

# Ὁ παῖς καλός

Scritti di archeologia offerti a Mario Iozzo  
per il suo sessantacinquesimo compleanno

*a cura di*

Barbara Arbeid, Elena Ghisellini, Maria Rosaria Luberto

**ESE**  
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Fotografie e disegni sono stati forniti dagli autori dei contributi presenti nel volume, ai quali si rimanda per le referenze.

Redazione:  
Barbara Arbeid, Elena Ghisellini, Maria Rosaria Luberto.

In copertina:  
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. n. 28.167. *Bobbin* a fondo bianco attribuito al Pittore di Penthesilea (Foto Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Public Domain).

Composizione e impaginazione:  
a cura della casa editrice.



2022 © Edizioni Espera  
v.le Monte Falcone 44  
00077 Monte Compatri (RM)  
[www.edizioniespera.com](http://www.edizioniespera.com) | [edizioniespera@edizioniespera.com](mailto:edizioniespera@edizioniespera.com)

ISBN 978-88-99847-40-1

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Mario Iozzo ad Atene, gennaio 2022  
(Foto di Konstantinos Tzortzinis; per gentile concessione di Jenifer Neils).

## Premessa

*Socrati cum multa pro suis quisque facultatibus offerrent,  
Aeschines, pauper auditor: 'Nihil' inquit 'dignum te, quod dare tibi possim,  
invenio et hoc uno modo pauperem esse me sentio. Itaque dono tibi,  
quod unum habeo, me ipsum.  
Hoc munus rogo, qualecumque est, boni consulas cogitesque alios,  
cum multum tibi darent, plus sibi reliquisse'.*

Poiché a Socrate offrivano, ciascuno in proporzione alle proprie possibilità, molti doni, Eschine, un discepolo povero, gli disse:  
'Non trovo niente da offrirti che sia degno di te,  
e per questo soltanto mi rendo conto di essere povero.  
Perciò, ti dono l'unica cosa che possiedo: me stesso. Ti prego di gradire questo dono, qualunque sia, e pensa che gli altri, pur avendoti donato molto, hanno tenuto per se stessi molto di più'.

Seneca, *Ben.* I 8, 1

Sarebbe stato divertente chiedere a ciascuno degli autori che ha accettato di partecipare a questo tributo in onore di Mario Iozzo di raccontarci la prima volta che l'ha incontrato: siamo convinte che avremmo potuto raccogliere un florilegio di episodi sapidi e memorabili. Ciascuna di noi conserva quel ricordo vivido – un ricordo che non cessa di strappare un sorriso – e siamo convinte che sia così per tutti coloro che l'hanno conosciuto.

Chi conosce Mario infatti sa bene che, al di là della sua figura di studioso di grande profondità e acume, della sua professionalità e della sua competenza nell'ideare e portare avanti progetti di ampio respiro, ci sono la sua allegria, il suo umorismo trascinate, la sua capacità di mettere le persone a proprio agio, la sua personalità entusiasta e scoppiettante. C'è soprattutto un uomo di grande generosità. Tutti noi che abbiamo condiviso con lui un tratto di cammino, che sia stato per noi compagno di studi, collega di lavoro, insegnante o coresponsabile di un'impresa scientifica, sappiamo che possiamo contare sempre su di lui per discutere un'idea, per avere un parere su un articolo appena scritto, un incoraggiamento, un suggerimento quando siamo in dubbio su come andare avanti.

Approssimandosi una ricorrenza importante come il suo sessantacinquesimo compleanno, desideravamo festeggiarlo insieme con lui ma anche in qualche modo sdebitarci per tutto quanto sentiamo che Mario ci ha regalato con la sua presenza, per come il rapporto con lui ci ha arricchite negli anni come archeologhe e soprattutto come persone. Abbiamo riflettuto a lungo su come organizzare per lui un compleanno particolare, su cosa fare insieme e su che cosa donargli e, come Eschine Socratico, nel pensare a quale dono offrirgli non abbiamo trovato niente che fosse degno di lui. È stato dunque naturale, alla fine, decidere di raccogliere un volume di scritti di archeologia, redatti dai suoi amici, per festeggiare insieme con lui il suo compleanno, donandogli qualcosa di noi stessi.

