

# Women in medicine. An epigraphic research

Dr. Dimitrios N. Theocharis

## Abstract

The current study presents 28 epigraphic testimonies of women who practice medicine in a wide geographic area of the ancient world from 3th century BCE to 6th century CE, outlining at the same time the different terms used to articulate and refer to the medical profession. Although the majority of these women were referred to as *μαῖα* or *ἰατρίνη*, two cases of women were interestingly titled as *ἰατρός*, revealing perhaps that their level of knowledge and training was equal to that of their male colleagues. Altogether these epigraphic testimonies bring to light valuable information about the medical education and training of those women, which sometimes goes beyond the field of gynecology and obstetrics.

## Introduction

From the Archaic period to the late antiquity, engaging in medicine was a privileged area only for men, who practiced the profession either privately or publicly, holding the positions as a public doctor<sup>1</sup> or chief doctor (*Archiatros*).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, women were

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<sup>1</sup> For public doctors in antiquity, see Cohn-Haft, 1956. For public doctors in the Hellenistic world, see Chaniotis 2005:96–97. In the Roman period, public doctors were appointing in various cities with primary responsibility for the treatment of the weaker economical classes and were remunerated by the local community in which they practiced their profession. Sometimes the public doctor treated the citizens for free and in such cases the city honored him. See Syll<sup>3</sup> 620 (Honorific Decree for a physician from Milos) and Paton-Hicks 1891:344 (Honorific Decree for a physician from Kos). For public doctors in the Greco-Roman world, see Pleket 1995:27–34; Krug 1985:196–199; Samama 2003:38.

<sup>2</sup> The title of chief doctor (*archiatros*) appears in inscriptions after the 3rd century BCE. In the Hellenistic kingdoms, by the term *Archiatros*, certain physicians were identified, who had direct access to the royal courtyard and were often the personal physician of the monarch. Regardless of the peculiarity of this position, the supreme physician had no more privileges than the other physicians, but was the first among equals (*primus inter pares*). From the 2nd century CE the title is limited and identifies both the physician and the operator of a public office that enjoys particular privileges. From the 3rd century CE the title was given to certain categories of physicians, such as the palace doctors (*medicus palatinus*), who were paid a fixed salary

restricted to midwifery occupation and are called midwives (μαῖες). There are rare cases where women were called ἰατρός (doctor) or ἰατρίνη and may have the same professional rights as their male colleagues, as well as the same ‘scientific education’. The fact that women were excluded from medicine during antiquity is evidenced by the absence of both extensive literary sources and epigraphic testimonies.

The present research aims to examine the epigraphic sources, which refer to women identified as ἰατρός, ἰατρίνη with all dialectical variants<sup>3</sup> and μαῖες (midwives). Moreover, the research aims to identify their racial identity in combination with their medical practice and to highlight the geographical distribution of women related to the practice of medicine and gynecology. In addition, the social status and educational level of female doctors and midwives are considered. What is more, the way of acquiring the medical capacity, as well as the way of learning the obstetrics are determined. Another goal of this research is to study the ways in which the medical and obstetricity capacity are declared.

The purpose of this study is to present a comprehensive and updated catalog of epigraphical testimonies referring to female physicians (ἰατρός, ἰατρίνη), midwives (μαῖες) and midwife physicians (ἰατρομαῖες). From this point of view, the framework covers a significant part of women healers in greek antiquity. Each inscription examines literary elements, while attempting to ascertain the terms and conditions of the pursuit of the medical professions, in addition defining the differences between the use of the terms μαῖα, ἰατρός, ἰατρίνη and ἰατρομαῖα. The heterogeneous geographical provenance of the inscriptions also reveals the different treatment of women therapists depending on regions

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(lat.: *salarium*). Throughout the imperial period, the profession of chief physician was hereditary as he passed from father to son. For the ordinance of the supreme physician, see Römer 1990:85–88; Krug 1985:199–201; Samama 2003:42–43; Nutton 2005:151–152.

<sup>3</sup> See Krug 1985:195–197; Kunzl 1995:309–322; Samama 2003:13–16; Nutton 2005:196.

and eras. The ultimate goal of the present research is to illuminate one of the aspects of medicine in ancient Greece and lay the foundations for further research.

The contribution of the present work not only explores the medical professional status of women, but also aspires to be integrated into studies of gender identity, highlighting the role of women in antiquity in a male-dominated environment, that of medicine. Therefore, comparisons with male colleagues are not being missed in the survey.

At the center of the research there are twenty eight (28) epigraphic testimonies which refer to female physicians, midwives and midwife physicians, covering a long period from the 3rd century BCE until the 6th century CE and also in a broad geographic spectrum of the ancient world, such as Attica, Macedonia, Thrace, Asia Minor and Hispania.

According to mythology, the goddess Athena was the first midwife to assist Leto in giving birth, and later taught her art to the goddess Artemis (Aristides 37.18). In ancient Greece the first midwife was Agnodike, who disguised herself as a man, in order to be taught the obstetrics by Herophilus, (Hyginus *Fabulae* 274). Plato (*Theaetetus* 149b–e) mentions that the mother of Socrates, Phenarete was a midwife. At the same time, he presents the appropriate person to be a midwife, as an older woman, who is over the childbearing age and therefore not being infertile, as she must have already experienced motherhood. Moreover, she had to use several medicines to deliver a birth with less pain, to help those women who cannot bear a child, but also to know the process of procuring abortion if necessary. In Rome, the information on the profession of midwife comes from the work of Soranus of Ephesus. He (*Female* A 2–3 and B 4–5) presents the characteristics of the ideal midwife, pointing out that she must be sober, discreet, non-discriminatory, hardworking and have a training in diet, surgery and pharmacology.

Throughout Antiquity the midwife's profession was quite common for an elderly woman. The apprenticeship of this art was conducted through attendance in other women's birth processes. The midwives were responsible for the cutting of the umbilical cord

[ὀμφαλητόμοι] (Plato *Theaetetus* 149e; Hippocrates *Female* 1.46)<sup>4</sup>, while Plinius (*Historia Naturalis* 28.23) mentions that they could write books, giving various tips on conception and pregnancy problems. During the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, the term ἰατρομαῖα, which is attested in two latin inscriptions and a Greek inscription from Asia Minor, has been formed, but the difference of this status from the professional μαῖα<sup>5</sup> is not clear.

Along with the term μαῖα (midwife) the inscriptions, also, to the term ἰατρίνη are referred to, which does not exactly denote the woman doctor, but usually implies the midwife or the woman with medical skills corresponding to the fields of gynecology and obstetrics. In addition, the term ἰατρίνη describes women who care for children (LSJ, s.v. ἰατρίνη)<sup>6</sup>. In some cases, the medical status is expressed in terms of various expressions related to the practice of medicine. Xenophon (*Oeconomicus* 7.37) states that the role of the caretaker woman was the care of her husband's slaves without any discrimination of gender. So it was not uncommon for women to heal minor injuries or other illnesses found in women in need, slaves or children. Undoubtedly, some women cared for men, although social stereotyped perceptions discouraged or even banned such services.<sup>7</sup> The following study attempts to present the texts of the inscriptions referring to female physicians, midwives. The presentation of the inscription material is divided into three sub-categories: a) female physicians; b) midwives; c) midwife physicians.

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<sup>4</sup> For the procedure of cutting of umbilical cord, see Soranus, *Female* B 6.

<sup>5</sup> CIL 6.9477, 9478 and MAMA III 292.

<sup>6</sup> For women physicians, as well as for the term ἰατρίνη, see Kunzl 1995:309–322; Samama 2003:15–16; Nutton 2005:196.

<sup>7</sup> See Flemming 2000:382–391; Nutton 2005:101–102, 196–197.

