amore* 21 (492d). We can also recall the famous fresco in Pompeii, “Casa della Farnesina”, in which Ino breastfeeds Dionysus, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, Museo Nazionale Romano.

<sup>42</sup>Hyginus collected different variants of this narrative, with greater details, from *Fab.* 1 to *Fab.* 4.

<sup>43</sup>Ov. *Fasti* 6. 475–562; Plut. *Cam.* 5; *Quaest. Rom.* 16–17.



welfare. The whole ceremony was meant to celebrate the intimate bond between the nephew/niece and the maternal aunt, and her social role as “second mother”. During everyday life, however, the attachment figure for the infant was neither the mother nor the maternal aunt, but the (wet)nurse, who was a slave, therefore a stranger to the family. For this reason, she was considered as both a reliable – parents need to think they put their offspring in good hands – and an ambivalent character: her hands were not their hands, they were not the hands of someone linked to the baby by blood, and parents could not constantly control what she was doing.<sup>44</sup>

The ritual of whipping the slave and her expulsion from the temple of Mater Matuta might be seen as a symbolic reaffirmation of the child’s belonging to its original family.<sup>45</sup> Romans, in fact, often attributed a purifying value to lashes.<sup>46</sup>

The myth of Ino is a particularly intricate and disorienting one. Indeed, she is alternatively mother, step-mother, nurse, maternal aunt; in these roles, she can be good and evil, towards her own children and towards other’s people children. She exposes her offspring to danger, even though not intentionally. In general, it is a narrative full of women who can either protect or threaten infants. There are also the Maenads, who notoriously were reputed to tear their own children limb from limb in their madness. In some versions of her narrative, we find Ino herself among the Maenads.

The Matralia are celebrated on the 11th of June, which happens to be the *dies natalis* of the temple of Fortune in the Forum Boarium, as well. Fortune is also a deity related to kourotophia, and Mater Matuta, too, owns a temple in the Forum Boarium. We will see how these two temples are related to each other and, possibly, to Thesan.

## THESAN

The same ambiguity of character can be detected in the Etruscan myth of Thesan, a goddess who has much in common with Ino/Matuta. Sources concerning Thesan are almost exclusively iconographical;<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup>LAES (n. 20). Also PEDRUCCI (n. 6) *passim*.

<sup>45</sup>PEDRUCCI–SCAPINI (n. 14) 333–366. See also BETTINI: Su alcuni modelli (n. 14).

<sup>46</sup>LIPKA, M.: *Roman Gods: A Conceptual Approach*. Leiden (2009) 81; SCAPINI, M.: Whipping between symbolism and ritual and magic practice: a case of convergence. In SUÁREZ, E. – BLANCO, M. – CHRONOPOULOU, E. (eds): *Los papiros mágicos griegos: entre lo sublime y lo cotidiano*. Madrid 2015, 93–109.

<sup>47</sup>For iconographical documentation concerning Eos/Thesan in Greek and Etruscan art, see LIMC III Eos 759–771 (C. Weiss); LIMC III Eos/Thesan, 789–797 (R. Bloch. I would in particular emphasize an Etruscan mirror with Thesan and Chephalus, Vatican Museums inv. 12241, Vulci 480–470 BCE). In the literary sources Eos is reported as the abductress of four awesome youths: two hunters, Orion and Kephalos, the Trojan prince Tithonos, and one Kleitos of whom we know only that Eos, in love once again, took him to live among the immortals (Hom. *Od.* 5. 121–124 and 15. 249–251; Ath. 12, 566D; Euphorion 103; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1. 4. 3–5; Hes. *Theog.* 985–987; Eur. *Hipp.* 454–457; Xen. *Cyn.* 1. 6; Hyg. *Fab.* 189; Ov. *Met.* 7. 700–742; Ant. Lib. *Met.* 41.