Il risultato è oggi fra le sue mani: un volume a cui hanno concorso con entusiasmo studiosi di tutto il mondo, che riflette gli interessi scientifici di Mario e il suo percorso professionale fra il Ceramico di Atene, le colonie della Magna Grecia e le città dell'Etruria. Se anche, come speriamo, sarà un giorno sugli scaffali delle biblioteche, questo libro è nato spontaneamente, dal cuore, come l'unico dono che ci è sembrato possibile per un amico speciale.



# DYING (AS) ALCESTIS. ICONOGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE BASEL LOUTROPHOROS S21

Gianfranco Adornato

## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a holistic interpretation of the Apulian loutrophoros (Basel S21), attributed to the Laodamia Painter, and investigates the transmediality of the iconography of Alcestis' death: from the myth to the theatrical drama, to the reception of the myth in philosophical discussions to the fortune of representation of Alcestis and her sons, chosen by the artists as positive *paradeigma*. Furthermore, this paper focuses on the figure of the *paidagogos*: since he is considered a theatrical marker in vase painting, I will question about this issue by showing cases in which the *paidagogos* has nothing to do with the performance, with the tragic plot, and the theatre.

In his *Études sur la tragédie grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique*, Louis Séchan wrote: «on regrette de ne pouvoir mettre en parallèle avec le drame d'Euripide une belle création de la céramique grecque», noting that the only extant representation of the happy ending embrace of Alcestis and Admetus was depicted on an Etruscan volute-krater from Vulci, thanks to the inscriptions next to the figures, labeled as Alcsti and Atmite<sup>1</sup>.

Only in 1971, Trendall and Webster published the panel of an Apulian loutrophoros (Fig. 1), now in Basel, and interpreted the scene as an illustration of Euripides' *Alkestis*<sup>2</sup>. The scholars focused on the main scene, where six adults and two children are depicted on the foreground; on the left, two attendants hold a kalathos and a fan respectively. In front of a monumentalized ionic façade, on the left, a standing man in his *himation* covers his face with the left hand, in the middle a wealthy and well-dressed female figure sits on a *kline* and embraces her son and her daughter. On the right, an old woman with short white hair touches her face with the left hand and raises the right one; next to a Corinthian column, on which a vessel stands, an old man looks towards left at the main scene, leaning on a stick: he dresses a *chitoniskos*, a mantle and boots.

1 This paper is a sign of friendship and gratitude to Mario Iozzo, who was the first to introduce me to the ancient iconography. I would like to warmly thank Barbara Arbeid, Elena Ghisellini, and Maria Rosaria Luberto for inviting me to contribute to his Festschrift. I had the chance to present and discuss part of this paper at the A.G. Leventis Conference at the University of Edinburgh (2017), in particular with Fernande Hölscher, Kenneth Lapatin, Mauro Menichetti, Marion Meyer, Verity Platt. I would like to thank Laurent Gorgerat (Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig) for granting the permission to reproduce the images of the loutrophoros.

SÉCHAN 1926. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. 918; BONFANTE 2010. This intimate moment is attested only in few artistic examples of the Etruscan production and never on Greek objects: in a bronze mirror (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 96.18.15: LIMC I, s.v. «Alkestis», 7 [M. Schmidt]) the engraver captures a kiss between them, while Admetus touches Alcestis' breast, an action not otherwise attested in the myth and in the other visual media.

2 Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, inv. S 21; TRENDALL - WEBSTER 1971, 75; SCHMIDT *et alii* 1976, 78-80; *RVAp* II, 482, No. 18/16; LIMC I, s.v. «Alkestis», 533-544 [M. Schmidt]. Attributed to a painter next to the Laodamia Painter or to the Darius Painter (BLOME 1999); Todisco oscillates between the Laodamia Painter (TODISCO 2003, 444) and the Painter of the Alkestis Loutrophoros (*Id.* 2012, 185-186).