## Physician Women

The term *ἰατρίνη* is the feminine form of the word *ἰατρός* and means the one who heals. The word *ἰατρός* (physician) appears for the first time in Homer (*Iliad* 16:28) and Herodotus (3:130), while in Plato it is used to denote the specialist in medical art (*Respublica* 455e). The feminine form of the term is more prevalent in epigraphic testimonies than in literature. At the same time, O'Malley argues that the term in the feminine form often occurs from the Hellenistic era onwards.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the thirteen epigraphic testimonies, which refer to female doctors (*ἰατρίνες*), presented in this study have been cataloged by É. Samama in her research on the doctors of the ancient Greek world from the archaic period to late antiquity.<sup>9</sup> Most of the inscriptions (8) refer to women doctors with the term *ἰατρίνη* in all of phonological variants (*εἰατρίνη*, *εἰατρίνη*, *ἰατρίνη*). In four (4) inscriptions, medical status is not explicitly stated in an appropriate term, but rather, implying a woman's medical skills and knowledge. In one case the term *Archiatrine* occurs.

The earliest of these inscriptions was found in the area of Thrace (Byzantium-Istanbul) and is engraved on a funerary stele that dates between 2nd and 1st century BCE. (Firatli-Robert 1964:96, no. 139; IK.Byzantium 128; SEG 24:811; Samama 2003:413–414, no. 310):<sup>10</sup>

Μοῦσα Ἀγαθοκλέους  
ἰατρίνη.

In this inscription a woman by the name of Musa is mentioned and is called as an *ἰατρίνη*. On the relief surface of the funerary stele a woman is depicted, wearing a tunic, covering

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<sup>8</sup> O'Malley 1970:17.

<sup>9</sup> Samama (2003) in her study of doctors in the ancient world collects a total of 524 cases of doctors, including 13 cases of women related to medicine.

<sup>10</sup> Istanbul Archaeological Museum, no. 5029.

her left shoulder and next to her there is a little girl and two dogs on her right. The woman is holding a scroll-book in her hand, implying that she has acquired her knowledge through studying and reading.<sup>11</sup> The presence of a little girl may imply one of her childcare responsibilities, while dogs may recall Asclepius' worship.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the name of the dead woman refers to the mythical tradition of the Muses, possibly implying the Musa, Meleti.<sup>13</sup>

Trevulia is also described as ἰατρίνη in a funerary stele from Ankara, Turkey in the 2nd century CE. (Bosch 1967:269, no. 205; Samama 2003:421–422, no. 320):

Τρε[β]ουλία ἰατρίνη ζῶσα φρονοῦσα  
κατεσκεύασα τὸ περίφραγμα ἑαυτῇ  
καὶ Αἰλ(ίᾱ) Ἀγάθῃ μάμμη καὶ Αἰλ(ίᾱ) Πωσφο-  
ρίδι μητρὶ καὶ Στατωρίῳ Γάιου πάππῳ  
5 καὶ Αἰλ(ίῳ) Λεωνίδα ἀνδρὶ καὶ μετὰ τὸ  
ἐμὲ κατατεθῆναι παρορίζω μηδένα  
ἔχειν ἐξουσίαν ἐπισενέγκαι ἕτερον  
σῶμα· ἐὰν δέ τις τολμήσῃ, τῷ ταμείῳ δώσει  
χ μύρια πεντακισχίλια.

Trevulia (name *hapax legomenon* on inscriptions) may have specialized in gynecology and obstetrics, as no information is available on specific medical knowledge or duties. With the word φρονοῦσα (l. 1) her spiritual superiority and intellectual virtues are praised. At the

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<sup>11</sup> Krug 1985:192–193, fig. 87.

<sup>12</sup> For the myth that dogs associate with Asclepius, see Pausanias 2.26.3.

<sup>13</sup> According to Pausanias (9.29.2) there were two generations of Muses. In the first generation the Muses were three (Mneme, Meleti, Aoidi), daughters of Uranus and Gaia, and came from the Helikon. The second generation includes the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. (Hesiod *Theogony* 53).

end (ll. 8–9) a fine is mentioned in an attempt to prevent the desecration or use of the grave for a purpose other than that for which it was entrusted.<sup>14</sup>

The term *ιατρίνη* also appears in a funerary inscription from the Kios—Bithynia, dating between 2nd and 3rd century CE. (IK.Kios 52; CIG 3736; Samama 2003:408, no. 304):

Γάιος Ἰούλιος  
 Βεττιανὸς  
 ζῶν ἑαυτῇ  
 καὶ Ἐμπειρίᾳ  
 5 εἰατρείνῃ  
 ἑαυτοῦ γυναικὶ  
 ζησάσῃ  
 ἔτη μθ' κατε-  
 σκεύασεν.

Gaius Julius Vettianos<sup>15</sup> dedicated the funeral monument to his wife Empiria, who was a physician and died at the age of 48.<sup>16</sup> The term (*εἰατρείνη*) with this particular phonological variant appears in another inscription from Attica as the definitive adjective of the goddess Rea.<sup>17</sup> The name Empiria (l. 4) is not common and appears in two more inscriptions (LGPN I, VB, s.v.), but only in this case are they used, in order to designate a physician. The name indicates knowledge, experience and practising exercise and is probably related to the

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<sup>14</sup> For funerary fines in the ancient Greek world, see Λεμπιδάκη 2015.

<sup>15</sup> From the husband name is proved that he or his family Roman status had acquired, an indication of the couple's social status.

<sup>16</sup> The age is stated in letters of the alphabet (μθ). For the declaration of age in inscriptions of the Roman period, see Mclean 2002:267.

<sup>17</sup> See IG II<sup>2</sup> 4759 (Μητρὶ θεῶν εὐαντήτῳ|εἰατρείνῃ).

knowledge and experience of the woman in medicine. The word ἐμπειρία is found in the context of medical inscriptions (see e.g. SEG 41: 680; IG XII 7, 231), and in Plato's *Laws* (857c) with medical arguments. The word ζῶν (l. 3) is repeated in funerary inscriptions of the imperial period, implying that the benefactor had constructed the monument to his wife and himself while he was still alive. At the same time, it operates as a deterrent to any future bad omen and corresponds to the vi(vus) of the Latin inscriptions.<sup>18</sup>

Attalis is also described as ἰατρίνη in a funerary inscription of the 3rd century CE from Pisidia to Asia Minor. (SEG 57:1486):

Ἀντιοχίδι, τῇ θυ-  
γατρί, Τροκονδας  
Δώρου καὶ Ἀτταλῖς  
Μολεους, ἰατρίνη  
οἱ γονεῖς.

The inscription is engraved on a tombstone and was found on the north side of the city's cemetery. It is a parental dedication to their daughter, Antiochis. Attalis is characterized as ἰατρίνη, an indication of her profession but her medical skills are not clearly stated.

In a similar context there is the inscription on the funerary stele from the Byzantine-Istanbul region dating between 4th and 5th century CE. (Ebersolt 1921:53, no. 10; Samama 2003:414, no. 311):<sup>19</sup>

Ἐ<v>θάδε κατάκοιτε ἰα-  
τρίνα Ἀμαζόνη,

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<sup>18</sup> For the use of word ζῶν, see Ριζάκης-Τουράτσογλου 2000:258 and n. 99; Λεμπιδάκη 2015:70, n. 415, 87 and n. 539 (for the similar expresion: ζῶν καὶ φρονῶν); Friggeri-Pelli 1980:95–172 (for vivus in Latin inscriptions).

<sup>19</sup> Archeological Museum of Instabul (Top-Kapi), no. 701.



Ἀμα[ζ]όνη πιστὴ δούλῃ τοῦ [Θ](εο)ῦ [ἀ]ρέ-  
 5 σουσα Θε(ε)ῶ καὶ ἀν-  
 θρώποις.