For Tithonos and Memnon: Hom. *Hymn Ven.* 218–238; Hom. *Il.* 11. 1, *Od.* 5. 1–2 and *schol.*; Hes. *Theog.* 984 and *schol.*, 985; Mimn. *frg.* 4; Ibyc. *Schol.* ad Apollon. R. 3. 158 and *frg.* 189; Eur. *Tro.* 847–858; Pindar, *Ol.* 2. 184; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3. 147.) Her nymphomania towards beautiful youths as Aphrodite’s punishment for having bedded with her lover Ares, see Apollod. *Bibl.* 1. 4. 4. In the article by DIPLA, A.: Eos and the Youth; a Case of Inverted Roles in Rape. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 9.1 (2009) 109–133, the author focuses on the scenes (strangely quite popular) of Eos pursuing/abducting youths on 5th-century Athenian vases, in particular on Eos being the only woman who pursues in rape. According to her, “in these representations Eos is promoted as a model of what a woman should not be in the interest of the essentially male social system. It is a matter of wild nature against social order threatening the future of the polis that the ephebes represent” (p. 124.)



therefore, narratives related to her are mainly reconstructed by modern scholars by using Greek and Roman mythology and this section must be intended as highly speculative. She is connected – which does not at all mean identified (Etruscan deities usually maintain their original features, even when they are iconographically associated with Greek deities) – with Eos/Aurora, the Dawn, like Mater Matuta.<sup>48</sup> She was called by some as a childbirth goddess, as she was present at the beginning of the day, which finds its parallel in the beginning of a new baby's life, i.e., she brought the infant into the light of day (like goddesses such as Juno Lucina or Artemis).<sup>49</sup> But it was believed that death could also arrive when the sun is up. This hypothetical reconstruction can be particularly true if we think of Pyrgi, where Ino/Leukothea is associated with Thesan and Ino/Mater Matuta in the Forum Boarium.<sup>50</sup> The sanctuary was dedicated to Leukothea, but Thesan is attested here by the presence of a votive dedication of a statue and by a mirror with her name on it,<sup>51</sup> and in the so-called “Edificio delle Venti Celle” the roof is decorated by different phases of the day.<sup>52</sup> The aforementioned reconstruction can be confirmed if we think of Mater Matuta in Lucretius's poem on Nature, which might be thought of as being all about birth, growth and decay.<sup>53</sup> All the cycle of life is at the core of *De rerum natura*, beginning with plants that grow and die, and then moving to the growth of a boy from teething to puberty; and finally to the cycle of all seasons, and of all things. Mater Matuta in this great cycle of life acts as goddess of dawn, but also as a goddess of fertility and growth, I would suggest until metaphorical dusk; as does Thesan.

<sup>48</sup>BLOCH: Ilithye (n. 37); BLOCH: Un mode (n. 37).

<sup>49</sup>PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 291.

<sup>50</sup>COARELLI (n. 31) 244–253 (also for marine connections among the two goddesses); COLONNA, G.: Il santuario di Pyrgi dalle origini mitistoriche agli altorilievi frontonali dei Sette e di Leucothea. *ScAnt* 10 (2000) 251–336, 327, 325ff.; COLONNA, G.: Il pantheon degli Etruschi – “i più religiosi degli uomini” – alla luce delle scoperte di Pyrgi. *Memorie. Accademia nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 29/3 (2012) 557–595: the high relief put on the upper façade of the temple in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE shows Leukothea and her son Palaemon hosted in the sanctuary of Uni thanks to Heracles. The same scene was likely present in the archaic sanctuary of S. Omobono. See also n. 31.

<sup>51</sup>COLONNA: Il Pantheon (n. 50).

<sup>52</sup>COLONNA: Il Pantheon (n. 50). It is worth noting that the so-called “Edificio delle Venti Celle” is part of the adjacent, older sanctuary dedicated, according to an Etruscan-Phoenician inscription, to Uni/Astarte. It is *communis opinio*, even though in my opinion not clearly argued, that in this building sacred prostitution took place. I quote BUDIN, L. S.: *The myth of sacred prostitution in antiquity*. Cambridge–New York 2008, 247–259, on this regard: “it is worthwhile to look at the history of the sacred prostitution debate at Pyrgi and Rapino for two reasons. On the one hand, there are still a number of publications available that discuss sacred prostitution as having been practiced at these sites, and thus there is still the need to banish that specter in the literature (especially with Pyrgi). On the other hand, the ways in which sacred prostitution came to be associated with these two areas offer a fascinating insight into how this vicious cycle functions. For, in the absence of literary testimonia, the sacred prostitution idea only emerged in association with Pyrgi and Rapino through some rather gratuitous circular reasoning and apparent wish-fulfillment.”