Fig. 1. Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, inv. S21. Apulian Loutrophoros, detail of the upper register of Side A with the inscription ALKESTIS (© Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig).

This panel has captured the attention of scholars of Greek theatre, who generally interpret it as «more than likely related to the death scene in *Alkestis*»<sup>3</sup>. In this interpretative key, Taplin states that «the whole painted scene is redolent of tragedy, also suggested by the portico and the *paidagogos* [...] is there any reason to associate it with Euripides in particular? There is at least one detail that tallies well: it is fairly clear, especially from lines 302-434, that Euripides brought on, as here, two children, one girl and one boy (he signs after his mother dies at 393). The chief reason, however, for associating this vase with Euripides' play is simply that»<sup>4</sup>.

In the “theatrical” interpretation of a single scene, however, the rest of the loutrophoros and its painted decoration have been totally neglected: how is this specific panel connected to the rest of the paintings on the vase? How does the meaning of this scene affect the interpretation of the whole loutrophoros? In this paper, I would like to offer a holistic interpretation of the vase and, secondly, investigate the transmediality of the iconography of Alcestis: from the myth to the theatrical drama to the transposition of the myth in more or less condensed visual formulas, to the reception of the myth in philosophical discussions to the fortune of representation of Alcestis and her sons in other supports and materials<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, this paper investigates the figure of the *paidagogos* not only on the Basel loutrophoros but also on other vases, on which the supposed link with a (lost) Greek tragedy has to be demonstrated. Since the *paidagogos* is considered a theatrical marker in vase painting<sup>6</sup>, I will question about this issue by showing cases in which the *paidagogos* has nothing to do with the performance, with the tragic plot, and the theatre.

3 TAPLIN 2007, 111.

4 *Ibid.*, 111.

5 On Roman sarcophagi and Alcestis' death see WOOD 1978.

6 TAPLIN 1998, 39.



Fig. 2. Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, inv. S21. Apulian Loutrophoros, Side A (© Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig).



Fig. 3. Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, inv. S21. Apulian Loutrophoros, detail of the lower register of Side A (© Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig).

1. VISUAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SIDE A AND B?  
 In 1976, Margot Schmidt provided the first analysis of the Basel loutrophoros, stressing the association of Alcestis' iconography and myth to the shape of the vase and its use for wedding ceremonies and funerals<sup>7</sup>. In support of her hypothesis, she connected the upper scene to the lower register (Figs. 2-3), on which the ritual *epaulia*, that is the presentation of gifts to the bride and the groom, is depicted. In her perspective, on the vase there is a visual analogy between two of the most important events in ancient Greek society, the wedding and the death, suggested not only by the shape of the vase, but also by the presence of a winged figure on the side B (Fig. 4). This *Flügelwesen* will lead the lady to the underworld. Even the objects carried by the two elegant servants and those hung on the wall, inside the portico, have been connected to the funerary sphere and interpreted as offerings for the dead and decoration of the tomb.

Since the main scene with the inscribed Alcestis is very well known in scholarly literature, it seems more appropriate to discuss the

<sup>7</sup> SCHMIDT *et alii* 1976, 78-80.



Fig. 4. Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, inv. S21. Apulian Loutrophoros, Side B (© Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig).

lower register on side A and then present the two panels on side B.