The funerary stele is dedicated to Amazona, who is inscribed as the first Christian woman to be called ἱατρίνα. The name refers to the mythical Amazons<sup>20</sup> and is repeated twice (ll. 2, 3) for emphatic reasons. It may recall the virginity of the woman, which reinforces the assumption that she was a Christian (πιστὴ δούλῃ τοῦ Θεοῦ) and may have had a monastic influence.<sup>21</sup> The expression ἀρέσουσα Θεῶ καὶ ἀνθρώποις (ll. 4–6) is a kind of concise praise, indirectly highlighting her virtues, which made her being liked by both God and men.

The term ἱατρίνη appears on an inscription engraved on a sarcophagus, originating from Seleucia of Asia Minor and dating between 4th and 5th century CE. (CIG 9209; Samama 2003:449, no. 354):

Θήκη Θέκλας εἰατρίνης. ✚  
 ✚

Thekla is characterized as εἰατρίνη, while the presence of the cross signifies her Christian identity. The name often occurs in Asia Minor (LGPN VA, VB, s.v.) and is particularly associated with Seleucia, as according to Christian tradition, Hagia Thekla was the patron saint of the area.<sup>22</sup> The term θήκη refers to the tomb and is repeated in funerary inscriptions from Asia Minor.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> A. Ley, s.v. Ἀμαζόνες, *Brill's New Pauly*, 563–565.

<sup>21</sup> Samama 2003:414, n. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Samama 2003:449, n. 13.

<sup>23</sup> For the term θήκη as a definition of sarcophagus, see Λεμπιδάκη 2015:102, n. 635. See also Mclean 2002:262–263, n. 5 (short list of known burial terms and supplementary bibliography).

In the same meaningful context there is an inscription from Corinth of Caria, inscribed in sarcophagus and dated between 4th and 6th century CE. (CIG 9164; MAMA III 269; Samama 2003:451, no. 358):

✠ Σωματοθήκη

Βασιλ[- -] τ[ῆ]ς ἰ[α]- folium

τρίνης.

The restoration of the name remains uncertain, but the term ἰατρίνης proves that it is a woman's grave. The term σωματοθήκη refers to the tomb in this case to the sarcophagus,<sup>24</sup> while the presence of the cross signifies the Christian identity of the dead woman. The ivy leaf (l. 2) is a common ornamental element on inscriptions of imperial period.<sup>25</sup>

The following inscription bearing the simply declaration of medical status as ἰατρίνη comes from Athens and is a funerary stele that dates between 5th and 6th century CE. (IG II<sup>2</sup> 13330; Sironen 1997:no. 45; Samama 2003:132, no. 26):<sup>26</sup>

[Κοιμητήριον<sup>7</sup> - - κ]αὶ Σωσάννας ἰατρ[ρ]ίνης

[- - - - -]ην πλίσιον τ[ῶ]ν ἀγγέλ[ων].

The funerary inscription is dedicated to female physician (ἰατρίνη) Sosanna. The name is related with the verb σώζω (save), through the subject σωζ-, referring indirectly to the woman's ability to save / cure the sick of diseases. The expression πλίσιον τ[ῶ]ν ἀγγέλ[ων] (l. 2) underlines the eschatological christian conception for the afterlife.

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<sup>24</sup> As above n. 23.

<sup>25</sup> The distinctive ivy (*hedera distinguens*) is a feature of the Greek and Latin inscriptions of the Hellenistic and Roman period and probably has an ornamental role since it is not a strong punctuation mark (Hommel 1970: 293–303). For the use of ivy as a punctuation mark, see Threatte 1980:vol. I, 85–86.

<sup>26</sup> Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, no. 1590.

In other cases the declaration of women's medical status is achieved through metaphorical statements that reveal their knowledge and practice of medicine. In particular, in an inscription from the 1st BCE, from Tlo of Lycia, the citizens honor Antiochis with the erection of a statue, as Antiochis has benefited the city with her medical knowledge and experience. (Wilhelm 1932:84; Samama 2003:389–390, no. 280):

Ἀντιοχίς Διοδότου  
 Τλωίς, μαρτυρηθεῖ-  
 σα ὑπὸ τῆς Τλωέων  
 βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δή-  
 5 μου ἐπὶ τῇ περὶ  
 τὴν ἰατρικὴν τε-  
 χνην ἐνπειρίᾳ,  
 ἔστησεν τὸν ἀν-  
 δριάντα ἑαυτῆς.

Antiochis of inscription is not literally unknown, as Galen (13,250 Kühn) mentions her as the creator of a drug for spleen pains, septicemia and rheumatism. This testimony confirms the fact that Antiochis had general knowledge of medicine, a fact that is also evident by the credentials of her medical status. If her father, Diodotus identifies with the person mentioned by Dioscurides (*Preamble 2*), then her profession had a family tradition. The noun ἐνπειρία (l. 7) often appears in medical contexts as well.<sup>27</sup>

An indication of the family tradition of the profession is also present on the inscription of Pantheia from Pergamon. The inscription is engraved on an elegiac couplet on a marble base, dating between 1st and 2nd century CE. (GVI 2040; Samama 2003:310–311, no. 188):

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<sup>27</sup> As above p. 8.

Χαῖρε, γύναι Πάνθεια, | παρ' ἀνέρος, ὅς μετὰ μοῖραν|

σὴν ὀλοοῦ θανάτου πένθος | ἄλαστον ἔχω.

Οὐ γάρ πω τοί||ην ἄλοχον Ζυγίη<ν> ἴδεν Ἥρη|

εἶδος καὶ πινυτὴν ἠδὲ σαοφρο|σύνην·

5 αὐτὴ μοι καὶ παῖδας ἐγεί|ναο πάντας ὁμοίους

αὐτὴ καὶ | γαμέτου κήδεο καὶ τεκέων||

καὶ βιοτῆς οἴακα κατευθύνεσκες | ἐν οἴκῳ

καὶ κλέος ὕψωσας ξυνὸν ἱστορίας,

οὐδὲ γυνὴ περ | ἐοῦσα ἐμῆς ἀπολείπεο τέχνης.|

10 Τοῦνεκα σοι τύμβον τεῦξε Γλύ||κων γαμέτης,

ὅς γε καὶ ἀθ[ανά]|τοιο δέμας κεύθει Φιλαδέλ[φου], |

[ἔ]νθα καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ κείσομ[αι], | αἶ κε θά[νω]·

ὥς [εὐνῆ]ς μο[ύνη] | σοι ἐκοινώνησα κατ' αἶσαν, ||

ᾧδε δὲ κα<ι> ξυνὴν γαῖαν ἐφεσ|σάμενος.

The statement of Pantheia's medical status is made possible by the expression καὶ κλέος ὕψωσας ξυνὸν ἱστορίας, οὐδὲ γυνὴ περ | ἐοῦσα ἐμῆς ἀπολείπεο τέχνης (ll. 8–9). Under no circumstances can the medical responsibilities and abilities of the deceased woman be accurately identified, though they may go beyond the fields of gynecology and obstetrics. The epigraph is a praise from her husband, Glicon, who was also a doctor himself. At the same time, the memory of her father, Philadelphus, who marked as a doctor, highlighting the family tradition of the profession.

