

Threptoi

DAVID D. DRY

Threptoi was a term used in the Greek and Roman East to refer to individuals whose upbringing was undertaken by persons other than their natural parents. Although they were commonly brought into a nurturer's household and reared from a young age, *threptoi* were not lawfully recognized members of their nurturer's family (see FOSTERING, FOSTER-CHILD). *Threptoi* generally entered the nurturer's care either as children sold by their parents, as orphans, or as the result of abandonment by the child's natal family (see EXPOSURE OF CHILDREN; ORPHANS).

The term *threptoi* was an informally conferred social title, not a technical legal delineation, and considerable variety existed in the social position granted to *threptoi* by their nurturers. The majority of *threptoi* acted as servants or foster children with servile functions, and for this reason, the term *threptoi* is commonly translated as "slave." Unlike slaves, however, *threptoi* shared an exceptional affection with their nurturers as a result of their upbringing, and slave *threptoi* were commonly manumitted (Cameron 1939; Nani 1943–4; Marijana 2009). The designation *threptoi* extended beyond the years of fostering and delineated the special relationship between nurturer and *threptoi* throughout their lives. Some *threptoi* were the children of free parents and were either orphaned or surrendered by

their natural parents. Since Roman law prohibited the enslavement of free-born children, these free *threptoi* were often fostered by families who wanted the emotional benefits of raising a son or a daughter but lacked children of their own. Some free *threptoi* were given legal status and formally adopted into their nurturer's family (see ADOPTION). The surviving evidence for *threptoi* consists largely of epitaphs placed by both nurturers and *threptoi*. These epitaphs underscore the most salient characteristic of relations between *threptoi* and their nurturers, namely, a lifelong emotional attachment and deep-seated loyalty on behalf of both (Ricl 2009).

SEE ALSO: Slavery, Greece.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- Cameron, A. (1939) "Threptos and related terms in the inscriptions of Asia Minor." In W. M. Calder and J. Keil, eds., *Anatolian studies presented to W. H. Buckler*: 27–62. Manchester.
- Nani, T. G. (1943–4) "Threptoi." *Epigraphica* 5/6: 45–84.
- Ricl, M. (2009) "Legal and social status of threptoi and related categories in narrative and documentary sources." In H. M. Cotton *et al.*, eds., *From Hellenism to Islam: cultural and linguistic change in the Roman Near East*: 93–114. Cambridge.
- Zelnick-Abramovitz, R. (2005) *Not wholly free: the concept of manumission and the status of manumitted slaves in the Ancient Greek world*. Leiden.