



La presenza dei bambini nelle religioni del Mediterraneo antico

**O**biiettivo di questa miscellanea di studi è di trattare, grazie all'interdisciplinarietà fra la storia delle religioni, l'archeologia e l'antropologia, la presenza dei bambini come privilegiati intermediari fra uomini e dèi nel Mediterraneo antico, con particolare attenzione alle religiosità ellenica, magnogreca, romana e punica. Nel mondo antico il bambino è un essere tutto permeato di "natura", che solo l'educazione e l'ingresso nella sfera della "cultura" può rendere un individuo vero e proprio. I bambini, dunque, saranno visti attraverso diverse "prospettive", che, mediante i nomi, i giochi, i suoni, i rituali, le sepolture e le voci stesse degli antichi, li vedranno sempre protagonisti di un esclusivo rapporto con il divino.

**C**ontributi di Angela Bellia, Valentina Caminneci, Stefano G. Caneva, Romina Carboni, Daniela Costanzo, Emiliano Cruccas, Gabriela Cursaru, Beatriz De Paoli, Aurlan Delli Pizzi, Céline Dubois, Doralice Fabiano, Alessandra Foscati, Giulia Pedrucci, Sergio Russo, Filippo Sciacca, Francesca Spatafora, Giovanni Tosetti, Stefano Vassallo.



**C**hiara Terranova ha conseguito il titolo di Dottore di Ricerca in Storia delle Religioni. È attualmente Cultore della materia, a Messina, in Storia delle Religioni e in Storia del Cristianesimo e delle Chiese. Ha prodotto numerosi contributi scientifici, fra i quali *Morire di parto nell'antica Grecia: la storia di Plangon di Platea*, che ha ottenuto il Primo Premio alla VII Selezione "Forma Urbis per l'Archeologia" (2013). Ha recentemente pubblicato con Aracne Editrice le monografie *Tra cielo e terra: Amphiarao nel Mediterraneo antico* e *La Cripta delle Repentite*.

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La presenza dei bambini nelle religioni del Mediterraneo antico a cura di C. Terranova

ARACNE

# LA PRESENZA DEI BAMBINI NELLE RELIGIONI DEL MEDITERRANEO ANTICO

LA VITA E LA MORTE, I RITUALI E I CULTI  
TRA ARCHEOLOGIA, ANTROPOLOGIA E STORIA DELLE RELIGIONI

a cura di  
Chiara Terranova



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# Classical and Hellenistic statuettes of the so-called “Temple Boys”:

A religious and social reappraisal

STEFANO G. CANEVA—AURIAN DELLI PIZZI

## *Abstract*

*Le statuette dei cosiddetti “Temple Boys” in età classica ed ellenistica. Un riesame religioso e sociale*

L'articolo riprende in considerazione il significato religioso e sociale di un *corpus* di statuette raffiguranti bambini accovacciati con gioielli e amuleti, dedicate principalmente nei santuari di Cipro dalla metà del V secolo a.C. al periodo ellenistico. L'interpretazione più plausibile di queste statue come dediche votive, intese a evocare la protezione divina su bambini piccoli, sarà confermata attraverso la discussione dei contesti di ritrovamento e del significato degli amuleti e di altri elementi decorativi delle statue, ma anche grazie a una più ampia disamina del posto riconosciuto agli infanti nei templi. D'altro canto, la varietà di configurazioni di queste statue permetterà di discutere la possibilità che più interpretazioni concomitanti siano preferibili a un modello interpretativo unico.

Our paper reconsiders the religious and social significance of a *corpus* of statuettes representing crouching children with jewels and amulets, principally dedicated in shrines on Cyprus from about the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century BC down to the Hellenistic period. The most plausible interpretation of these statues, that of votive dedications aiming to evoke divine protection on small children, will be substantiated by discussion of discovery contexts and of the significance of amulets and other objects decorating these statues, as well as by broader considerations on the place of small children in temples. The variety of configurations of these statues will also be taken into account in order to discuss the possibility of various interpretations instead of one single interpretative paradigm.

The denomination “temple boys” was introduced at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by J. L. Myres and M. Ohnefalsch-Richter in the *Catalogue of the Cyprus Museum* (Nicosia), to collectively refer to the small statues of crouching children that were being found in large

numbers during excavations in Cyprus (**Fig. 1–2**). The name reflects the hypotheses that this iconographic type represented boy–gods or boys serving in local temples. Although these interpretations are not retained any more, the name “temple boys” has remained in common use in scholarship to deal with the Cypriot corpus, which in the meantime has reached the considerable size of about 300 specimens.<sup>1</sup>



**Fig. 1**

\* This article is the second chapter of a joint research project that the authors are dedicating to the religious place of children in Greek sanctuaries (cfr. CANEVA–DELLI PIZZI 2015). Many thanks are due to C. Bonnet, V. Pirenne–Delforge and J. M. Carbon for their commentaries on a draft of this paper. Although the authors wrote different parts of the article, they share responsibility for its whole content. This paper does not intend to provide an exhaustive treatment of the previous scholarly debate on the Cypriot “temple boys”, for which readers can refer to BEER 1985 and especially to the fundamental study by BEER 1993 (Vol. II, henceforth BEER II) and 1994 (Vol. I, henceforth BEER I); cfr. also BUCHOLZ–WAMSER–KRASNAI 2007. STUCKY 1993, pp. 29–39 enriches this perspective through a detailed analysis of the evidence from Bostan esh–Sheikh, near Sidon. Further bibliography is mentioned and discussed below.

<sup>1</sup> MYRES–OHNEFALSCH–RICHTER 1899; OHNEFALSCH–RICHTER 1893. Some alternative names are used in scholarship, such as the wider category of “crouching children”, in accordance with the methodological focus of each study. For HADZISTELIOU–PRICE 1969, p. 107, “temple–boys” is used only for children dedicated to a god’s service.



**Fig. 2**

Problems raised by this corpus are, however, far from being extinguished. Studies setting the dossier from Cyprus within a broader Mediterranean context have shown that some features considered typical of the Cypriot boys are actually paralleled by a large number of crouching and standing statues of small boys and girls attested across the Mediterranean. Thus what makes the Cypriot “temple boys” a distinctive case? And on the other hand, what makes them similar to other dedicatory practices well attested in the ancient Mediterranean world?

Another problematic point is the *floruit* of the Cypriot corpus, which C. Beer has dated through a combination of archaeological and stylistic criteria to the 5<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century BC, with a decline coinciding with the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Such chronological limits bring along a relatively abrupt rise and fall of the tradition of dedicating statues of children to temples on the island.<sup>2</sup> This evidently raises the question of what particular social, cultural, and perhaps ethnic environment promoted the spread of this tradition, and what changes caused its decline. To date, attempts at answering this question by appealing to punctual events in political history have failed to convince.