<sup>53</sup>Lucr. 5. 656–679: *Tempore item certo roseam Matuta per oras / aetheris auroram differt et lumina pandit [...] / multa videmus enim, certo quae tempore fiunt / omnibus in rebus [...] namque ubi sic fuerunt causarum exordia prima / atque ita res mundi cecidere ab origine prima, / consequae quoque iam redeunt ex ordine certo* (“Matuta also at a fixed hour / Spreadeth the roseate morning out along [...] For many facts we see which come to pass / At fixed time in all things [...] And where, even from the world's first origin, / Thus wise have things befallen, so even now / After a fixed order they come round / In sequence also.” Translated by W. E. Leonard, London 1916, available on-line: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0131%3Abook%3D5%3Acard%3D650>. Last access 12 Nov. 2019.) See SMITH (n. 8) 146–148.



Thesan was a dedicated mother of Memnon,<sup>54</sup> but also a rash lover, and for this reason she kidnapped two young men, Chephalus and Tithonus. The iconographical theme of the kidnapping of the young Chephalus was particularly widespread. Thesan kidnaps young men she is in love with, not children. Nevertheless, as a kidnapper of boys, one might say that she is an anti-curotrophic figure, that is, someone who does not help a young person grow up and become an adult – in contrast with Mater Matuta, but this is not completely true.<sup>55</sup> In fact, abduction by the Dawn might express the ancestral awareness of its danger: the baby/child/young boy or girl will escape the danger (an illness?) only if s/he manages to survive the night, and therefore the Dawn. If the Dawn returns the infant to its mother – as the maternal aunts will symbolically do after the Matralia – it will be safe.<sup>56</sup>

The theme of kidnapping was also present in a corpus of six epitaphs for children in Greek or Latin language from Rome (except one from Egypt. All date 1st – 2nd c. CE). Abduction can be seen as a way to edulcorate, to emphasize the beauty of the child to the nymphs responsible for its premature death; the infant raptus a nymphis was thus an elected one from the parents' point of view.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, a nymph is an ambivalent figure which can raise – even breastfeed<sup>58</sup> – but can also kill infants, even if in a sweet and privileged way. I recall that Carnaë was also a nymph; and somehow it comes full circle.

## CONCLUSIONS (WITH SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ROMAN RELIGIOUS CALENDAR)

In conclusion, children's lives in antiquity were constantly in danger, even more so than today, due mainly to poor hygiene and lack of effective medical treatments. The aim of my paper is to cast light on who might have had a role in both in protecting and threatening children in the Roman world. It has been well noted that the wet-nurse, a servile and foreign/alien figure inside the household, was viewed with suspicion, in spite of a wealth of evidence of mutual love and devotion on her part? (and often she is the only one who knows how to save infants' lives).

My point is that not only can the (wet)nurse be dangerous and superstitious, but also as a female figure perceived as quite reliable inside the household and the family – even more reliable than the mother herself. But the danger for children does not come only from outside, it can also

<sup>54</sup>Memnon was killed by Achilles, but it was not her fault, while, in the case of Achilles, we might say that his mother, Thetis, was not clever enough when she tried to make him totally immortal.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. the etymology of Matuta from *matūs*, mature, see n. 36.

<sup>56</sup>PEDRUCCI–SCAPINI (n. 14) 349; PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 200. In some tombs in Lucania, Campania and Daunia, small amber sculptures representing a flying woman with a child were found, see for instance MASTROCIQUE, A.: *L'ambra e l'eridano. Studi sulla letteratura e sul commercio dell'ambra in età preromana*. Este 1991.

<sup>57</sup>FABIANO, D.: *Raptus a nymphis*. Emozioni e gender nelle epigrafi funerarie di bambini. In TERRANOVA, C. (ed.): *La presenza degli infanti nelle religioni del Mediterraneo antico: la vita e la morte, i rituali e i culti tra archeologia, antropologia e storia delle religioni*. Roma 2014, 111–140. It is clearly the case of Hylas, companion of Heracles kidnapped by water nymphs.

<sup>58</sup>PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 200–208.





come from inside. I will avoid here mentioning obvious examples of murderous mothers such as Medea,<sup>59</sup> and I would rather mention cases in which she is indirectly guilty – that is, she is guilty of delegating and lack of action. The witch, too, is a sort of inverted mother-figure:<sup>60</sup> her condition is often due to a previous miserable motherhood or to the (unnatural) lack of motherhood.<sup>61</sup>

The figures of Carna, Ino and Thesan, together with the more famous goddess Mater Matuta, to whom they are all linked, can help in reconstructing how ambivalent the imagery concerning child care and child protection was in ancient Roman culture. I would like to recall in this regard Mary Douglas's word on beliefs in witchcraft: "this kind of beliefs flourishes where there is ambiguity in the patterning of roles".