The declaration of the medical status of Domnina is implied in verse 4 of the text on a funerary stele from Neoclavidiopoli of Asia Minor. The inscription dates between 2nd and 3rd century CE. (Wilhelm 1932:75–84, no. 3; GVI 1486; Samama 2003:424–425, no. 324):

Σπεῦ[σας] | ἐς ἀθα[νά] | τους, Δο[μνεῖν], | ἀνδρὸς δ' ἀμέ||λησας

ἀστράσιν | οὐρανίοις σῶ|μα καθαράμει|νη·  
 οὗ τις ἐρ(ε)ῖ με | ρόπων ὅτι δὴ || θάνες, ἀλλ' ὅ|τι πάτρην  
 ῥυ|ομένην νού|σων ἄρπασαν | ἀθάνατοι·  
 5 χαῖ||ρε καὶ Ἥλυσίοις | ἐπιτέρπεο, σοῖς | δ' ἄρ' ἑταίροις |  
 λύπας καὶ θρή|νους κάλλιπες || /ἀιδ<ί>ους. | folium

The epigram is on an elegiac couplet, and A. Wilhelm was the first to notice it referring to a female doctor.<sup>28</sup> The declaration of medical status is achieved through the expression πάτρην ῥυομένην νούσων ἄρπασαν (l. 4), suggesting that Domnina probably had more general medical knowledge and with her art helped and relieved the city of ill health. The word ἑταίροις (l. 5) may imply her male colleagues, including her husband,<sup>29</sup> to whom her death had caused sadness and lament.

Aurelia Alexandria Zosimi is praised for her medical art in a funerary stele of 3rd century CE from Pisidia of Asia Minor. (Sterrett 1884/85:303, no. 424; IGR III 376; Samama 2003:437–438, no. 339):

Αὐρ. [Ἀ]λ[εξ]ανδρίαν  
 Ζ[ωσ]ίμην ἀπὸ ἐπι-  
 σ[τή]μης ἰατρ[ικ]ῆς. Αὐρ.  
 [Πονπω]νι[α]νὸς [Ἀ]σκ[λη]-  
 5 πι[άδ]ης ὁ ἀν[ήρ] αὐ[τ]ῆς  
 καὶ  
 Αὐρ. [Μ]οντ[άνη]ν τὴν  
 γλυκυτάτην θυγατέ-

<sup>28</sup> See Wilhelm 1932:75–84, no. 3.

<sup>29</sup> See Samama 2003:425, n. 72.

ρα ὁ αὐτὸς Ἀσκληπιάδης.

The funerary stele was erected by her husband, Asclepiadis, who may have been a physician himself, as the etymology of his name refers to a similar professional capacity. The expression ἀπὸ ἐπιστήμης ἰατρικῆς (ll. 2–3) states the medical status of the deceased woman, without, however, explaining her exact knowledge and skills. Zosimi may have had broader medical knowledge that transcended the boundaries of gynecology and obstetrics. This is, also, proved by her social status as established by the three nomina (nomen, gentilicium, cognomen), indicating Roman citizenship. Therefore, Zosimi's high social standing may have contributed decisively to her medical education.

Augusta is called ἀρχιειτρήνα, and as indicated, knew how to cure human illnesses. It is a funerary stele from the region of Lycaonia dating between the 3rd and 4th century CE. (MAMA VII 566; Samama 2003:442–443, no. 342):

Αὐρ. Γάιος ἀρχί-  
 ιατρος ἀνέσ-  
 τησα εἰστήλην  
 θῆ συμβίου μου  
 5 Αὐγούστης ἀρχι-  
 ιατρήνα ἥτις πολλῶν σώμα-  
 [σι]ν ἀ[ρ]ρώσθων  
 [ἴασ]ιν δέδω-  
 10 [κε ἦς] δώσι αὐτῆς  
 [σ(ωτή)ρ Ἰ(ησοῦ)ς]  
 Χρ(ιστὸ)ς ἀμ[οι]- [βήν - - - - -].

The inscription states that her husband, Gaius sets up a funerary stele in honor of Augusta. The term ἀρχιιατρήνα is *hapax legomenon*. From the fact that the husband was a chief

doctor (ἀρχιείατρος), it can be deduced that Augusta was a prominent figure of the local community. The couple may have worked together, and the woman's medical qualifications were equal to her husband's, so that she would not be considered as an assistant or inferior. This assumption follows from the expression ἥτις | πολλῶν σώμ-|[σιν] ἀ[ρ]ρώσθων | [ἴασ]ιν δέδω-|[κε] (ll. 6–10). The last verses (ll. 10–13) express the Christian eschatological conception that the virtuous acts of earthly life are rewarded by God.

## Midwives

The term μαῖα appears in the ancient Greek literature since Homer's time. The *Odyssey*, Eurycleia is described as a μαῖα (*Odyssey* 19:482). The term does not describe the woman with a broader knowledge of obstetrics, but refers to an elderly woman who was Odysseus' nurse. In later ancient greek literature the term describes the mother or the nurse. Examples from Euripides' *Hippolytus* (243) and *Alcestis* (393) are indicative of the term μαῖα associated with the woman who sometimes replaces the mother, but at the same time cares for women and children. Finally, the use of the term is associated with other terms related to midwifery art and signify the birth process.

In this chapter twelve epigraphic testimonies, which prove the knowledge of some women in obstetrics, are presented. All of these women are described as midwives, but without any particular reference to the particularities of their work and their skills. These inscriptions cover a long period between 3rd century BCE to 6th century CE and a large geographical range. Most of the inscriptions are mainly simple statements of obstetrician status of specific women. The classification of inscriptions follows a chronological order.

The earliest inscription originates from the wider Euboea region (Chalkida), dating to 3rd century BCE and is a funerary stele. (IG XII 9, 1129; Samama 2003:9):

[Α]ριστόκλεια Κλεά[ρ]-

[χ]ου Ῥηγινία ἡ μα[ῖα].





- [Μέ]νανδρος ἀρχίγαλλος·  
ἐπὶ πρυτάνεως Κύμης τὸ [β'], μη(νός)  
Πορνοπίου [β']· Ἡρακλείδης] Ζωπ-  
ύρου Ὀλυμπικός ἡγόρασεν τοῖς μετέ-
- 5 χουσιν τοῦ πρὸ [πό]λεως ἱεροῦ Καίοντος Μ[άν]-  
δρ[ο]υ τὸ γεν[ό]μεν[ο]ν .....ο[υ] τοῦ  
π[..... καὶ ...]ο[υ] τοῦ [Ἐ]ρ[μο]γένου[υ] στε.-  
τ.ου ...ον [...]α[.]ιο[ν] σὺν τῇ προσκε[ι]-  
μ[ένη] στο]ῃ .....ω .....ι στεγν..
- 10 [..... σ]τε[γ]ν[ὸ]ν [.....]αῖον σὺν [..]οι[—]  
τ[.....]ερ[.]μένοις [ύ]πὸ [τ]ῶν ἱερῶν  
κ[αῖ] τὰ λοι[πά, καθ]ὼς [ἡ κ]τ[ῆ]σ[ι]ς πε[ρ]ιέχει,  
λ[αβ]ῶν παρ' [έκ]άστου τῶν μετεχόντων  
τῶν [ιερῶ]ν (δην.) ργ', τῆς πρά[σ]εως γενομ[έ]-
- 15 [νης ύ]πὸ τῶ[ν κα]ταστα[θ]έντων πρακτόρων  
[τῶν] ἀποδεδωκότων [τὸ] ἀργύριον  
[Ἡρακλε]ίδου τοῦ [Ζω]π[ύ]ρου Ὀλυμ[π]ικοῦ ...  
.....ο... [τοῦ Κ]ριτ[ίου, Ἀλε]ξ[ᾶ(?) Ζ]ώλου  
[τῶ]ν Ἐρ[μ]ο[γένου] Ὀ.....ελ..... Περικ]-
- 20 λ[έ]ους [Ἡ]ρώ[ιδ]ου τοῦ [Δ]ιαγόρου, Ὀλυμ[π]ικοῦ  
τοῦ ..]υ[.]ομ[.]γ[.]ς, [Με]νάνδρου τοῦ Σωτη[ρί]-  
χ[ου], Ε[ύκ]άρ[π]ο[υ] ἐν[τε]ίμο[υ] δ[η]μοσίου, Ἀσκ[λη]-  
[π]ί[δ]ου τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδ[ρ]ου, [Ἐλέ]νου τοῦ Κλ-  
ε[ο]κρίτου· οἵτινες] φ[ρ]οντίσουσι καὶ ἐπιμ[ε]-
- 25 λ[ή]σονται τῶν [ι]ερῶν κα[ὶ] τῶ[ν] οἰκ[ημ]άτων [σὺν]  
τῶ [..]τα ...[.]ον [Ε]ὐδώρου ἐνιαυτὸν ἀγο[ρα]-