<sup>2</sup> BEER II, pp. 83–84, 125–126.

By mainly focusing on the role of centralized ideology, these explanations do not take into due account that agents other than political authorities could be active promoters of religious innovation, and that, conversely, centralized religious policies might be only one aspect of broader processes unfolding in the *longue durée* and at a trans–local geographical scale.<sup>3</sup>

We must accept that not all the questions raised by the Cypriot “temple boys” can be solved with our present knowledge. The aim of this paper is therefore a methodological contribution to the study of an archaeological dossier at the crossroads of local and global, and of context–related historical dynamics and long–lasting religious tendencies. This brief attempt of interpretation does not rely on a strictly iconographical analysis. An iconographical study was carried out by C. Beer in her book, and it is not our goal to attempt a comprehensive survey of the details of the statues.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, we would like to focus on the interpretation of the process of putting a statue of one’s child in a sanctuary. We will analyze this process through two notions: **1.** integration of a child within the human community and **2.** ritual actions granting divine protection to a human being. Analogy with other processes and rites from other regions of the Greek and Phoenician world will be a necessary tool to fulfill this goal.

<sup>3</sup> BAURAIN 2008 and 2011, pp. 144–148 associates the Cypriot “temple boys” with the ideological program of the kings of Salamis, especially with the stressing of their genealogical link with Zeus and of their Argive origins. Baurain takes new impetus from the foundation myth of the Nemea in Argos (the death of a small child, Archemoros, bitten by a snake, and the consequent institution of the festival by Amphiaraos) and from two pieces of iconographic evidence: a 2<sup>nd</sup>–century Corinthian sarcophagus representing the baby Archemoros in the crouching pose of a “temple boy” and a Hellenistic statuette in the same pose, from the surroundings of the *heroon* of Opheltes–Archemonos in Nemea. To us, such a stylistic correspondence is no mark of a special link between Nemea and Cyprus, but a typical example of a widespread iconographic tradition. Moreover, the dating of the Cypriot “temple boys” cannot be reduced to “c. 425–300” (BAURAIN 2011, p. 148), the period of the reign of Evagoras and of his successors. Finally, if this iconography was particularly important for the kings of Salamis, one wonders why this center appears only as a minor site for the “temple boys”, with only one preserved specimen, from a tomb (BEER I, nr. 6; BEER II, 63–64; cf. below, n. 30). A similar overestimation of royal ideology appears in the arguments of CONNELLY 2007, for which see below, n. 15.

<sup>4</sup> BEER II, 2, explicitly writes that she is going to “make an iconographical and stylistic study of the temple boys”.

## 1. Temple boys in Cyprus

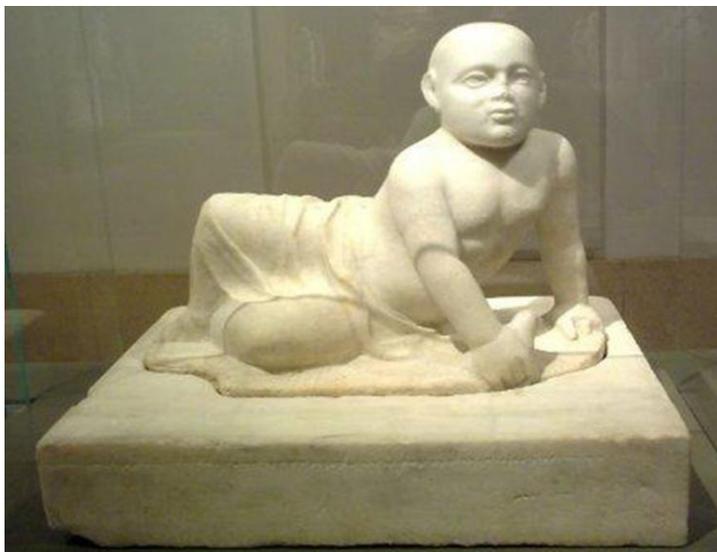
Scholars have distinguished the following stylistic characteristics identifying the Cypriot “temple boys”. We list first the iconographic features, then the material ones. The Cypriot statues represent crouching children in their very early years (not much later than the first year, as they are represented as being unable to stand), almost exclusively boys, seated with their left leg bent under the body and the right foot on the ground.<sup>5</sup> Children are generally barefoot, dressed with a short tunic and wearing various types of, or no headgear.<sup>6</sup> In a large number of specimens (about 30%), the tunic is pulled up, often in an unnatural way, in order to show the sex of the boy. Most Cypriot “temple boys” wear jewels, among which the most conspicuous are a necklace or diagonal chain with a large number of pendants. Children carry a little animal (in most cases a bird) or another small object in their hands. As far as the material features are concerned, most specimens are realized in a local soft limestone, while a few are molded or hand-made in terracotta. Many cases still showing intense traces of painting prove that color played a conspicuous part in the characterization of these statues. A peculiar feature of the statues is that they are unnaturally thin and with a flat back, a detail suggesting that they were exposed frontally. Size varies between miniaturized and lifesize. Execution ranges from a few good-quality portraits to a large amount of rough, poorly refined specimens (pointing to a large, cheap production). Such a variety may suggest that different social strata were involved in the dedication of these statues.<sup>7</sup> The large corpus of “temple boys” in a Greek style from the Eshmun sanctuary of Bostan esh-

<sup>5</sup> On the Egyptian origin of the “crouching boy” pose, cfr. HADZISTELIOU-PRICE 1969, who points to Phoenicia as a middle ground from which this type spread in the Eastern Mediterranean and later in the Greek world, especially through the mediation of Phoenician traders in Rhodes. In Cyprus, a direct Egyptian influence may also have played an important role. Together with BEER II, 90–123, HADZISTELIOU-PRICE 1969 and VORSTER 1983 remain standard references with regard to the spread of types comparable to the Cypriot “temple boys” in the Mediterranean world down to the Roman period. On the continuity of the “crouching boy” type in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, in particular relation to Harpokrates and Horus, cfr. HADZISTELIOU-PRICE 1969, p. 101; BEER II, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> For the clothing of the Cypriot “temple boys”, cfr. BEER II, 9–18, including hypotheses of chronological trends and possible ethnic differentiation based on the type of headgear (flat *kausia*-style cap; peaked Phrygian cap; wreaths); BUCHHOLZ-WAMSER-KRASNAI 2007, pp. 234–236.

<sup>7</sup> BEER II, 90–92, pp. 125–126.