Looking at the lower register (Fig. 3), the scene depicts a different atmosphere, entirely dominated by female characters<sup>8</sup>. From my point of view, however, this scene does not match the (vague) characteristics of the *epaulia* iconography<sup>9</sup>. Usually, the bride sits in the center of the composition and women approach from either side of the vase, bringing gifts and other honors to her (Fig. 5)<sup>10</sup>. On the contrary, the composition, the setting and the theme of the lower register of the loutrophoros hugely differ from the iconographic comparanda of the *epaulia* scenes. Here, on the left side, a female servant holds a chest in the right hand and a fan in the left one; on the ground stands a *thymiaterion*; next is a female figure in a very relaxed pose, with the left hand on the right shoulder of a woman; she elegantly sits on a *klismos* in the middle of the scene and turns the head towards a standing female figure with the right arm bent, characterized by long hair on the shoulders; at the right end, a young servant gently holds an umbrella<sup>11</sup>. As far as I checked, this scene is very peculiar. Furthermore, the similarity between the standing female figure under the umbrella on the lower panel and Alcestis on the upper level has never been addressed: to me, the two figures appear to be in both cases the same character, even though in different attitude and poses. If the standing figure has to be interpreted as Alcestis, is this situation easily recognizable in Euripides' text? Or is this "sacra conversazione" related to a lost text? From an iconographic point of view, it seems more appropriate to interpret this register as a sort of *gynaecium*: here the visual

8 This frieze has been interpreted as the day of the presentation of gifts for the wedding called *epaulia*, whose iconographic patterns are not easily recognizable and defined; OAKLEY - SINOS 1993, 38-42.

9 SABETAI 1997; 2004.

10 See, e.g., the lebes gamikos by the Washing Painter (430-420 BC), New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 07.286,35, and the lebes gamikos by the Marsyas Painter (360 BC), Saint Petersburg, Hermitage, inv. 15592: OAKLEY - SINOS 1993, figs. 40 and 124-127.

11 For the presence of the servant with the umbrella and the courtship atmosphere, good comparanda are two pelikai: one from the Guarini Collection, inv. 3: TODISCO 2012, vol. I, 195, vol. III, tav. 168.3; the second at the Museo Jatta, inv. 35773: TODISCO 2012, vol. I, 106, Salting Painter, vol. III, tav. 112.2.



Fig. 5. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 07.286,35. Attic lebes gamikos (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

focus is the conversation between an elegant woman (perhaps the mother or a goddess, like Aphrodite) and the standing lady. Apparently, the depicted scene on the lower register does not find a close parallel with literary texts and appears to be unique in the iconographic repertoire of the Apulian vases.

On side B the composition is divided in two registers: in the upper level, on the left side, a standing female figure walks to the middle of the scene, holding a branch (?) in the right arm and a circular object in the left one. A small flying Eros moves towards the young man in the middle, carrying a fillet and a mirror; he is very similar to Admetus on side A and sits naked, turns to his left side, and talks with the standing female figure, leaning on a pilaster: she holds a swan in the right hand. Below, on the left is a seated woman with a chest on the right leg; in the middle a slender, effeminate, winged Eros leans on a monumental louterion with an oblong object in the raised hand<sup>12</sup>; on the right, a running lady is moving towards the center of the scene. Side B has been interpreted as focused on wedding motifs and Eros is in both cases the pivotal character: in the upper scene, he flies towards the man; below, he directs his gaze to the lady<sup>13</sup>. Side B has no mythological connotation and could be interpreted as a *cosmesis* scene of the groom, in connection to some specific objects such as the mirror, the fillet, and the louterion. From an iconographic and conceptual point of view, side B could be connected to the “*sacra conversazione*” on the lower register of side A. This emotional situation is comparable with an *amphoriskos* by the Heimermann Painter (Fig. 6 a-b)<sup>14</sup>, representing Helen sitting on Aphrodite’s lap, with her head bent and the eyes down. Next to this group, a winged figure (Himeros) grasps the arm of a nude man,

who must be Paris. On the Basel loutrophoros, the female figure (Alcestis) raises the bent right arm toward the chin, as Helen does on the *amphoriskos*.

<sup>12</sup> A good comparison of the association of Eros and a louterion is a pelike at the Schneider Hermann collection: Todisco 2012, vol. I, 112, vol. III, tav. 116.3.

<sup>13</sup> According to Schmidt’s (1976) interpretation, however, the scene of courtship and the reference to the wedding are synonymic of death and the winged figure calls the lady to the underworld.

<sup>14</sup> Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, inv. 30036: ARV<sup>2</sup>, 1173.1.