- ν[όμ]ω, [συντελουμέ]νων τῶν [μυσ]τηρίω[ν]  
 κ[...μ[...]]νων ..γ.ς [εἰς αἰωνίαν] διαμον[ήν]  
 τῶν Σ[εβαστ]ῶ[ν β]α[σιλέων καὶ τοῦ δ]ήμου [Ῥω]-  
 30 μ[αίω]ν κα[ὶ δ]ήμου [Κυμ]αίων τοῖς μ[ετέχου]σι[ν]  
 [μύσ]τα[ις(?) καὶ] ...ρ...[ς] κ[αὶ τοῖς το]ύτων ἐκ[γό]-  
 ν[οι]ς, [ὅσοι ἂν ἀπογράψα]ντ[ε]ς [τ]ελέσω[σι],  
 διδ[όν]τ[ος εἰς τὴν] ὠ[νὴν ἐκά]στ[ου ... Ζ]ωπ[ύρ]-  
 [..]ν[.....]ω..ε...ων· [φροντι]σθήσε[ται]  
 35 δὲ τῶν [μ]ετεχόντων ἱερῶν καὶ θρεμμά[των]  
 καὶ δαπα[νή]σει καθὼς καὶ τὰ πρὸ τούτων ..[-]  
 τῶν χ[ρό]νων· [κα]ὶ [ὅ]σοις μ[έτε]στ[ι τ]ῶν μυστ[η]-  
 [ρ]ίων, τούτοις [ἀνύο]υσι κ[α]ὶ σ[υ]ν[τ]ηροῦσιν  
 ἀκατά[λ]υτα γεί[ν]οιτ[ο γ]ῆ βατ[ή] καὶ καρποφό-  
 40 ρος κ[α]ὶ τ[έκν]ων [γνησί]ω[ν γ]ένεσ[ις] καὶ πάν-  
 των ἀγαθῶν μετο[χή], τῷ δὲ τάναντία φρο-  
 νήσαντι τάναντία. οἰκήματα τὰ προγ[ε]-  
 γραμμένα καὶ ἱερά, καθὼς ἡ κτῆσις περ[ι]-  
 έχει, καθιέρωσεν Ἡρακλείδης Ζωπύρο[υ]  
 45 Ὀλυμπικὸς σὺν τοῖς ἱεροῖς πᾶσιν, ἀγορα-  
 νομοῦντος Ὀλυμπικοῦ νέου τὸ δεύτ[ε]-  
 ρον· οἱ δὲ κατενηνεχότες εἰς τὴν  
 ὠνὴν τὸ ἀργύριον σὺν τοῖς προγεγραμμένοις  
 πράκτορσιν· Τετταίιος αὐλητὴς δωρεάν·  
 a.50 Παπίας  
 Φοῖβος  
 Ἱερατικός

Ζώσιμος

Ἑργαστικός

55 Ἀνείκητος

Σπόρος

Ζώσιμος

Κορβούλων

[Τε]τταίιος

60 [.....]ς

b.50 Βουλομάγα

Μητροφίλη

Ἑλένη

Ἄμμιον

Εὐγένεια {<sup>26</sup>Εὐγένεια}

55 Μεττία

Βᾶσσα

Εὐτυχίς

Ἀγαπωμένη

Ἰωνίς

60 [Ε]ἰ[ρή]νη

[Διον]υσιάς

[.....]ρα

c.50 Πρεῖμα

Ἑλπίς μαῖα {μαῖα}

Σωτηρίς

Ἡδέα

Αὔξησις

55 Συντύχη

Σώτειρα

Γαμική

Λεζβία {Λεσβία}

Ἡρακλέα

60 Κασταλία

d.50 Ἀρχίππη

Σαμίραμι[ς]

Ἐκπρέπ[εα] {Ἐκπρέπεια}

Διονυσιάς

Ἐλπίς

55 Φαυστεῖνα.

The inscription is the first and only reference of the god Mandros. In the text the names of those responsible for the care of the sanctuaries and the buildings are referred to, which are used for the rituals of that God. Then the names of theophores are listed, between which is the Ἐλπίς (C51), who was a midwife. The name expresses hope (ἐλπίς)<sup>30</sup> and is found in several areas of Greece (LGPN I, II, IIIA, IIIB, IV, VA, VB, s.v.). The reference to the name and the profession of the woman, in an honorary decree, proves to her social status. In addition, the declaration of midwifery status is also made in a simple and comprehensive way. The fact that the midwifery profession is listed among the other professions proves the importance of midwifery at that time in the region.

The midwifery status of Euphrosyne is described in a funerary inscription from Paros, dating between the 2nd and 1st century BCE. The inscription represents a snake, which symbolizes fertility and Asclepius. (IG XII 5, 325; Samama 2003:7, n. 3):

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<sup>30</sup> Σαμσάρης 1982:261.

Εὐφροσύνη ἡ μαῖα

Μελίσση

ἡρώισση.

The name Euphrosyne is quite common and is found in many areas of Greece (LGPN I, II, IIIA, IIIB, IV, VA, VB, s.v.). The midwifery status is stated in a simple and straightforward way without providing specific information on the profession of the deceased. The characterization of ἡρώισση at the end of the inscription is common in Roman inscriptions and it is a kind of affirmation of the dead, suggesting eschatological perceptions of the time.<sup>31</sup>

Echekleia is also described as a μαῖα in funerary inscription from Milos and dating to the 1st century BCE. (IG XII 3, 1120):

[Κλεώνυμος] Λυσανία

[τ]ὰν ματ[έρ]α καὶ Ἐχέκλεια

Κλεωνύμου θυγάτηρ τὰν

[μ]αῖαν Ἐχέκλειαν τὰν Κλεωνύμου

5 θυγατέρα θεοῖς.

The inscription is a simple declaration of the midwifery status of Echekleia, with no further details of her profession and skills. Her father's name (Cleonimos) is mentioned. The name Echekleia responds *hapax* to this inscription.

In a simple and comprehensive way Parias is characterized as a μαῖα in a funerary stele from the island of Paros. The inscription dated between the 1st and 2nd century CE. (IG II<sup>2</sup> 12419; IG XII 5, 412; Firatli-Robert 1964:176; Samama 2003:7, n. 3):

Παριάς

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<sup>31</sup> See Ριζάκης-Τουράτσογλου 2000:250–252.

μαῖα  
 χρηστή  
 χαῖρε.

The inscription is a clear statement of the midwifery status of the dead woman. The name Παριάς is a proper name and is *hapax legomenon* (LGPN I, s.v.). The farewell at the end of the inscription is common in inscriptions of the Roman period.<sup>32</sup> The characterization as χρηστή, may indicate the positive contribution of the deceased to the practice of her profession, but it is also a typical characterization of the dead in inscriptions of the Roman period.<sup>33</sup>

In an inscription from the region of Asia Minor, and in particular from Miletus two women are mentioned, one of whom was a midwife. The inscription is not dated and it is maybe of the Roman period. (CIG 2891; Samama 2003:7–8, n. 3; Milet VI, 2 502):

vacat τὸ μνημεῖον  
 Ἀρίστας, μαίας  
 vacat τῆς Πλουτογέ-  
 νου Ζωσίμη  
 5 vacat χρηστή χαῖρε.