Sheikh, near Sidon, is closely reminiscent of the Cypriot evidence, particularly in the predominance of boys,<sup>8</sup> the pose and presence of small animals, yet many differences must be noted as well: although dating roughly to the same period as the Cypriot statues and being stylistically influenced by them, the Sidonian children are for the largest part executed with a high artistic quality, in marble and in the round;<sup>9</sup> they do not wear any pendants and are generally naked, except for a *himation* that partly covers their legs in some specimens, often leaving genitals exposed. Both material and artistic quality have induced scholars to see them as an expression of the Sidonian elite; one inscribed specimen even points to a royal figure as the author of the dedication to Eshmun (**Fig. 3**).<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 3**

<sup>8</sup> Only two crouching girls have been found at the Eshmun sanctuary, against 26 entire and 13 fragmentary boys: cfr. STUCKY 1993, pp. 29, 38, 97–98, nr. 183–184 (cfr. pp. 36, 98–99, nr. 185–192 for older standing girls).

<sup>9</sup> The few terracotta specimens, probably a local production based on the Cypriot model, are discussed by STUCKY 1993, pp. 19–20, 33, 69. For the date of the oldest Sidonian specimens found in a *favissa* (late 5<sup>th</sup>–mid 4<sup>th</sup> century BC), cfr. STUCKY 1993, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> STUCKY 1993, pp. 29–39, esp. 29–30, 84 nr. 101 and Pl. 24, 54 for the statuette dedicated by a King of Sidon, either Ba'alshilem I for his son Ba'ana or King Ba'ana for Ba'alshilem II. The dedication may date to the late 5<sup>th</sup>–early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC according to the identification of the donor, for which cfr. STUCKY 1993, p. 30 n. 202. For this inscription, see also below, § 2.

This mix of similarities and differences on a macro-regional scale suggests that we should interpret the details characterizing the Cypriot corpus as local features of a model spreading from Cyprus to the Phoenician coast, where it was adapted to a different social environment and stylistic taste.<sup>11</sup>

The pendants worn by the Cypriot children have attracted particular scholarly attention. They include spindle-shaped pendants (probably cases for amulets or papyrus rolls), bearded masks, signet-rings, geometrical pendants and crescents,<sup>12</sup> which in Cyprus are worn only by crouching boys, except for a few portraits of older, standing boys.<sup>13</sup> Current scholarship interprets them as amulets protecting the children on the special ritual occasion that caused the donation of the statue.<sup>14</sup> The study of pendants by C. Beer has pointed to the existence, in Classical and early Hellenistic Cyprus, of an Eastern Mediterranean *koine* combining elements diffused in the Greek world with others that can more specifically be read in relation to the long-lasting Egyptian and Phoenician influence on the island. Recent British excavations at Geronisos, a small island facing the Western coast of Cyprus near Paphos, have confirmed this impression by extending it to the late Hellenistic period. The site of Geronisos has preserved no “temple boys”, but a corpus of 1<sup>st</sup>-century limestone amulets pierced for suspension, whose various geometrical shapes resemble those of the earlier crouching children.<sup>15</sup> The fact that some pendants have been found

<sup>11</sup> For the Cypriot influence on the Phoenician corpus, see already BEER II, p. 71. On the growing familiarity of the 5<sup>th</sup>-century Sidonian elite with marble and the Greek style of sculpture, see STUCKY 1993, esp. 32–33; NITSCHKE 2007, pp. 133–137.

<sup>12</sup> On the typology and significance of the pendants, cfr. esp. BEER II, pp. 18–32; LAFFINEUR 1997 (amulet cases; club-shaped pendants in relation to Herakles?); PETIT 2007 (bearded mask interpreted as Bes/Malika).

<sup>13</sup> BEER I, pp. 84–85 (Appendix B).

<sup>14</sup> Conspicuous parallels of children with chains of amulets come from 5<sup>th</sup>-century Attic *choes* and Argive figurines, usually from funerary contexts: cfr. HADZISTELIOU-PRICE 1969, 98 n. 35, 100 (Type II, 1a.ii), 107 n. 84. Recent scholarship has rejected the interpretation of signet-rings as seals belonging to children that served as cult staff in temples (MYRES 1914, pp. 186–187). As pointed out by BEER II, pp. 26–27, the interpretation of rings as amulets rather than as seals is strengthened by parallels outside Cyprus and by the fact that “temple boys” always wear many rings at once, just like many small amulets hanging on their necklaces and chains.

<sup>15</sup> See in particular CONNELLY-PLANTZOS 2006 and CONNELLY 2007. Excavations at Geronisos have shown three distinctive periods of occupation, in the Chalcolithic, Hellenistic and Byzantine period. The Hellenistic occupation can be dated on the ground of coins from the

unfinished has suggested a local production. The motifs decorated on these pendants confirm that Cyprus remained opened to Eastern influences throughout the Hellenistic period, but with a new, particular role played by Ptolemaic models. To focus on a few speaking examples, the fact that some pendants were decorated with a *basileion*, an eagle and two portraits of Ptolemaic kings proves that the Ptolemaic Empire was able to cut itself a place in the somewhat more “informal” Mediterranean *koine* of Classical Cyprus and to replace it with a new Hellenistic one, based on a more direct interconnection between the island and Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Contextualization: statuettes in sanctuaries

Interpreting the cultic function of the Cypriot statues is made difficult by the scarcity of information concerning the original contexts of their use and findspots. Archaeological reports dating to a large extent to the late-19<sup>th</sup> or early-20<sup>th</sup> century provide inaccurate information about the context of the finds and poor or no photographic evidence at

reign of Ptolemy VIII (170–164/3, 146/5–117/6 BC) to that of Cleopatra VII (47–30 BC). The earthquake of 15 BC (Dio. Cass. 54. 23. 7) is the most plausible cause of the abandonment of the site. The occupation of the island grew in intensity in the last part of the Ptolemaic period, when a large building was erected on the Western tip, probably a temple. The excavators’ identification of the local god with Apollo, which is based on an ostrakon reading ΑΠΟΛΛΩ[...] (“of/to Apollo”?; “of Apollonios”?), remains unproven. The position on a rocky peak dominating the sea routes from Lycia, Pamphylia and Rhodes as well as the anchor and *basileion* motifs on two of the Geronisos pendants could suggest that the local deity was Aphrodite–Isis, the patroness of seafarers (cfr. BRICAULT 2006; DEMETRIOUS 2010). Be that as it may, it is worth reminding that the pendants found on the island are not associated with statues of “temple boys”. This warns against following J. Connelly in a, in our view, uncertain interpretation of the site in relation to rituals of temporary segregation and education of children in temples. To date, the use of the site for ritual healing (cfr. also PAPANTONIOU 2012, pp. 148, 151) also remains a hypothesis.