Fig. 6 a-b. Berlin, Antikensammlung. Staatliche Museen, inv. 30036. Attic amphoriskos (Foto: Johannes Laurentius © 2022. Foto Scala, Firenze/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin).

## 2. PAIDAGOGOS AND THE PROTECTION OF THE OIKOS

In the main panel, one of the most interesting characters is the *paidagogos* figure. Generally speaking, scholars have interpreted the presence of this figure (sometimes labeled as *paidagogos* - messenger)<sup>15</sup> on vases as a direct influence of and derivation from the Athenian tragedy and the most reliable marker of a link between theatre and iconography. This very peculiar figure of an old servant is well attested starting from the Middle Apulian vase production onwards and his identification is easily recognized thanks to a specific physiognomy (usually he is not very high, with a bald forehead, long white beard, uncombed white hair) and iconographic attributes (he wears a *chitoniskos*, with long sleeves, a mantle – sometimes a *chlamys*, sometimes a *chlaina* of heavy wool –, high *endromides*, a *pilos* or *petasos* on the shoulders, a crooked stick). Starting around 360 BC this figure appears for the first time on a bell-krater attributed to a painter near to the Ilioupersis Painter<sup>16</sup> and representing a scene from Euripides' *Medea*. This is not a coincidence, since the character of the *paidagogos* in the Greek theatre is attested for the very first time in Euripides' *Medea*, dating 431 BC. Looking at the calyx-krater by a painter near to the Policoro Painter (Fig. 7),<sup>17</sup> dating around 400 BC, representing the myth of Medea (or, according to some scholars, the scene of Euripides' *Medea*), the figure of the *paidagogos* does not present a peculiar iconography. He is depicted as an old citizen, with a *himation* around the shoulders and the hips, a long stick with a hooked end, black hair: in short, at that time these figures are not iconographically characterized and easily recognizable<sup>18</sup>.

15 Sometimes the figure is labeled as *tropheus*, as in the case of the volute-krater by the Darius Painter (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, inv. 1984.41), dating around 340-330 BC from Canosa.

16 Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. Stg 526: TODISCO 2003, 427 (Ap 77); TAPLIN 2007, 115-116.

17 Cleveland, Museum of Art, inv. 1991.1: TODISCO 2003, 391 (L14); TAPLIN 2007, 123.

18 Catucci (2003) has identified 56 representations of the old man and strongly connected this figure to the Athenian theatre. Her arguments are not convincing, since she does not question about the attitude of the *paidagogos*, who talks towards the figures on the vases and not to the audience. Furthermore, in her perspective it is impossible to explain the depiction of the *paidagogos* with mythological figures, since we have no tragic plots related to.



Fig. 7. Cleveland, Museum of Art, inv. 1991.1.  
Lucanian calyx-crater, detail of the lower register with the figure of the *paidagogos*  
(© The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund 1991.1).



Fig. 8. Paris, Louvre, inv. Ma 4498.  
Funerary relief from Nicomedia  
(© 1998 RMN-Grand Palais - Musée du Louvre/  
Hervé Lewandowski).



Fig. 9. London, British Museum, inv. F279.  
Apulian volute-crater, detail of the lower register with the figure of the *paidagogos*  
(© The Trustees of the British Museum).

In this context, I would like to shed new light on this figure, questioning some of the proposed identifications. The *paidagogos* was introduced on the stage by Euripides and I wonder how we have to interpret those painted scenes and figures coming from the previous theatrical production by Aeschylus and Sophocles: this is the case of the majestic calyx-krater by the Capodarso Painter<sup>19</sup>, representing Sophocles' *Oidipus King*, as generally accepted by scholars. Since in Sophocles' tragedy the character of the *paidagogos* is not literally attested, in this case scholars have proposed to identify the figure as a messenger-*paidagogos*, due to his pose and attitude. Is this modern inference correct? Or should it be possible to propose an alternative solution<sup>20</sup>? Another interesting case is the volute-krater by the Darius Painter<sup>21</sup>, on which scholars have recognized the representation of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* or Aeschylus' *Nemea*; on the lower panel, the dying Archemoros is depicted. Next to the funerary *kline*, on the right side of the scene, a *paidagogos* (with an inscription) is approaching towards left, raising the right arm. A very curious detail in this scene is the musical instrument held by the *paidagogos* in his left hand. As far as I checked, this is one of the few representations of a *paidagogos* with a lyre on South Italian vases, but we have more

19 Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale "P. Orsi", inv. 66557: TAPLIN 2007, 90-92.