Therefore, to answer my starting questions: Who protects children in the Roman religion? From whom? Based on the set of evidence I have collected – also in previous works – concerning the dynamics and feelings between the women involved in the protection of children, and those women and the child,<sup>62</sup> I would suggest that anyone who is involved in the care and the growth of the infant (mother, grandmothers, aunts, wet-nurses, maybe also elder sisters<sup>63</sup> and more generally, jealous siblings – just to limit my research to female figures) – can potentially act both in favor of or against the baby, and might use religious means to do so. Of course, if someone deliberately uses religious means to harm a baby, it is more likely not to be the mother or other closely "attached" relatives.

A child must be protected, at the very end, from anyone, with no exception. Anyone can put, intentionally or not, the infant's life at risk, as the above depicted imagery aims to show. Again, however, if we speak in terms of religious actions, it is more likely that the threat was more strongly perceived as coming from outside (I imagine a grandmother may take religious actions to protect the baby from, for instance, the nurse, but not from its mother. . . still, also the mother can be a danger for her offspring, and relatives, maybe in some particular cases, may have been aware of this).

Along with these considerations, I would like to add some reflections on the dynamics inside the Roman religious calendar. To do so, I will borrow the model of intertext from Christopher Smith,<sup>64</sup> who took it, in turn, from literary criticism, and in particular from Allusion and

<sup>59</sup>PEDRUCCI, G.: Il corpo biologico e il corpo sociale nella donna alle origini della cultura occidentale. L'obbligo di (imparare a) essere madri in Grecia antica. *Narrare i gruppi* 10 (2015) 71–95 (on-line); PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 119–141.

<sup>60</sup>JOHNSTON, S. I.: Defining the dreadful: remarks on the Greek child-killing demon. In MEYER, M. – MIRECKI, P. (ed.): *Ancient magic and ritual power*. Leiden 1995, 361–387, here 367; McDONOUGH (n. 27) 320–321.

<sup>61</sup>CAPPANERA, C.: *Lamia e le sue metamorfosi*. *Gerión* 34 (2016) 103–126; PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 105–111.

<sup>62</sup>PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 1–111.

<sup>63</sup>However, we should not think of these women with different social roles towards the infant as an indistinct group: SERED (n. 1) clearly shows how, for instance, mothers and grandmothers experience "religions dominated by women" differently. A mother who has previously lost a child would act in a different way in comparison with a mother who has not. The elder sisters would likely experience a sort of "maternal" apprenticeship in taking care of the siblings (PASCHE-GUIGNARD, F. – PEDRUCCI, G.: Motherhood/s and Polytheisms: Epistemological and Methodological Reflections on the Study of Religions, Gender, and Women. *Numen* 65 [2018] 404–434), but, especially inside aristocratic families, there can be rivalry among siblings, in particular half-siblings, not to mention the step-mother. A wet-nurse would be a completely different case: deprived of her own offspring for the wellness of an alien creature, she can have plenty of reason either to protect the baby (she experiences the masters' baby as a surrogate of her own, she wants to keep as long as possible the privilege position inside the household. . .) or to harm it (jealousy, post-partum depression. . .). Cf. PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 1–111.

<sup>64</sup>SMITH (n. 9).





Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry by Stephen Hinds.<sup>65</sup> Smith states, at the end of his article *Worshipping Mater Matuta*: “My intention has been not that the Roman religion is primarily literary in character, but that experience and the description of experience share similar patterns of intertextuality and allusiveness.”<sup>66</sup>

I will borrow this, and apply it to the Roman religious calendar, with special focus on the period between the 1st and the 11th of June (with some extensions before and after). Concerning Ovid’s *Fasti*, one might also speak, at least in part, of intratextuality. In order to do so, I must first clarify the concept of *kourotrophia*.

This word is made of the verb *trephō*, whose first meaning is “cause to grow”, and subsequently “increase, bring up, rear”; and *kouros*, young boy. Therefore, *kourotrophia* means “making a child grow”,<sup>67</sup> and it represents the main way for “major” goddesses to express their mothering towards someone else’s offspring (divine, not fully divine, not divine).<sup>68</sup> *Kourotrophia* starts in the maternal womb and ends when the individual becomes an adult. All the members of the household take part in this process, and possibly also some neighbors.<sup>69</sup> Evidently, religious practices play a crucial role in it, from rites of passage to apotropaic rituals. It is obviously a Greek notion, but the same idea does exist in the Roman culture as well: aspects concerning fertility and the preservation of children are at the core of numerous cults in Rome. The span of time in the calendar of June we selected can be a persuasive demonstration.