<sup>16</sup> PAPANTONIOU 2012 provides an overview of this trend as regards religious space, artifacts and practice, and convincingly explains long-term changes in relation to the new organization of Cyprus under the Ptolemies. On Geronisos, Ptolemaic influence is confirmed by the use of plaster setting beds for the limestone blocks of the “temple” at the Western island tip, according to a well-attested use in Alexandria (cfr. CONNELLY 2007, p. 39). D. Plantzos (in CONNELLY–PLANTZOS 2006, pp. 271–277, and CONNELLY 2007, p. 47) points out that the Geronisos pendants closely resemble contemporary seals from Edfu. This can be taken as another proof of a strong Cypro–Egyptian connection in the late Ptolemaic period, yet J. Connelly’s suggestion of a link intentionally established by Cleopatra VII between the *mammisi* of Edfu and the “temple” of Geronisos is unconvincing.

all. In most cases, moreover, the low material and artistic value of these statuettes explain why they have been neglected and stored in museum deposits and are only summarily referred to in old catalogues and studies. This implies that provenance is often unknown and that the most that can be said about some groups of “temple boys” is the name of the private collection to which they belonged before a museum came into possession of them. In some more fortunate cases, however, we are allowed to trace provenances with an acceptable degree of approximation. A list of the main finding sites includes Idalion, Kourion, Lefkoniko, Golgoi, Voni and Chytroi on Cyprus and Bostan esh–Sheikh (Sidon) on the Phoenician coast.<sup>17</sup> Some located specimens have been discovered in votive pits near temples. This is the case, for instance, of a small limestone statue found at Tamassos, in a votive deposit close to the altar of Aphrodite–Astarte (BEER I, nr. 8), datable c. 500–300 BC.<sup>18</sup> While this two–century gap does not allow for a precise chronology, what interests us more is that located specimens can shed light on the role of votive statuary in local cults. On Cyprus, evidence points to Apollo and Aphrodite, together with their Phoenician correspondents Reshef and Astarte, as the major divine recipients of the votive statues.<sup>19</sup> Explanation of these associations has been sought in the link of Aphrodite/Astarte with motherhood and child care and of Apollo/Reshef with protection for human life, of which ritual healing could be an element.<sup>20</sup> The possibility that on Cy-

<sup>17</sup> For the main Cypriot sites, cfr. BEER II, pp. 52–60. For other sites having preserved up to three specimens, cfr. BEER II, 53, pp. 60–71. For the Phoenician coast, see BEER II, pp. 71–76; STUCKY 1993, esp. 29–39 (Bostan esh–Sheikh).

<sup>18</sup> BUCHHOLZ–WAMSER–KRASNAI 2007, nr. 1. For this and other located cases, cfr. BEER II, pp. 83–84.

<sup>19</sup> For Apollo’s cult in sanctuaries associated with “temple boys”, cfr. BEER II, pp. 77–83. Epigraphic evidence links the cult of Apollo Hylates in Kourion with the dedication of “temple boys” (see below). In Idalion, a 4<sup>th</sup>-century, bilingual Phoenician/Cypro–syllabic dedication identifies Reshef MKL (for the uncertain interpretation of this double name, cfr. BEER II, pp. 78–79 and LIPINSKI 1987 and 2009, pp. 233–235) with Apollo Amyklos as the recipient of the local cult (for the Phoenician part, CIS I:1, 89 = KAI 3; for the Cypriot part, ICS, 246–248, nr. 220). The Cypriot Goddess, identified with Aphrodite and Astarte on the ground of epigraphic and iconographic evidence *in situ* as well as by literary documentation, is associated with sanctuaries where both “temple boys” and *kourotrophos*–style figurines were dedicated (esp. at Idalion, Golgoi, Chytroi, Amathous). On *kourotrophoi* on Cyprus, cfr. HADZISTELIOU–PRICE 1978, pp. 90–100; QUEYREL 1988; PAPANTONIOU 2012, esp. 220–257. On Aphrodite and Astarte on Cyprus, cfr. PIRENNE–DELFORGE 1994, pp. 309–370; BONNET 1996; BONNET–PIRENNE–DELFORGE 1999 and 2004.

<sup>20</sup> This explanation seems to be confirmed by comparison with other sanctuaries connected with the dedication of children’s statues in the Mediterranean world: cfr. below, § 4.

prus, “temple boys” were also associated with the cults of Melqart/Eshmun remains unproven due to the difficulty of singling out cult places of these gods on the island.<sup>21</sup> However, some considerations make this association possible. Evidence from the sanctuary of Bostan esh–Sheikh, near Sidon, where “temple boys” were dedicated to Eshmun, provides a significant case in this perspective.<sup>22</sup> A major divine feature of Eshmun was his protective attitude towards human life, both in a general way and in particular relation to ritual healing, the latter point justifying his common identification with Asklepios.<sup>23</sup> Phoenician and Cypriot sites have preserved a large corpus of Herakles–type figures, which have often been found in the same context as “temple boys”.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, some of the pendants worn by the Cypriot children, such as the club–shaped amulet and the Bes–style face, may suggest iconographical links with Phoenician gods associated with the Greek Herakles, such as Melqart and Eshmun.<sup>25</sup>

Dedicatory inscriptions are scarcely represented in the “temple boys” dossier. This lack of epigraphic evidence raises an additional interpretative problem: the anonymity of the “temple boys”. The site of Ayia Anna (Kourion) has preserved two legible inscribed specimens. These two small statues (c. 13 cm h) bear Cypro–syllabic dedications dated palaeographically to the late 5<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century, which seem to identify the statues as dedications to Apollo. Syntax suggests that the depicted children were not the active donors, but the beneficiary of the dedication, most plausibly performed by their parents or tutors.<sup>26</sup> One

<sup>21</sup> For the documentation concerning Melqart on Cyprus, cfr. BONNET 1988, pp. 313–342.

<sup>22</sup> BEER II, pp. 80–81; STUCKY 1993, pp. 29–39.

<sup>23</sup> See BENNETT 1980, pp. 365–367; BEER II, pp. 80–81; YON 2008, pp. 159–160 (Kition); RIBICHINI 2008; GARBATI 2010.

<sup>24</sup> BEER II, pp. 80–81; STUCKY 1993, p. 68; for the iconographic type, cfr. PETIT 2007; GARBATI 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Concerning the club–shaped pendant, LAFFINEUR 1997 suggests a link between the protection of small children by Herakles and the myth of the baby–god killing snakes. On divine snake–killers and the ritual protection of individuals, especially children, see below, § 4, and GARBATI 2010. For the Egyptian Bes as the possible iconographic rendering of a variety of Phoenician gods, including Eshmun, cfr. PETIT 2007; HERMARY 2007; GARBATI 2010. However, we are not convinced by T. Petit’s suggestion of a relation between the crouching pose of our statuettes and the iconography of the dwarf god Bes/Malika of Amathous (cfr. KARAGEORGIS 2000, pp. 201–204, nr. 330). As stated above, to us the boys’ position is simply a stylistically diffused, naturalistic representation of little children, which does not point in itself to any direct link with a deity.