20 A further problematic example is the connection on vases of the *paidagogos* with Niobe and the identification of these scenes with Sophocles' *Niobe*, where a *paidagogos* is not attested.

21 Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 81934: TAPLIN 2007, 211-214.



Fig. 10. London, British Museum, inv. F272. Apulian calyx-crater (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

archaeological evidence from terracotta figurines, attesting the role of the old man as teacher and, more specifically, as music teacher, as in the case of fourth-century terracotta group found in a tomb from the Black Sea area and funerary reliefs (Fig. 8)<sup>22</sup>.

Another discrepancy is visually represented by the case of an Apulian volute-krater by the Darius Painter (Fig. 9)<sup>23</sup>. In the lower part of the scene, we see Hippolytos driving the chariot, a white bull coming up from the bottom, a female figure on the right and a *paidagogos* on the left. Scholars have unanimously recognized the representation of the finale of Euripides' *Hippolytos*, as recounted by the messenger. In the case of the krater, it is worth noting that the *paidagogos* is moving towards the youth, raising the left hand and addressing words to him. Here the old man is not referring to the audience what he saw or what he heard, so he is not playing the role of the messenger, as on the stage: this detail is not attested in the Euripidean tragedy, where the poet mentions servants looking at the tragic event.

We have six vases with the depiction of the *paidagogos* and Ganymede: «rather unexpected is the popularity of a story that involved Ganymede and a swan»<sup>24</sup>. Not surprisingly, scholars were not able to mention a specific plot related to Ganymede and his rape and the presence of the *paidagogos* in these scenes appears to be not connected to a tragic play.

There are depictions with the *paidagogos* associated to other rape scenes, as in the case of Kephalos carried off by Eos, and scenes with the *paidagogos* in conversation with youthful

22 YOUNG 1990; NEILS - OAKLEY 2003; the inscription on the funerary relief from Nicomedia (Paris, Louvre, inv. Ma 4498; 2<sup>nd</sup> BC) reads: «Thrason, son of Diogenes, erected this funerary stele for his two sons, Dexiphanes, age 5, and Thrason, age 4, and for Hermes, age 25, who brought them up. In the earthquake collapse, so did he hold them in his arms».

23 London, British Museum, inv. F279: TAPLIN 2007, 137-138.

24 GREEN 1999.

figures, apparently without a specific connection with tragic plots and characters<sup>25</sup>. In the Apulian calyx-crater by the Laodamia Painter (Fig. 10),<sup>26</sup> on the upper register at the far right end the *paidagogos* is talking with a lady: Taplin interprets this scene thanks to «the *paidagogos* figure, whose presence suggests that a young man figured in the story, and who probably signals a connection with a specific tragedy. It is not hard to see why people have thought of the Phaidra of our surviving Hippolytos [...] the old *paidagogos* on the other side can easily be associated with the slave who at the end of the prologue tries to give young Hippolytos some advice about respecting the gods»<sup>27</sup>.

Scholars have explained the presence of the *paidagogos* figure on South Italian pottery in connection to the place of the actor in fourth-century society<sup>28</sup>. It seems clear that the *paidagogos* iconography was imported and adopted after the theatre – in this perspective his costume and other characteristics remind his theatrical origin. Looking at the whole corpus attesting the presence of the *paidagogos* on South Italian vases, however, in many cases this figure has nothing to do with the theatre, with the tragic plot, with the rest of the characters. As for these cases, I argue that the character of the *paidagogos* has implications with his main role in the *oikos*, in connection with the family, the children, their education and protection. From my point of view, it is not a mere coincidence the depiction of a *paidagogos* with young figures on vase paintings. In one case, he is depicted as a music teacher, holding a lyre in the hand: even though this is a specific trait of the “real” *paidagogos*, those activities are not highlighted in the tragic plots. For this reason, I wonder if those representations of the *paidagogos* character on vases have something to do with the social role and status achieved during the fourth century, since we have evidence for the very first time of monuments for or by *paidagogoi* in the city of Athens<sup>29</sup>.