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<sup>32</sup> For farewell in inscriptions of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods see, McLean 2002:269; Λεμπιδάκη 2015:70, n. 416. Greetings to the dead are considered paradoxical, as they contradict the meaning of the verb χαίρω. Sourvinou-Inwood (1995:180–216 and 368–369) examines the theme of salute to the dead in both archaic tomb inscriptions and epic and tragic poetry. She concludes that the expression χαῖρε has begun to refer to heroic or deified dead as an extension or adaptation of salute to gods or heroes. She also points out that before the 4th century BCE this greeting was not addressed to ordinary people, which is certainly not the case from the Hellenistic period onwards, when addressing loses its original meaning and becomes a common expression. On the subject of salute to the dead, see Kahrstedt 1954:261; Rizakis 1993:112 (for Achaia region); Robert 1974: 223–224 (for Thessaloniki and Macedonia in general); Βερτουδάκης 2000:83, n. 290 (for earlier literature); Ριζάκης-Τουράτσογλου 2000:247–248; Tsagalis 2008:82–84.

<sup>33</sup> For typical praise expressions, see Tod 1951:182–190; Robert 1965:35–42 & 227–228.

The funerary inscription is dedicated to Arista, who is identified as a midwife, with no further information of her skills. At the same time, Zosimi is also honored through the praise adjective χρηστή. At the end of the inscription there is the usual farewell to the dead during the Roman period.

In a similar expressive way the midwifery status of an anonymous woman is declared. The inscription originates from Athens, it is a funerary and dates back to the 2nd century CE. (IG II<sup>2</sup> 12019):

μαῖα χρηστή.

The inscription is a mere statement of the professional status of the deceased, but the name of the deceased woman remains anonymous. The adjective χρηστός -ή is a short and comprehensive praise.

The declaration of the midwifery status is also found in another funerary inscription from Aegina, dating between 2nd and 3rd CE. (IG IV 168; Samama 2003:8):

[Θ]εοξένου. Σατορνείλα γυνή αὐτοῦ,  
μαῖα.

The brief text is dedicated to Theoxenos. Saturnila, who is described as a midwife, sets up the monument for her husband. The name Saturnila responds hapax. The inscription continues the simple style of Attic funerary inscriptions. In this inscription, the midwife Saturnila is not the honored person, but is a secondary character.

The next inscription is metrical on a elegiac couplet. It is dated between the 2nd and 3rd century CE and comes from Rome. (GVI 1940; Horsley 1987:23; Samama 2003:9):

Ἰουλία Πρειμιγένει|α μαῖα πολλὰς σώ|σασα γυναῖκας  
οὐκ ἔ|φυγον Μοίρας· ζήσα|σα καλῶς ἀνέλυ|σα  
εἰς οἶκον, ὅπου | μοὶ τόπος εὖσεβί|ης ἀπέκειτο. |

Τι. Ἰούλις Ἰέραξ ἀν|νήρ τῇ γαμετῇ |  
μνημοσύνης | ἀγαθῆς ταῦτ' ἐ|πέγραψε φιλῶν.

The inscription states that Julia Primigeneia saved many women with her obstetric skills but failed to escape her own fate. The inscription provides some information on the life of the deceased, such as the manner of her death, and the name of her husband is stated at the end. The declaration of midwifery is more complex and literary and differs from the simple way of declaring the property of earlier inscriptions. At the end, there is the usual memorial expression related to inscriptions of the Roman period.<sup>34</sup>

In a simple way the midwifery status of Sarapias is described in a funerary stele from Attica, probably dating back the imperial period. (Peek, Att. Grabschr 156):

[Σα]ραπιὰς μαῖα  
χρηστὴ χαῖρε.

The name Sarapias is quite common in the ancient world and occurs in Crete, Euboea, Peloponnese, Asia Minor between the 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE (LGPN s.v.). The inscription is a simple statement of the obstetrician status, without reference to the family and origin of the deceased. Sarapias is described as a midwife, with no details on how she pursued her profession or her education. The inscription concludes with the common farewell to the dead woman, but also with the praise adjective *χρηστή*, which signifies the prosperous pursuit of her profession.

In a similarly expressive way the midwifery status of Myrine from the Asia Minor is also described. The inscription dates between 4th and 5th century CE. (MAMA III 605; Nissen 2006:562; Firatli and Robert 1964:176; Samama 2003:9, n. 14):

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<sup>34</sup> For memory expressions, see Guarducci 1974:vol. III, 150; Ριζάκης-Τουράτσογλου 2000:254; McLean 2002: 268. For the adoption of the phrase in Latin inscriptions (*memoriae causa*), see Λεμπιδάκη 2015:91 and n. 570 (with detailed bibliography).



εὐψύχι Μυρίνη ἡ μᾶ,  
 ἰς ἰρήνην σου ἡ καλὴ  
 ψυχὴ καὶ τὰ μέλλοντά σοι.

The declaration of midwifery status of the deceased is made in a simple way. The word is written with -ε- instead of -αι-, which is due to the phenomenon of iotacism during the Roman period.<sup>35</sup> Myrine is praised for her beautiful soul, while reference to the future either signifies a better future life or a posthumous life, giving an eschatological tone to the inscription. The expression τὰ μέλλοντά σοι it is found in Pindar (*Olympian* 2.56) and Plato (*Theaetetus* 178e). The name Myrine is commonly found in the regions of Asia Minor (LGN IV, VA, VB, s.v.).

From the above examination of the term μαῖα and its references to inscriptions, the following conclusions are reached. Initially, the term μαῖα is found in literary texts of the classical period and usually describes the stepmother or nurse or older woman taking care of the children. The above mentioned term differs from the Greek inscriptions of the Hellenistic and Roman period, as the term μαῖα is used to describe a woman who has knowledge and empirical training in obstetrics.

Most of the inscriptions, which are examined in this study, refer to midwives as simple statements of the midwifery status without further information on how to pursue the profession and also the social status of these women. In this way, the midwifery status of Sarapias, Parias, Euphrosyne and the anonymous midwife from Athens is revealed in a simple way. These inscriptions follow a common typology, including name, profession, and farewell. This typology, perhaps, highlights the social status of these women in local communities, which may not have been particularly high and appreciated.

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<sup>35</sup> See Threatte 1980:vol. I, 294–299; Panayotou 1990a:tome II, 243–247; McLean 2002:349 and n. 21.

At the same time, epigraphic testimonies also present cases of midwives whose social status may have been high, as the texts of the inscriptions are more extensive and provide more details. Therefore, it is, almost certain that in the fragmentary inscription from Spain, the role and social position of the midwife was particularly important to the local community. Equally important was the position of Julia Primigeneia from Rome, as well as of Myrine. At the same time, the genealogical references in some inscriptions reveal individual elements of origin, which indicate the social status of both honored women and their families.

Another point to be reached from the examination of the inscriptions concerns the extent of the texts. In particular, it is observed that the inscriptions of midwives from the eastern Mediterranean are more extensive and detailed than the inscriptions of Athens and the mainland, which are simple statements. This element may also relate to the role and importance attached to each area. Moreover, in the inscriptions of the eastern Mediterranean, midwives are imprinted in secondary roles within the texts, since the funerary inscriptions are not always dedicated to them.

## **Midwives Physicians**

The list of female midwives physicians is completed by three separate cases that draw attention to the dual statement of physician and midwifery capacities at the same time. According to King, the compound term *ιατρομαῖα* indicates both the role of the midwife and that of the therapist in general.<sup>36</sup>

The earliest inscription derives from Athens and dates to the 4th century BCE. It is engraved in a dactylic hexameter, inscribed on a marble column, while on the relief surface

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<sup>36</sup> King 1998:179.

are depicted two women and around them two young children. (GVI 342; Clairmont 1970: 130, no. 53; SEG 33: 214; CEG 2 569; Samama 2003:109–110, no. 002):<sup>37</sup>

Μαῖα καὶ ἰατρός Φανοστράτη ἐνθάδε κεῖται,  
[ο]ὕθενι λυπη<ρ>ά, πᾶσιν δὲ θανοῦσα ποθεινή.