<sup>26</sup> BEER I nr. 189 (4<sup>th</sup> cent.) and 190 (last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> cent.), with discussion in BEER II 77–78. For the fragmentary inscriptions, cfr. MITFORD 1971, pp. 46–51 nr. 18–19, suggest-

inscribed specimen from Bostan esh–Sheikh allows for comparison outside Cyprus. The text preserves the dedication of a Sidonian king to Eshmun and makes it explicit that the purpose of this act was a request for divine protection.<sup>27</sup> Another text from the same site refers to a figure, probably a member of the temple staff, charged with the duty of taking care of these votive statues.<sup>28</sup> In addition to these inscriptions, similar images of crouching children on inscribed stelae have been found in the Punic area, but neither the name nor the age of the child is provided.<sup>29</sup>

The general anonymity of the depicted children suggests that, in the process of dedication of the statue, the emphasis was not so much on the child himself, but rather on the parents. Accordingly, “temple boy” statues may only be a part of a larger ritual process, where the identity of the child would play a more important role. The dedication of a statue in a sanctuary would therefore be one of the acts of such process, the only piece of evidence that we still have at our disposal today, while other pieces of the jigsaw would be missing: sacrifices, prayers, possible registration of the child in archives, and so on. On these grounds we can surmise that on Cyprus and the Phoenician coast, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, parents consecrated on some precise occasions statues of their little children in order to ensure divine protection for them. However, a few Cypriot statues come (or are said to come) from tombs, according to a use better document-

ing caution for some of the integrations by previous editors. As far as we can understand, both inscriptions followed a formula “donor (nom.) + verb of dedication + object (acc.) + recipient god (dat.)”. The god is in both cases Apollon. The object, of which in both cases only the sign “[...] RO” remains, has been rendered [τὸ(ν) κοῦ]ρον, which is not impossible but slightly hazardous. If, as proposed by the editors, the signs “O PA TE” (on MITFORD, nr. 19) are to be rendered with the verb ὠπασσε (*LSJ*: “to give as a companion or a follower” or “to grant”), the verb would fit both interpretations of the dedication of the statue as a votive gift to Apollo and as a consecration of a boy to the god. However, we are inclined to favor the first explanation (cfr. below, § 4). Another brief fragment from Kourion also suggests a consecration to Apollo: [...one<sup>h</sup>ē]ke tode Apo(I)ōni (EGETMEYER 2010, Kourion, nr. 23). For other grammatical structures, see e.g. EGETMEYER 2010, Kourion, nr. 8 and 22.

<sup>27</sup> The inscriptions states: “This is the statue which Ba’alshilem, son of Ba’ana, King of the Sidonians, son of King ‘Abdamon, King of the Sidonians, son of King Ba’alshilem, King of the Sidonians, has offered to his Lord Eshmun at the spring Ydlal. May he bless him!” It remains uncertain whether the donor Ba’alshilem is to be interpreted as the father of the child, or as the child dedicating his own image (cfr. above, n. 10).

<sup>28</sup> STUCKY 1993, pp. 34, 105 nr. 229.

<sup>29</sup> BEER II, pp. 94–95.

ed outside Cyprus.<sup>30</sup> The hypothesis can be made that in some cases, the events for which parents had purchased a statue did not go as expected and that the statue became part of the funerary goods of the deceased child. This would confirm that the dedication of the “temple boys” statues was somehow related to the ritualization of a dangerous moment in the life of a child. However, a broader link with the earliest years of his life, in which the risk of mortality was higher, remains an equally possible hypothesis. We may therefore also suggest that children’s portraits could become a part of funerary goods because divine protection was expected to be ensured by gods to the whole extension of human existence, from life to death.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Gender issues

Only 30% of the Cypriot “temple boys” expose their genitals. This feature can be associated with good quality specimens, but it also combines with other stylistic details, together suggesting that exposed genitals declined by the end of the Classical period.<sup>32</sup> It remains possible that other specimens originally had their genitals painted rather than carved, yet this hypothesis is not supported by the extant archeological evidence. C. Beer has suggested that statues with exposed genitals could be related to an act of thanksgiving by parents for the successful result of their children’s circumcision.<sup>33</sup> This hypothesis can-

<sup>30</sup> The only certain case from Cyprus is BEER I, nr. 6 (Nicosia Cyprus Museum, Sal. T. 84/I; c. last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century): a limestone specimen from the *dromos* of a Phoenician-style tomb (tomb 84) at Salamis, containing at least one child burial. The provenance of nr. 168–170 from tombs at Idalion is uncertain (cfr. BEER II, p. 135). For parallels of statues of children in a funerary context, cfr. HADZISTELIOU–PRICE, esp. pp. 109–110.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. GARBATI 2010, p. 164.

<sup>32</sup> BEER II, p. 14. Most preserved “temple boys” from Bostan esh–Sheik are naked, thus they are of no comparative use to discuss the Cyprus dossier. It is however interesting to note that, in cases where a *himation* is present, this seems to be intentionally placed so as to leave the genitals uncovered. The only exception is the royal dedication of Ba’alshilem (STUCKY 1993, Pl. 24), for which see above, § 1–2.

<sup>33</sup> See BEER II, pp. 121–123, 131–134, and below, § 4. Beer draws attention to the parallel case of “temple boy”-style statues with clothes and exposed genitals, which come from 4<sup>th</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century Caere, in Etruria (cfr. BEER 1987). According to Beer, it is possible that this type arrived from Cyprus, through the mediation of Pyrgi and the contribution of Phoenician traders. Be that as it may, we remain dubious about the interpretation of the “loop-shaped” object held by some Cypriot boys (BEER II, pp. 34–38) as a tool used to stop the bleeding after cir-

not be ruled out without any doubt for the specimens with exposed genitals, since it has some arguments for it. It may be no coincidence that this iconographical display ended at the same time as the collapse of the Phoenician dynasty at Kition, which was to be replaced by the Ptolemies, in the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>34</sup> However, this explanation seems to raise more problems than it may solve when applied to the general corpus. Firstly, circumcision poses abruptly an unsolvable problem, i.e. the ethnic identity of the Cypriot donors. Distinguishing between Phoenician and Greek donors, the latter not practicing circumcision, is extremely hard on the basis of the sole iconography of the statues. Secondly, almost nothing is known about the actual practice of circumcision by Phoenicians, let alone about the age at which their children assumedly underwent such surgery.<sup>35</sup> These observations warn us against stressing an ethnic explanation for internal discontinuities within the Cypriot corpus. As we shall see, the documented trend might rather be explained as the consequence of a diachronic change in visual semantics (the genitals not being shown because the male gender of the figure became self-evident) or in religious practice (re-use of the crouching style for new ritual purposes).