On the 1st of June, as we saw, the festival of Carna takes place. At the core of the narrative we have the protection of a new-born in its very first day. But it is also the *dies natalis* of the temple of Juno Moneta and the *dies natalis* of the temple of Mars outside the Porta Capena. At least during the *Ludi Saeculares* from the night of the 31st of May until the night of the 2nd of June, there were sacrifices in honour of the *Parcae* (who have a major role in admitting the new-born into life during childbirth),<sup>70</sup> of *Eileithyia*, of Juno, and of *Tellus* (a pregnant sow, which might allude to the young sow during the *Carnalia*). This very first part of June, thus, seems to deal with fertility, childbirth, very early infancy.

<sup>65</sup>HINDS, S.: *Allusion and intertext. Dynamics of appropriation in Roman poetry*. Cambridge–New York 1998.

<sup>66</sup>SMITH (n. 9) 152. Moreover, p. 155: “What Ovid makes of the *Matralia* and what Perseus’ aunt makes of it, and what someone of *Satricum* made of it, could never be the same, but it is precisely the specificity of each individual’s circumstances, and the capacity of Roman religion for multiple exegesis and intertextual transaction, that allow for what Hinds calls a “dynamics of appropriation”. Roman religious literature takes part in a way of thinking much more widely shared over place and time, which evolves from the interpretative negotiations that constitute Roman ritual mastery.”

<sup>67</sup>DEMONT, P.: *Remarques sur le sens de τρέφω*. *Revue des Études Grecques* 91 (1978) 358–384.

<sup>68</sup>I have developed this concept in many works, for instance: PEDRUCCI, G.: *Le maternità nei politeismi: status quaestionis e nuove prospettive di ricerca*. In PASCHE-GUIGNARD, F. – PEDRUCCI, G. – SCAPINI, M. (eds): *Maternità e politeismi / Motherhood(s) and Polytheisms*. Bologna 2017, 15–41; PEDRUCCI, G.: *Motherhood, Breast-feeding and Adoption: The case of Hera suckling Herakles*. In JOHNSTON, P. A. – MASTROCINQUE, A. – TAKÁCS, L. (eds): *Hera and Juno: The Functions of the Goddesses in Prehistoric and Historic Greece and Rome, Symposium Classicum Peregrinum, June 16–19, 2015, Budapest*. *Acta Ant. Hung.* 57 (2017) 325–336; PEDRUCCI (n. 6); PEDRUCCI–SCAPINI (n. 14); PASCHE-GUIGNARD–PEDRUCCI (n. 62).

<sup>69</sup>PEDRUCCI (n. 6) 1–111.

<sup>70</sup>DASEN, V.: *Le pouvoir des femmes: des Parques aux Matres*. In DUTHEIL DE LA ROCHERE, M. H. – DASEN, V. (éds): *Des Fata aux fées : regards croisés de l’Antiquité à nos jours*. Lausanne 2011, 115–146.



On June 7th the Vestalia start, which end on the 15th. During this period, domestic and family life in general was celebrated by honouring Vesta and the Penates. On the first day of festivities the *penus Vestae* was opened (normally, it was closed). As long as the curtain remained open, mothers could come to leave offerings to the goddess in exchange for a blessing to them and their family. The main focus, therefore, seems to be on family welfare in general.

At the core of the Vestalia, we have the Matralia on the 11th, which is also the *dies natalis* of Fortuna at the Forum Boarium. Connections between Mater Matuta and protection of children are well-known and we already spoke of them; Fortuna has to do with infancy,<sup>71</sup> too, and this makes the association of the two goddesses, as well as with Mars, at the Forum Boarium and in the calendar extremely interesting. We must add a few further details to the global framework: the statue of Fortuna at the Forum Boarium is covered in male clothes; in the temple of Mater Matuta in Satricum we find the *lapis Satricanus* with a dedication made by the soudales of Mars;<sup>72</sup> the Porta Carmentalis, and presumably the shrine of Carmenta – who, incidentally, plays an important role in the narrative of Ino/Leukothea – is part of the route of triumph and very close to the twin shrines at the Forum Boarium.<sup>73</sup>

