

Natalie Kampen : "*Cucullati: Boys in the Hood*"

Cucullati are figurines found in the northern provinces of the Roman empire; they represent people wearing hooded cloaks and are generally represented in styles which use broad forms and relatively small amounts of detail in facial and bodily features.

Despite the difficulty of recognizing the attributes they sometimes hold as the scrolls or eggs that scholars identify, the general impression they make is one of childlike androgeny. Bodies hidden beneath cloaks, faces hidden by androgeny, they have always been discussed within the framework of the history of Roman religion. Given that neither the hiding of body nor of identity is typical of indigenous or Olympian deities and spirits in the same regions (Roman Britain, Gaul and Germany especially), the cucullati demand further explication. Are they, as some have said, relatives of Telesphoros, the healing god, and thus boys, or are they doing some ritual or other work in which adult masculinity is of less value than androgenous youth? Are they even ritual objects? And what is at stake in thinking both about the constraints of an interpretive framework limited to the history of religion and about the possibilities implicit in an age and gender analysis for clarifying the ways in which the local may be rendered visible in order to advance both particular cult needs and needs connected with the identities of the owners and users of these figurines.