Two or perhaps three crouching statues from Cyprus actually depict girls<sup>36</sup>. This evident disproportion between boys and girls is confirmed by the Sidonian evidence at Bostan esh-Sheikh, where only two fragmentary specimens can be referred to crouching girls.<sup>37</sup> To this evidence we may add a small Cypriot corpus of standing portraits of slightly older girls in both marble and limestone, and a spare mar-

cumcision. To us, this object could more plausibly be a sort of bread or another (at the moment impossible to identify) ritual tool (cfr. BEER II, p. 35).

<sup>34</sup> BEER II, p. 126. According to BEER II, pp. 14–15, the appearance of the *kausia*-style cap could be another mark of the cultural and social change occurring on Cyprus under the Ptolemies.

<sup>35</sup> Phoenician evidence on this subject is regrettably non-existent. In this regard, cfr. Hdt. II, 104 on the difference between the Phoenicians of the Levantine coast practicing circumcision and those having abandoned this use as a consequence of contact with the Greeks.

<sup>36</sup> BEER I, p. 85, Appendix C, nr. 1 and Pl. 196b (from Golgoi; Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Inv. Nr. GR.1–1917): complete limestone figure of a girl with a chiton, a Gorgoneion on her chest, shoes and holding a duck; nr. 2 (probably from Golgoi; present location unknown, thus not seen by BEER; CESNOLA 1885, nr. 980): girl in the traditional sitting pose, with an unusually small head raising the suspicion of a wrong match; BEER I, p. 83, Appendix A, nr. 1 and Pl. 196a (allegedly from Kourion; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. Nr. 74.51.2766) is uncertain and might be an unfinished girl. See also the discussion in BEER II, pp. 85–87.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. above, n. 8.

ble head from Kourion, representing a girl aged around 4–6 years, of high Attic quality and possibly to be dated to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup> Here again, evidence from Bostan esh–Sheikh provides an interesting parallel with five standing girls.<sup>39</sup> Standing statues of this type are not uncommon in the Mediterranean world and the Cypriot evidence is closely reminiscent of standing girls from Attica, which we will briefly discuss below. If we follow C. Beer in dating these Cypriot female statues to the Hellenistic period, we may interpret this innovation as part of the changes that occurred in post–Classical Cyprus, when a new Mediterranean *koine* affected the cultural, social and religious traditions of the island. Cypriot “temple girls” might therefore be a short–lived innovation within the tradition of dedicating statues of children in temples: a practice that, as proposed by C. Beer, declined in the course of the Hellenistic period.

While longer discussion of the disproportion between male and female votive statues is carried out in the following section, we would like to draw attention now to two points: **1.** it is possible that the larger amount of boys is to be linked to the greater social expectations that many cultures have for male than for female children; **2.** the Cypriot corpus speaks against the hypothesis of a gender–related match between children and protecting deities. At least in Cyprus, “temple boys” statues were dedicated to both gods and goddesses.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. Attempts at Interpretation

As explained at the beginning of this paper, scholarship has gradually rejected some outdated interpretations: temple boys as images of gods or gods’ children,<sup>41</sup> as children dedicated to the service of a god,

<sup>38</sup> BEER II, p. 86, with references.

<sup>39</sup> STUCKY 1993, pp. 29, 98–99, nr. 185–192.

<sup>40</sup> *Contra* STUCK 1993, p. 38, who draws attention to the big number of female statues in Brauron. However, Brauron is a specific case with a local characterization and, as such, it cannot be taken as revealing of a global trend.

<sup>41</sup> WESTHOLM 1955, p. 7: “There is nothing divine whatsoever about the temple boys”. Connections have been made with different deities on account of iconographical features of the statues; for instance, the Phrygian cap depicted on a few statues has been used to suggest a connection with Adonis.

or as divine prostitutes.<sup>42</sup> Besides, it seems that the exposing of genitals has attracted a hitherto overwhelming attention to the detriment of other details: even C. Beer, who admits that only 30% of temple boys show their genitals, repeatedly uses this iconographical specificity and assumes that this was used to convey a clear message to visitors of the sanctuary.<sup>43</sup> This iconographical feature has raised two interpretations, which cannot be rejected as directly as divine images and prostitution, but which still rely heavily on what might actually be only an iconographical detail. Firstly, A. Westholm suggested that these statues could be votive sculptures offered by parents who wished to have a male child.<sup>44</sup> The main problem is that temple boys are not new born children anymore and are usually adorned: desired male children would perhaps instead be represented as babies and without any other characteristics than their male attributes.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, as explained above, it has been suggested that the exposing of genitals could be associated with a rite of circumcision assumed to have been practiced by Phoenicians on Cyprus. This interpretation is considered likely by C. Beer, as it allows for a systemic view and provides possible explanations of different elements of the problem, such as the loop-hole objects. We have already drawn attention to some methodological problems inherent in this reading. At this point we would like to observe that other options remain possible. The first is that, at least in Classical Cyprus, all children involved in the ritual of which the dedication of a statue was a part, were boys, and that the exposed genitals are only to be taken as an aspect of stylistic redundancy. Admittedly, this solution is frustrating as it gives up with any attempt to make sense of a conspicuous feature of our evidence. However, this interpretation may be

<sup>42</sup> The age of the children is the strongest argument to reject this interpretation. HADZISTELIOU-PRICE 1969, p. 109, goes against this interpretation. On divine prostitution, see BUDIN 2008, but see also our remarks in CANEVA-DELLI PIZZI 2015 (c.d.s). C. Beer's suggestion that some of the children's mothers could be prostitutes working in the whereabouts does not allow for any meaningful interpretation (the author uses as an argument a temple tariff, p. 129). This status does not explain this practice, and many other women, without being prostitutes, could set their child's statues in sanctuaries.

<sup>43</sup> BEER II, p. 14. She considers that this is part of the three distinctive iconographical features on which she bases her comparative research throughout the Greek world (p. 90).

<sup>44</sup> WESTHOLM 1955, p. 77.