### 3. ALCESTIS AS A PARADEIGMA

Looking at the main scene, the *paidagogos*, never attested in Euripides’ tragedy, could be explained as member of the *oikos* with a significant role in the education and protection of the children: two servants, the old nurse, and the *paidagogos*, all of them are connected to the house and the family. In this perspective, the *paidagogos* has nothing to do with Euripides’ *Alcestis* and with the theatre in general, but he is in charge with an important institutional and educational role within the family, within the *oikos*. This may affect the interpretation of the rest of the painting, figures, and attributes. The objects carried by the servants and the others hung on the wall could be considered in connection with female activities in the house: the kalathos, for instance, is generally associated with the spinning work; the lekythos, as perfume container, highlights the body care and the beauty of the lady; the ball has significant meanings, as it is connected to the ritual and social passage from *kore* to *nymphē*, from girl to wife. Furthermore, the presence of the two female servants on the left, never attested in Euripides’ drama, contributes to praise the role of the perfect *despoina* in the house.

The central group, Alcestis and her sons, contributes to enhance the emotional situation and amplifies the sadness of the loss: this iconographic motif has been exploited by fourth century sculptors for funerary reliefs, where the mother is generally associated with a child. In the corpus of the Attic tombstones, however, I found an interesting case on which a mother with two children is sculpted<sup>30</sup>. In this occasion I would like to stress the potential transme-

25 Taplin (2007, 40) states that in some pictures of the abduction of young men, he [the *paidagogos*] may, however, have become nothing more than a conventional figure.

26 London, British Museum, inv. F272: TAPLIN 2007, 131-32.

27 *Ibid.* 2007, 131.

28 GREEN 1999, 52, 53: «this was the period in which the actor became increasingly professional [...]. He forms a sort of bridge between the heroes and us, between their world and ours. He is really one of us, so he can express his observations in terms that are familiar to us, and it is typical that he will use less high-flown language».

29 GREEN 1999.

30 Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 762: CAT 2.851.

diality and compositional similarities with the central group on the Basel loutrophoros: if we had only the funerary relief, should we have interpreted it as the reduced transposition of the death of Alcestis and her sons, as Taplin suggested for the Basel loutrophoros? From a methodological point of view, are we allowed to recognize in this reversed iconographic pattern – a mother with two children and a nurse – the central scene of Euripides' drama? I think that in both cases, the artists had in mind to show emotions and to highlight the social role of the mother, alluding to the theme of the separation and the death. On the relief we have the "syntagm", the formulaic scheme of the mother with children. On the Basel loutrophoros, this scheme is amplified with other figures, the inscription, and related scenes: on the registers, a beautiful wife is depicted close to the grieving husband, a caring mother embraces her sons, an attentive lady of the house supervises servants, nurse and *paidagogos*.

In addition to the elaborations of the myth in different media, a neglected passage (179b-d) in Plato's *Symposium*, where the story of Alcestis is reported as paradigmatic for her love, is revealing. Phaedrus after mentioning Achilles and Patroclus, cites Alcestis as follows: «Furthermore, only such as are in love will consent to die for others; not merely men will do it, but women too. Sufficient witness is borne to this statement before the people of Greece by Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, who alone was willing to die for her husband, though he had both father and mother. So high did her love exalt her over them in kindness, that they were proved alien to their son and but nominal relations; and when she achieved this deed, it was judged so noble by gods as well as men that, although among all the many doers of noble deeds they are few and soon counted to whom the gods have granted the privilege of having their souls sent up again from Hades, hers they thus restored in admiration of her act. In this manner even the gods give special honor to zeal and courage in concerns of love».