The inscription consists of three parts: a) above the relief surface the inscription Φανοσ[τράτη] Μελιτέως is inscribed; b) on the left and above the relief depiction of the standing young girl the name Ἀντιφίλη is engraved. On the right and above the relief depiction of the seated woman, the name Φανοστράτη is engraved; c) below the relief surface the epigram is inscribed.

Fanostrati has the dual status of midwife and doctor, which leads to the connection of her two professional qualities. On the one hand the word μαῖα implies that this may have been her primary capacity. The characterization, regarding the male gender as a doctor (ἰατρός)<sup>38</sup> is a noticeable difference for the majority of female physicians, who are identified as doctors of the female gender (ἰατρίνη). On the other hand, perhaps not only was she a "wise" woman, but she also had more general medical knowledge and could possibly cure all kinds of diseases.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, having had knowledge and skills, she did not cause any pain, as is mentioned (l. 2).

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<sup>37</sup> National Archaeological Museum, no. 993.

<sup>38</sup> The term physician, as well as the dialectal types of εἰατρός, ἰητρός, εἰητρός, οἰατρός, as well as the Ionic types of ἰατήρ, εἰατήρ, ἰητήρ, εἰητήρ, ἰήτωρ, are found in several inscriptions of medical content (SEG 26: 13, 33: 15; 22, 29: 22; 29, 39: 189, 36: 620, 37: 840, 41: 193, 46: 1360) and is used to identify male physicians. See Samama 2003: 13–15; Παπαγεωργίου 2011:252.

<sup>39</sup> In this inscription the reference to the term ἰατρός may also imply midwifery, acting as a verbal intonation of her attribute. This case follows from the fact that the appropriate term for women (ἰατρίνη) according to the LSJ is a later one and is used for the first time by Galen. At the same time, the use of the term in the male gender also contributes to metric consistency.

Similar content is expressed in another inscription from the region of Dion in Macedonia in the 2nd century CE. (Παπαγεωργίου 2011:249–256 [ed. pr.]; SEG 61: 494).<sup>40</sup>

Ἦδε περικλήι-  
 στος ἔην ἰατ-  
 ρὸς Εὐτυχιανή,  
 ἀνδρῶν ἱη-  
 5 τήρ, μαῖα δὲ θηλυτέρων.  
 Οὕλιος  
 Ζωσᾶς Ἰου-  
 λία Εὐτυχι-  
 ανῇ τῇ συνβίῳ  
 10 καὶ αὐτῷ ζῶν.

The funeral altar was commissioned by Ulpios Zossas in order to honor the memory of his wife, Julia Eftichiani, who was a doctor and midwife. This dual distinctive feature makes the case of Eftichiani unique in Dion and in Macedonia. Eftychiani is initially called a doctor, noting her capacity as a therapist, possibly having a hint of praise.

The expression μαῖα θηλυτέρων (midwife of young women) literally states that Eftychiani was fully responsible for taking care of the young pregnant women (θηλυτέρων) who assisted them in pregnancy and thus in childbirth. The epic type θηλυτέρων has a dual meaning. On the one hand, the word may be used as a noun and refer to the female gender in general. On the other hand, it may be used as an adjective, indicating very young girls

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<sup>40</sup> In situ at the basement B3–B4 of the Roman wall of Dion.

and implying the ideal age at which the female body is biologically mature for childbearing.<sup>41</sup>

Eftichiani is described as ἀνδρῶν ἱητήρ (doctor of men). This property is quite rare, as it was difficult for a woman in antiquity to acquire general medical knowledge and to cure all kinds of diseases, except in rare and exceptional cases, where apprenticeships with a male doctor were possible.<sup>42</sup> The word ἀνδρῶν precedes and emphasizes Eftichiani's ability to visit or receive male patients at home, providing medical services, while at the same time giving a distinctive tone to her other status as a midwife. Unlike the word θηλυτέρων following the status of a μαῖα, the word ἀνδρῶν may imply that this was her primary professional status. At the same time, this verbal sequence also contributes to the completion of the meter.

The last inscription is from Korykos in Asia Minor, dating from the 2nd to the 4th century CE. (MAMA III 292; Firatli-Robert 1964:177 no. 89; Nissen 2006:408):

✠ σωματοθήκη Γεωργίου υἱοῦ  
 Στεφάνου μάγκιπος καὶ  
 Στεφανίδος ἱατρομέας.

The inscription is Christian as evidenced by the presence of the cross at the beginning of the text. It is dedicated to Georgios the son of Stephanos, who bears the title of contractor

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<sup>41</sup> Hesiod (*Works and Days* 698–699) defines as the appropriate time to marry a woman and thus give birth to the fifth year of adolescence. Aristotle (*Politica* 1335a) defines eighteen years for the woman and thirty years for the man, as he considers that the body is then at its highest. Plutarch (*Ethics* 16.228A) points out that strong parents can give birth to strong children. Hippocrates (*Girls I*) advises young women to marry as quickly as possible in order to avoid the risk of contracting sacred disease. Oribasius (*Medical Synagogues*, vol. IV, Inc. 16, r) argues that childcare at an early age, that is, less than eighteen years burdens both the woman and the infant herself. Soranus (*Female* A11) defines the age between fifteen and forty years as appropriate for childbearing.

<sup>42</sup> More generally on the teaching of physicians in the Roman period, see Singer-Underwood 1962:51–55.

and Stephanis, who was a midwife physician (ιατρομέας). The term ιατρομαῖα is a compound word formed by the prefix ἰατρ- and the word μαῖα and denotes that the woman who was a midwife but also had medical knowledge and skills. The term σωματοθήκη is a common burial term, which occurs to Asia Minor to denote the burial monument.<sup>43</sup>

The above three cases describe women holding the dual status of doctor and midwife. The three examples come from three different time periods (Classical, Roman and Christian), highlighting the timeless presence of women in medicine and obstetrics. From the texts of the inscriptions as well as from the context it is concluded that the three women may have belonged to a higher social class and therefore acquired a higher education and had been respected by the local communities. Although the professional role of Fanostrati and Eftichiani is more distinct, this is not the case with Stephanis. In any case, however, these are women whose knowledge exceeded the limits of midwifery and obstetrics.

## Conclusions

The above overview of the epigraphic evidence has highlighted some crucial points about the role and position of female doctors in the ancient world. In particular, the role of the physician was not sufficiently distinct from that of the midwife, making any assumption about the nature and responsibilities of each property, precarious. The variety of used terms, as women are sometimes called midwives, sometimes physicians and sometimes midwives physicians, highlights the particular skills of each woman separately, specifying the conditions for practicing her art. Women with medical knowledge, in rare cases, could also offer their services to men, such as Eftychiani in Dion and possibly Fanostrati in Athens, Antiochis in Tlo and Zosimi in Pisidia. Women could gain knowledge of general medicine either through some family tradition, such as in the case of Antiochis and

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<sup>43</sup> As above n. 23.

Panthea, or through their marriage, such as in the case of Augusta, or through apprenticeships with a renowned physician, as is likely happening for Eftichiani. An important factor for women in acquiring medical knowledge was probably their social status. The high social status, which during the Roman period implies the title of Roman Citizen, constituted a strong guarantee for the acquisition of the required medical education. Finally, women practiced their profession mainly in private, as they were excluded from practicing publicly, with the possible exception of the case of Augusta.

