

Marking Life Transitions in Middle Republican Latium

The votive deposits of middle republican Italy (4th-3rd cen. BCE) have rich potential for our knowledge of contemporary society although it is still difficult to extract that perspective from existing collections or publications (for the possibilities, see Turfa). Most votive deposits were unsystematically excavated in the nineteenth century and dispersed; hobbled by a lack of textual or contextual information, the material was usually characterized in terms of typology and style. My talk will focus on an unusually large deposit of pottery, statuettes and statues (3/4 life-sized), excavated in the 1970s at the so-called East Sanctuary at ancient Lavinium (mod. Pratica di Mare), and on a smaller number of comparanda from other sites. The East Sanctuary has not been completely excavated and the excavations and finds are still not definitively published but the sanctuary can be securely attributed to Menerva, manifested there as both a warrior goddess (*Menerva Tritonia*) and a protectress of the household, with a duck or a goose as attribute (*Enea nel Lazio*). To judge from the kinds of votives found in the deposit, the cult clientele seems to have been predominantly women but, unlike some other contemporary sanctuaries, they do not seem to have come out of a primary concern for their health or that of other family members but to leave thank-offerings for the birth of children or for a child's successful transition from one life stage to the next. The cult flourished throughout the period of Roman republican expansion, from the end of the 6th to the 2nd cen. BCE with particularly numerous and rich dedications from the 4th and early 3rd centuries BCE. Its decline, and that of the city as a whole, may be related to the creation of a new, deep-water port on the Bay of Naples.

The representational votives from the deposit include both statuettes, many of them concerned with childbirth and infants, and an unusually large number of large-scale statues of

children, primarily girls, in two age groups, some below the age of 12-14, and others, which I will characterize as “young adults”, aged ca. 16-20 (Enea nel Lazio, Weis). Many of the statuettes reflect types found throughout Italy and across the Mediterranean—especially the *kourotrophic* mothers and swaddled babies (Ammerman) or the fancy ladies in Greek drapery known as Tanagras. They were probably intended as memos to Menerva, either to ask for her protection or, as seems more usual, a thank-offering for a prayer answered. Some unusual types, however, may have had a particular significance in a Latin or a central Italian setting. The larger-scale statues were labor-intensive to produce and probably commissioned by a family to mark a particular occasion—boys in togas to mark the donning of the *toga virilis* (Dolansky) and the statues of “young adult” girls to mark a wedding or a betrothal (Enea nel Lazio, Weis). The statues of the younger girls seem to celebrate and commemorate an elite child’s/girl’s role in cult or cult ritual (Weis). The younger children are clearly distinguished from their parents and other adults in dress and in a newly invented “childlike” physiognomy (Bobou); the older boys and girls signal their transitional status in different ways. All of these statuary types have counterparts, in a variety of materials, in Greek sanctuaries (Bobou) and represent an increased interest, on the part of elites across the Mediterranean, in promoting elite family interests through the representation of wives and offspring.

The talk will look at this group of votives in relation to other contemporary deposits, concentrating on unusual statuette types that appear to have particular relevance for Latin or central Italian society and on the use of jewelry, especially amulets, to mark age and status within the community.

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