This passage testifies that in Plato's *Symposium* the story of Alcestis was mainly perceived as a story of love, zeal, and courage; in Plato's words there is not a specific reference to Euripides' *Alcestis* or to a stage performance. His version differs from Euripides' drama: here the gods have granted her the privilege of having her soul back, and not Heracles fighting against Thanatos. Alcestis, like other mythological figures, represents an exemplar character, offering a consolation motif to the family and the public, as she was admired by the gods for her love towards her husband.

Notwithstanding the visual specificity on the loutrophoros, it is worth mentioning that Euripides' *Alcestis* provides judgments and values continuously praised and listed by the Chorus, by Admetus, and even by Alcestis herself: she is considered «the best of wives» (vv. 83-85: *ariste doxasa gyne*), «glorious and the noblest woman by far under the sun» (vv. 150-151: *euklees [...] gyne t'ariste ton hyph'helio makro*), «noble wife» (vv. 199-200: *esthles*), «not dear but dearest» (vv. 230-231: *ou philan alla philtatan gynaika*), «noblest of all wives» (vv. 235-37), «faithful» (v. 368: *pistes emoi*), «young» (*en eba*). At some point the male servant says (vv. 767-70): «she was like a mother to me and to the other servants, rescuing us from countless troubles and softening her husband's temper».

On the Basel loutrophoros, Alcestis represents the quintessence of the good mother towards her sons (in opposition with the decision of Admetus' parents not to die for their son); the generous wife in favor of her husband; the respectful lady of the house and towards servants and the *paidagogos*. These social values are associated to happy moments in the life of the couple. In the lower panel of side A and on side B, the painter depicts scenes related to the courtship, with the groom and the bride associated with Eros and perhaps Aphrodite, respectively. The figures closely resemble Alcestis and Admetus on the main scene of side A, but the narrative frame in which they are depicted has no links to the myth and to the drama as well. In the "sacra conversazione" the future bride – she looks like Alcestis in the upper metope on Side A – talks with her mother: this episode is not attested in the Alcestis' myth and recalls similar situations, as in the case of Helen comforted by Aphrodite on the Berlin amphoriskos. Side B is mostly dedicated to the groom, who resembles Admetus on the main scene, and to male activities, like the courtship and the *cosmesis*: this interpretation is confirmed by the presence of a flying Eros with a mirror and a fillet, the female figure

holding a swan, and, in the lower register, of a second Eros leaning to the louterion. It is not a coincidence the material and symbolic association between the louterion on side B and the loutrophoros itself used for the ritual of bathing before the wedding feast. To these daily life episodes, the painter added a more significant scene on the main side, alluding to the exemplary figure of Alcestis: in my perspective, the presence of the children, the husband, the servants, and the *paidagogos* are synonymic of positive values connected to Alcestis, as attested in literary sources. Only the sad attitude of the husband (touching the head with the left hand) and the old woman (touching the face with the left hand) anticipates the dramatic moment of the separation from the *oikos*. Conversely, the loutrophoros – already used for the wedding bath of the bride and the groom – will wash the corpse of the dead wife, mother, and *despoina*.

In this perspective, dying as Alcestis becomes a *paradeigma*, a model, for the Greek women to be imitated, as suggested in Euripides' drama and eloquently displayed on the loutrophoros. This lenitive function of the myth and of the mythological figure becomes more evident as summarized by Plato: Alcestis (as other young ladies) receives great honor (*time*) from the gods, thanks to her love (*eros*) and her virtue (*arete*).

The elaboration of the myth and the plasticity of the main patterns, in theatre as well as in vase painting, in Greece, in Magna Graecia and even in Etruria, allow us to single out a variety of themes around Alcestis' story and its iconography on the Basel loutrophoros. From Homer to Euripides, from the potter to the sculptor, poets and artists have differently chosen, stressed and exploited the collective shared knowledge of the Alcestis' myth, its paradigmatic value, and its meanings.

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