<sup>45</sup> Arguments by BEER II, pp. 128–129. Life-size terracotta statues of new born babies exist and depict the baby wrapped swaddling bands. They are common in votive deposits from Hellenistic Central Italy: cfr. the about forty specimens from the sacred area near the Northern city gate of Vulci; PAUTASSO 1994, pp. 33–44.

nanced by making use of the chronological insights provided by C. Beer for the Cypriot dossier. Let us first draw the attention to the fact that, when genitals are not exposed, only the combination of clothes and jewels allow us to recognize a boy or a girl in these stylized portraits of very little children. If we accept Beer’s Hellenistic dating for the decline of the type with exposed genitals and for the appearance of the few Cypriot “temple girls”, we may suggest that in Classical Cyprus, the type of the crouching children with no exposed genitals was felt as an overly generic iconographic type, perhaps sufficient for low-quality serial statuettes, but not for better specimens. Whether crouching children’s statues of unspecified gender might actually represent little girls remains out of our understanding. If this were the case, however, parents wanting to stress the male gender of their children could make use of the exposed genitals or, in later specimens, of other details, such as the *kausia*-style cap.<sup>46</sup> The concurrent disappearance of exposed genitals and appearance of the crouching girls therefore speak in favor of a change in iconography that may also reflect a change in mentality. Perhaps the opening of Cyprus to new traditions in the Hellenistic period assigned a new role to little girls in the ritual of depositing statues of children in sanctuaries, and at the same time it brought a distinctive Cypriot tradition — the exposing of genitals — to an end, imposing a new, less locally-bound system of gender differentiation. As stated above, the limited number of “temple girls” may be explained because of the prominent interest in male offspring, but also as a consequence of the fact that this innovation occurred in the declining phase of the tradition of dedicating children’s statues in the island’s sanctuaries.<sup>47</sup>

According to us, C. Beer’s most relevant interpretation is the one about the making of the statues at the time of the children’s weaning, when boys would move from the women’s quarters of the house into the men’s quarters<sup>48</sup>. Weaning could be a dangerous period for the child and a form of divine protection would be helpful around that

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. BEER II, p. 14; for the chronological implications of the *kausia* cfr. BUCHOLZ-WAMSER-KRASNAI 2007, pp. 234–235.

<sup>47</sup> R. Stucky’s dating of the two “temple girls” from Bostan esh–Sheikh to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (STUCKY 1993, p. 34) does not bring any conclusive contribution to this topic, since the Sidonian evidence stands in between Cypriot models and local adaptations, which are deeply influenced by styles and iconographic types derived from other Greek regions.

<sup>48</sup> BEER II, pp. 134–135; cfr. HERMARY 1989, p. 69; CONNELLY 2007, pp. 46–47.

critical time; the different ages of the statues could be explained by the fact that not all the children were ready for weaning at the same time<sup>49</sup>. Rituals of age transition are reasonable candidates for the occasion, urging parents to dedicate a statue of their children. We would like to take this interpretation a bit further, by focusing not on weaning itself — as we will not take this notion as a distinctive step in the children's growth — but by tackling the wider issue of integration of a child within a community through a ritual act placing the child under the protection of a god.

Deities to whom the “crouching children” statues were dedicated in the Greek world shared a common feature: they were all involved with the birth, care and upbringing of children. They were mostly feminine deities such as, for instance, Artemis at Brauron, Demeter at Halikarnassos, Malophoros in Selinus, Aphrodite at Idalion, Golgoi and Tamassos, the Nymphs in the Corycian cave near Delphi. The link between “temple boys” and male gods such as Apollo and Asklepios can be explained through the protective function that these deities would be expected to exert on children.<sup>50</sup> As seen above, the same explanations are valid for Phoenician gods associated with the dedication of “temple boys”. Connection with the divine sphere also appears in iconographical features of the statues: laurel wreaths on some statues — though on a minority of them — may be seen as attributes of Apollo.<sup>51</sup> Birds may be also part of the larger process surrounding the dedication of a statue: a bird was perhaps separately offered to the deity,<sup>52</sup> and might play, in some cases, the role of an iconographical marker of the recipient deity (a dove for Aphrodite?), although overall the distribution of objects in the children's hands seems to be too varied to bear

<sup>49</sup> CONNELLY 2007, p. 47 refers to an unpublished papyrus from Berenike (Egypt) in which a woman states that she has nursed her child for three years. Of course, this period of time cannot be taken as a rule, but is illustrative of an age fitting with the “temple boys”.

<sup>50</sup> In this perspective, healing can be seen as a part of the larger protecting prerogatives of these gods. In some cases, it can take a prominent importance, such as in relation to Asklepios and Eshmun. For the deities associated with the donation of “temple boys”, see the overview of HADZISTELIOU–PRICE 1969, pp. 104–106; BEER II, pp. 77–84, 100–117.

<sup>51</sup> BEER II, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> As suggested by WESTHOLM 1955, p. 75. A natural-size limestone dove is part of the Cypriot Cesnola Collection at the Metropolitan Museum (late archaic period; cfr. KARAGEORGIS 2000, pp. 254–255, nr. 357). Votive doves are not exclusively documented in Cyprus: cfr. also a small bronze dove from Hellenistic Etruria, in the votive deposit at Colle Arsicchio di Magione, in a context including “temple boys” (late 4<sup>th</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC; Perugia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria: cfr. FERUGLIO 1999).

precise cultic significance.<sup>53</sup> It is also possible that these animals were, as other objects, a gift that the children received on the special ritual occasion that was memorialized by the statue. It might finally be surmised that on this occasion, parents gave their children something to perform a small offering to the temple, so as to recompense the temple and at the same time to educate children in this basic act of religious devotion.

The need to secure the child's fragile fate through divine benevolence might theoretically not be the only motivation to perform rituals and to dedicate statues. It could be surmised that more prosaic reasons, such as the necessity to make official the child's status, may also have played a role. A comparison with Athenian practices of acknowledgment of the child's legitimacy and of his integration into the community, offers interesting — though different — parallels to this hypothesis. The age of Athenian children at the centre of such rites does not match the age of the “temple boys”: these seem to be older than the new born children concerned by the *amphidromia* and the *dekate* in Athens. Similarly, both presentations of children during the *Apatouria*, i.e. in the year of their birth (in order to be presented to the members of their father's phratry) and later when they were on the verge of puberty (in order to be inscribed in the register of the phratry), have to be located — especially the second — at different moments of a child's life.<sup>54</sup> However, it should be noted that religious elements are present throughout these habits: in Athens, the father of a newborn would put olive branches for boys and wool strips for girls on the wall of his house — two elements which connect the existence of the child to the city's main goddess, Athena.<sup>55</sup> It is tempting to surmise that something similar occurred in Classical Cyprus, although admittedly in this case we are not able to state whether dedicating children's statues in temples was a formalized social duty of their par-

<sup>53</sup> BEER II, pp. 32–33.

<sup>54</sup> On these rites in Athens, see GHERCHANOC 2012, pp. 35–48, 117–24, 138–9, 150–2, who highlights the complementarity and discrepancies between rites performed within and without the *oikos* (p. 157). The *amphidromia* are performed in a tight circle and aim at making sure that the child is viable. In the *dekate*, where more people are gathered in the *oikos*, and *inter alia* witnesses, the father announces the child's name and admits his legitimacy. The *Apatouria* are then performed outside the *oikos*, in the phratry. For a social history of childhood in Classical Athens, see BEAUMONT 2012.