In the reconstructed framework, *kourotrophia* as a whole – from birth to the care of infants, through rites of passage, until the threshold of adulthood – seems to be shared, at least at the Forum Boarium, by three deities, one of them being a male. Mater Matuta's task would be that of preserving children and their mothers through the earliest days until they come under the protection of Fortuna as political beings. Thus, both deities would protect the future of the city in different ways.<sup>74</sup> The association between Matuta and Mars also makes sense as a pair of rites of passage – the baby across the dangerous first days of life; the boy across the difficult and testing transition into adulthood – with the military aspect enhanced by the nearby Porta Carmentalis.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Fortuna is directly related to the upbringing of one particular child, Servius Tullius, whose miraculous birth and rise to the kingship is linked to his patronage of the cult of Fortuna at the Forum Boarium (Ov. *Fasti* 6. 625–636. See SMITH (n. 9) 143 – also for the analysis of the subsequent mention of Livia dedicating a sanctuary to Concordia). Fortuna is also venerated as Primigenia in Praeneste, and as patroness of marriage, just as Virgo in Rome is also indirectly connected with becoming pregnant and having children, for which marriage is a prerequisite.

<sup>72</sup>I would also recall that, during the *Ludi saeculares*, sacrifices to deities such as Parcae, Eileithyia, and Tellus, took place at the Campus Martius, the military place *par excellence*. See note below.

<sup>73</sup>SMITH (n. 9) 143–145. Smith's article might to some extent be seen as the “Roman” short version of N. LORAUX's *The Experiences of Tiresias. The Feminine and the Greek Man* (Princeton 1995. Or. ed. Paris 1989) in which Loraux unveils how the Greek male defines himself in relationship to the feminine. Smith finds masculine balance to Mater Matuta's feminine concerns in the possibility that the twin temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta were located along the Roman triumphal route and in the existence of the *Lapis Satricanus*, a dedication to Mars that must predate its reuse in the refurbishment of the temple of Mater Matuta at Satricum in the very late sixth century BCE. Smith argues that “women's worship cannot be dissociated from issues more usually associated with men and the state – war, triumph, political leadership and so forth (145).” There is evidence that the spheres of influence of many “feminine” deities included concerns traditionally considered masculine. The votive deposits belonging to Mater Matuta include some weaponry (admittedly in small amounts) alongside anatomical votives and kourotrophic statuettes. The temple of Juno Lucina was not only the site of an exclusively female festival (the *Matronalia*) but also a stop along the procession of the Argei and was under the care of the aediles, suggesting that this “feminine” deity was an intrinsic part of the civic religion of early Rome.

<sup>74</sup>SMITH (n. 9) 143.

<sup>75</sup>SMITH (n. 9).



Through an allusive mechanism within the Roman religious calendar, other deities might be recalled as pivotal in the whole process of growing up: cross-dressing was also present during the Matronalia, a festival which is clearly connected with maternal and, more generally, familial issues. It took place on the 1st of March, which was, of course, the month of Mars (and the first month of the year), and the same day the Ferae Marti were celebrated. The worshipped goddess was Juno Lucina, patroness of child-birth. At home women received gifts from their husbands and daughters, and Roman husbands, dressing as women, were expected to offer prayers for their wives. Moreover, women were also expected to prepare a meal for the household slaves (who were given the day off work), which seems to be the antithesis of the way the matronae chase a slave from the temple during the Matralia. Moreover, in terms of the cycle of the year, Matronalia took place at the beginning of the new year, the Matralia near to the summer solstice.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, we should mention the Ancillarum Ferae and the Nonae Caprotinae in honour of Juno Caprotina on the 7th of July: the theme of fertility is crystal clear, as well as the presence of the maidservant, and there might also be an allusion to Carna through the figure of Tutelina.

To come to an end and “full circle”, I would like to recall McDonough’s words: “While the Roman calendar was in no sense a liturgical year, a certain consistency bound the procession of festivals together as a religious whole. This thematic harmony, however, was not always straightforward, and at times the picture could be quite sharply refracted. The repetition of certain themes or elements throughout the year allowed important cultural ideas to be viewed from several perspectives, as Mary Beard articulates well: ‘It was precisely the Roman calendar’s reliance on building up associations and images on a paradigmatic model outside any determining narrative that gave the individual festival a fluid meaning in relation to the others in a sequence.’”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup>SMITH (n. 9) 142–143, with also an explanation of the link between Juno Lucina, Uni in Pyrgi, Eileithyia and Leukothea.

<sup>77</sup>MCDONOUGH (n. 27) 337. He is quoting BEARD, M.: A Complex of Times: No More Sheep on Romulus’ Birthday. *PCPS* 33 (1987) 1–15, here 8.