The absence of epigraphic testimonies for female physicians and midwives during the classical period may also indicate the suspicious or negative attitude of societies towards female therapists. This attitude is, also, evident in the literature and medical texts of the period, as the term *ἰατρός* (physician) does not refer to women, while the term *μαῖα* (midwife) does not fully reflect the status it has since the Hellenistic period. The only exception is the inscription of Fanostrati from Athens, which is characterized as midwife and doctor. This dual status (*μαῖα καὶ ἰατρός*) is unique in classical period, and especially in Athens, reflects to a certain extent, the attitude of society towards her. Fanostrati may have originated from a well-known family of the local society and gained a robust financial situation, as evidenced by her monument.<sup>44</sup> In classical period, in Athens, midwives often remain anonymous in inscriptions, while in monument depictions they have a secondary characters in the background. By contrast, in the case of Fanostrati on the one hand, her medical and midwifery status is emphatically declared. On the other hand, the monument depicts the woman in the center, surrounded by children and wearing a special attire, different from that of the common midwife of the period.<sup>45</sup> The case of Fanostrati proves

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<sup>44</sup> Nutton 2005:101.

<sup>45</sup> This different attire was led Clairmont (1970:131) and Berger (1970:162) to the assumption that Fanostrati was a pediatrician. On the contrary, Kosmopoulou (2006:300) considers that she was a gynecologist.

that women in the classical period were able to be more than mere midwives and to have esteemed recognition by the local community.

Midwives began to be referred in inscriptions during the 3rd century BCE. It is about the inscription of Aristocleia from Euboea, the fragmentary inscription from Spain, and the honorary decree from Euboea. These inscriptions recognize the value of women in obstetrics. In the years that followed until the Roman period, inscriptions referring to female physicians and midwives were increasing. Most of these inscriptions are simple statements of midwifery or medical status (e.g. inscriptions of Musa, Aristokleia and anonymous midwife from Athens), while some other inscriptions mention the name of the deceased, the patronymic or husband's name, and the usual farewell to the deceased at the end of the text (e.g. inscriptions of Parias, Sarapias and Satornila).

During the Hellenistic period there are several examples that demonstrate the recognition and acceptance of local communities towards female physicians and midwives. In the case of Antiochis from Tlo, the city council recognizes the value of the deceased woman and honors her by erecting a statue in the center of the city.<sup>46</sup> Pantheia from Pergamon is praised in the funerary epigram for her reputation as a valued member of the local community of Pergamon. Furthermore, as a therapist she is equated with her husband. Finally, the recognition of the city towards the deceased female doctors and midwives is also evident in the case of Domnina, who saved the city from diseases. The positive tone of the inscription is also evident by the fact of the metaphorical apotheosis of the dead, who—as it is typically mentioned—did not die, but was stolen by the Gods.

However, in addition to the simple and comprehensive inscriptions, more complex inscriptions appear during the Roman period in which medical or obstetrician status is sometimes attributed in a literary way, thereby giving added value to the status of deceased

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<sup>46</sup> Pleket 1969:27.



women (e.g. inscriptions of Pantheia, Domnina, Julia Eftichiani, Julia Primigeneia). The special literary ways indicate the social status of honored women, as well as their education and training. From this period on there are also cases where women are minor or secondary characters in the inscriptions and are not the most highly honored individuals. Indicative examples are the cases of Stephanis, who is identified as a midwife physician and honors her son. Satornila, who had set up the tombstone, in order to honor her husband and Attalis, who set up the monument with her husband, in order to honor her daughter Antiochis. Attalis is characterized as a physician.

During the Roman period, the Romans showed their preference for Greek female physicians and midwives, recognizing their medical capabilities. This is evidenced by the Greek inscription of Empiria, which is dedicated to her by Roman husband, Gaius Julius Vettianos. There is no intrinsic evidence to prove that Empiria was a Roman Citizen. She was most likely to have been a Greek woman honored by her Roman husband. The use of the Greek language in inscription indicates the couple's Greek education. An indication of the honor of the Romans to the Greek female physicians is the inscription of Zosimi, which is in a public statue, indicating that the deceased was publicly honored.

During the Christian period, inscriptions are defined on the one hand by their verbal content, on the other one by the use of special symbols, such as the cross. These inscriptions have, sometimes, an eschatological notion that their good deeds are rewarded in afterlife (e.g. inscriptions of Myrine, Sosana, Amazona), whereas in other cases these are mere declarations of medical or obstetric status, such as the cases of Thekla, Βασίλ [-] and Stefanis. These inscriptions have a simple form, indicating the name of the deceased and the title/occupation.

The case of Augusta shows that at that time, women could hold senior positions. Augusta is honored by the community for saving many people with her medical knowledge. The acceptance of female physicians and midwives during the Christian period is evidenced

both by the inscription of Sosanna, which saved people and after her death was found near the angels (πλισίον τ[ῶ]ν ἀγγέλ[ων], and by the inscription of Stefanis, who is called a midwife physician (ἰατρομαῖα), while her husband was a contractor (μάγκιπος). Simultaneously, Amazona enjoys the acceptance of the local community, as explicitly stated in the inscription.

The context of the Christian inscriptions shows that women were able to self-identify and could practise the profession of the doctor or midwife. On the other hand, the lack of information on midwifery and childbirth in the New Testament is mainly due to moral grounds that the authors of the work wish to gain, although women's therapeutic ability places them at a high degree of respect and acceptance.<sup>47</sup>

The majority of the inscriptions comes from the region of Asia Minor and dates back to the Roman period. This fact is related to the establishment of female doctors and midwives through the writings of contemporary writers, such as Soranus and Pliny, who present the female physicians and midwives as a reliable source of healing. On the contrary, the epigraphic testimonies of female physicians from Athens prove that women were accepted, but they did not have the same social status and wealth as their colleagues from the regions of Asia Minor.

From the above presentation of the inscriptions the context of education and training of female physician and midwives is not revealed, as no further information is provided in the texts. The only two exceptions are the inscription of Augusta, who may have been trained and worked with her husband, who was chief physician, as well as the case of Aurelia Alexandria Zosimi, whose husband and father were doctors and was possibly trained by them.

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<sup>47</sup> Osiek et al. 2006:50.

Of all the female physicians and midwives, who are examined, only two are classified as a doctor (ἰατρός) in a male gender (Eftichiani and Fanostrati). This fact is rare and possibly accidental, as there is no clear information on a systematic training of female doctors together with male colleagues. It is also obvious that they enjoyed the same professional rights with their male colleagues. Apparently, in some cases apprenticeships with male doctors were possible. The obstetrician status is a privileged sector for women, however, there is an epigraphic inscription referring to a male obstetrician, without completely clarifying the subject of his professional activity.<sup>48</sup>

The above examination of the epigraphic testimonies of female physicians and midwives in the ancient world has highlighted some critical issues that help us in further understanding of ancient medicine and the role of women. In particular, the full presentation of the women midwives and physicians in Greek inscriptions was attempted. At the same time, the presence and acceptance of these women in local communities was examined. The research did not reveal the level of education and training of female physicians and the way of acquiring their knowledge. Although in the case of midwives, things are clearer regarding the acquisition of midwifery status, in the case of female doctors it is more complicated as there is no information mentioned.

The recognition and acceptance of female physicians and midwives has been increased over the centuries. From the simple and brief statements of medicine and midwifery during the classical era, we gradually move to more extensive texts honoring female doctors and midwives, in which acceptance and respect from local communities is clear. The social status of women varies and certainly is not found on all inscriptions from all the above mentioned regions. In this sense, there are cases where the social status of women is high and in cases where the social status is unclear.

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<sup>48</sup> This is the case of Epianaktas from Paros. See IG XII 5, 199.

The examination of the Greek inscriptions on female physicians, midwives and midwives physicians is not only the single contribution of women to ancient medicine. The research could also be extended to individual medicine-related specialties, such as pharmacology and herbal medicine that the contribution of women is significant. In addition, the present research could be abundant, if enriched with material from other primary sources of research, such as archaeological and papyrological findings, whose examination could complete the mosaic of women's medicine in antiquity.

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