<sup>55</sup> GHERCHANOC 2012, p. 138.

ents, or rather a free choice that some of them took as a manifestation of family devotion.

A closer parallel is possible with similar statues of boys and girls found in the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia in Attica, which have raised divergent interpretations in scholarship.<sup>56</sup> According to C. Beer, sculptures of little girls found in the sanctuary cannot be identified with the ‘little bears’ (*arktoi*) depicted on vases and performing a pre-wedding rite: it is more likely that these statues were deposited in the sanctuary of Artemis on account of her quality of *kourotrophos*, as a protector of growing children. The coexistence, in the same sanctuary, of rites of *arktoi* and of dedication of statuettes of young children suggests that, if both practices cannot be confused, they were part of similar processes occurring at different stages of a child’s life: requesting divine protection before a critical period or status change.

A methodological warning is needed at this point. The possible interpretation of setting children’s statues in a sanctuary as part of a rite of integration within the community does not mean that this is to be understood according to Van Gennep’s classical notion of “rite of passage”: that is, as a process implying a temporary separation of young members of a community, which preludes their reintegration and recognition of a new, improved social status. Let us first of all remind that nothing in the Cypriot corpus suggests that children themselves rather than their stylized images were consecrated within sanctuaries. Accordingly, there is no reason to assume that the dedication of a child’s statue would refer to a period spent by the child in a temple.<sup>57</sup> Second, even if we assume that the ritual act of dedicating a statue was part of a presentation of the children to the community, which remains a hypothesis, it should be noted that the age of the “temple boys” places them outside the typical case allowing for an interpretation of “rites of passage”, namely as accompanying the accession of adolescents to the community of adults. In a recent paper in which we dealt with the question of consecrations of human beings to deities throughout the Greek world, we investigated in this respect the case of

<sup>56</sup> For an overview of these interpretations, see BEER II, pp. 105–107.

<sup>57</sup> The hypothesis of temporary temple segregation on Geronisos, which has been suggested by CONNELLY 2007, does not rely on conclusive evidence.

the sanctuary of Leukopetra (near Beroea, Macedonia).<sup>58</sup> Here, in the Imperial period, a large number of slaves were consecrated to the local Mother of Gods, a process that generally implied an improvement of their conditions of life and which in many cases may be equated with an act of manumission. Some of them were adolescents and adults, but to the largest extent they were younger children. With regard to the Leukopetra corpus, we rejected the hypothesis proposed by the editor M. Hatzopoulos that consecrations of human beings to temples would represent a long-term evolution of ancient “rites of passage” for adolescents through segregation and subsequent reintegration within the community. We opted for another interpretation, which seems to us to fit better with the cultural and social environment reflected in the corpus: young children were consecrated in larger numbers because of their greater vulnerability (economic reasons should also be taken into account). In the case of Leukopetra and in other similar ones, children’s vulnerability concerned not only health, but especially social dangers to which children could be exposed, *in primis* that their new status would be questioned by people that claimed possession over them.<sup>59</sup> Naturally the “temple boys” dossier requires different explanations than the Leukopetra one, as in this case consecrated statues *do not mean* that children were actually consecrated to a god, and no issue of slavery seems to be at stake. However, the two dossiers together draw attention to two important points: **1.** in both cases, an act of consecration is meant to establish a communication between the human community and the gods; **2.** divine intervention is required to bestow long-lasting protection upon vulnerable human beings and possibly to grant religious sanction to the status they enjoy within the community in which they live.

<sup>58</sup> CANEVA–DELLI PIZZI 2015 (c.d.s), with references to recent debate on Van Gennepe’s concept of “rites of passage”. For the epigraphic corpus of Leukopetra, cfr. HATZOPOULOS *ET AL.* 2000.

<sup>59</sup> In CANEVA–DELLI PIZZI 2015 (c.d.s) we have showed the complexity and variety of processes and social implications inherent in consecrations of human beings to deities in the Greek world. For instance, cases of service owed to a god on some prescribed days after consecration should not be necessarily taken as implying a restriction of the consecrated person’s freedom. Such duties towards the temple may also be seen as an exchange for divine protection. It should be also taken into consideration that the vocabulary used to signify one’s servile status. For *ἱεραὶ* serving a god after manumission and consecration to a temple, see esp. DARMEZIN 1999 and CANEVA–DELLI PIZZI 2015 (c.d.s).

As seen above, the “temple boys” issue can only be interpreted partially, due to the lack of knowledge of other ritual elements which probably went along the process of depositing the statue of one’s child in a sanctuary. Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that by consecrating statues of their children in sanctuaries of gods related to child care and protection, parents would intend to perform a useful act for the health and safety of their offspring. Without pretending to be exhaustive, we would like to conclude by briefly discussing an iconographic dossier where the crouching pose of “temple boys” appears re-used in objects that are stylistically different from the types discussed thus far. A fragmentary plaque from Salamis (Cyprus; c. 4<sup>th</sup> century BC) shows a naked boy handling a snake and wearing a diagonal chain with roughly designed pendants, closely reminiscent of the votive statuary from Cyprus. It is possible that the image is meant to evoke the myth of baby Herakles killing the snakes and to depict this Herakliskos as a divine correspondent of the mortal boys on whom the god would exert his protection.<sup>60</sup> Recent excavations under the acropolis of Amathous have brought to light a tunnel used as a votive deposit. Among the findings, a unique limestone group with two boys sitting in the “temple boy” pose behind a snake can be interpreted as having a votive function in relation to divine protection by a snake-killing god.<sup>61</sup> Close parallel to this iconography is provided by a fragmentary relief from Bostan esh-Sheikh representing a crouching naked boy holding a bird and a circular object and trying to escape the attack of a snake. While the crouching pose and the attributes of the child remind of the typical characteristics of the “temple boys”, the scene, with the snake appearing at the boy’s back in correspondence of his right leg, symbolically and dramatically stresses the mortal risks to which childhood is exposed.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> PETIT 2007, p. 80 and **Fig. 4** (British Museum, Inv. Nr. A473f). Cfr a small marble statue of a sitting baby Herakles killing the snakes from Salamis (KARAGEORGIS 1998, nr. 117).

<sup>61</sup> PAPANTONIOU 2012, pp. 228–229 and Fig. 38. For an archaeological discussion of the tunnel, see FLOURENTZOS 2004; PAPANTONIOU 2012, pp. 224–235.

<sup>62</sup> STUCKY 1993, pp. 41, 111 nr. 254–255 and Pl. 63.

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**Stefano G. Caneva**

Université de Liège (Belgique)

**Aurian Delli Pizzi**

Université de Liège (Belgique)

