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Lindsay R. Morehouse
Macalester College, lindsay.morehouse@gmail.com

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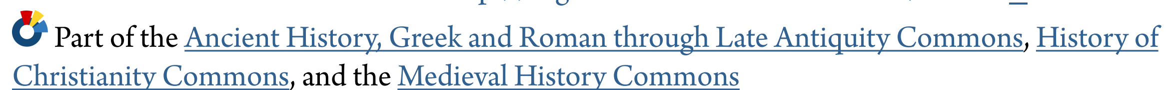
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Dismemberment and Devotion:
Anatomical Votive Dedication in Italian Popular Religion

By: Lindsay Morehouse

Professors Severy-Hoven, Drake, Vélez

Submitted as Honors Project to Macalester College Classics Department

May 1, 2012

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Introduction

Throughout Italy images of body parts decorate churches, to the extent that one Medieval Dutch traveler remarked, “When you first enter the church you would think you were entering a field of cadavers.”[1] These images are dedicated to a divine figure in order to receive healing or to acknowledge gratitude for a divine cure. A foot may represent a fracture, an eye may represent blindness, or a womb may represent infertility. Most often these offerings are three dimensional representations of body parts.

Anatomical votives come in many forms. However, these votives represent a localized area which is dismembered and detached from the context of a whole body. Though the Dutch traveler may have imagined cadavers, the scene might as well have seemed to him like butcher shop: a church full of hanging votives of dismembered arms, legs, feet, and even heads. Even in cases where more than one body part is exhibited—as is the case with images of busts, effigies or ‘polyvisceral plaques’—the image is still only part of a whole. These types of anatomical votives include larger portions of the body, but still represent only that—portions. This dismembered and disassociated aspect of anatomical votives is one which makes this type of votive offering unique. The isolation and imagined dismemberment of these objects focuses the site of the ailment, and helps the divine figure locate the need of the dedicator.[2]

Importantly, the dedication of anatomical votives often occurs in cults which venerate a specific type of divine figure. This practice is particularly popular in religious cults which venerate figures who are part-divine and part-human. The intermediary status of these figures provides a power to intercede and, often, a power to heal. In order to help heal corporeal issues,

[1] Freedberg, 229.
[2] Hughes, 224.

the dedicators of these objects call upon figures with the experience of humans, but with the powers of the divine.

Michael Carroll notes that votives can come about as a result of a vow (thus the term ex-voto), out of gratitude, to solicit a favor, or to testify to the largess and power of the god. This is certainly the case with anatomical votives.[3] Some anatomical votives are dedicated in an act of petition—to ask the divine figure for aid. In this case, the votive demonstrates the ailment in an instructive manner—to point out where the ailment lies in order to expedite healing. Other offerings are dedicated *ex-voto*—as a result of a vow, or as a way to acknowledge the healing after it has occurred. This reason for dedication simultaneously expresses gratitude, while at the same time attests to the power of the divine figure.

This particular practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings remains popular in modern Christian veneration. However, anatomical votives are not the only type of votive offering. A dedicated object can be something manufactured to give to a god (such as the anatomical votives), or a common place object that has been 'converted' into a sacred offering. Though Italian anatomical votives have roots as early as the middle of the first millennium BCE, evidence for giving gifts to the gods is much older and occurs in other areas throughout the Mediterranean. A brief look at one example of this tradition may help to clarify some of the more theoretical and ritual aspects of votive veneration.

In Ancient Egypt, the dedication of votive offerings was seen as a way that, "the sacred was contacted, the three realms were integrated, power was ordered, social hierarchy was negotiated."[4] The giving of votives was the duty of the pharaoh, who dedicated them on behalf of the people. The pharaoh was considered to be an intermediary figure—part divine and part

[3] Carroll, 1992, 111.
[4] Shafer, 21.

human—and as such he was the natural intercessor in this exchange. The donation was seen in light of a desire to bridge the worlds of human and divine. Bridging this gap allowed the circular flow of life from Egypt to pharaoh, from pharaoh to god, and from god to Egypt, which prevented "the Cosmos' return to chaos."[5] The dedication was seen as a way for the pharaoh to express power, appease the gods, and contain the chaos.[6] In this sense, the giving of offerings to the deity was a way to establish the order of the universe and Egypt's place therein. In Egypt, the dedication of offerings to gods was a polysemous ritual.

With such a long tradition, the ritual dedication of an object has come to symbolize many things. The most basic meaning was a particular mode of reciprocity in which, "to give a gift to the gods is to enter into a relationship from which the return is uncertain."[7] To use these objects was to have faith that an expected result would occur. Thus, these objects are evidence of a dedication and a trust in a god and to a ritual. In the case of anatomical votive offerings, the dedicator gave a gift with the faith that a miracle of healing would occur.

Versnel writes, "Anatomical votive offerings were spread over a large area both in time and in space. In Antiquity they appeared not only in the Greek world but also in Italy and they can be found in numerous other places in more recent times."[8] However, in this study I will pursue this practice of anatomical votive dedication and its unique forms in Italy. Contextualizing this study in Italy allows for a closer look at the ways in which this practice is and is not culturally specific, and allows for a long term examination of this practice that has been documented from the mid-first millennium BCE to present.

[5] Shafer, 24.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Osborne, 2.
[8] Versnel, 101.

According to extant sources and archaeological material, anatomical votives were dedicated in Italy in Antiquity, and again in the Medieval period, continuing to this day. Unfortunately, lack of scholarship from the period of Late Antiquity prevents this paper from claiming with absolute certainty that this practice was a continuous phenomenon. However, ancient and modern evidence suggests that this practice is long-standing in Italy and it is and was an important part of popular religion.

The best way to demonstrate the long term nature of practice is to examine different cults which use anatomical votives as a central aspect of healing practice, and which also highlight the veneration of intermediary figures. For the purposes of my study, I will examine the use of anatomical votive offerings within Etruscan religion, the cult of Asclepius,[9] Martyr cult/the cult of Saints, and the cult of the Virgin Mary.

Each of the cults has a long textual and archaeological history of receiving anatomical votives and of providing miraculous cures for ailments. In examining the sacred figures which are the center of these cults, I aim to draw direct connections between these different usages of anatomical votives in order to demonstrate the endurance of this ritual in Italy. Within each individual study, I will provide the background and history of the figure or cult, an outline of the rituals and the use of votives, and a case study of a specific sacred space in which evidence for this practice is particularly strong. These aspects will help give a complete picture of each stage in the history of this practice in Italy, and will illuminate its importance in Italian popular religion over time.

[9] Asclepius traditionally has had many different spellings. For the purposes of consistency in this study, I will use the spelling 'Asclepius' for the name of the deity and 'Asclepeion' for the title of the sanctuary unless quoted from another source or otherwise noted.

Votive offerings have often been an overlooked and understudied topic—Versnel argues, "presumably because of their slight aesthetic merit."[10] However, it is equally acknowledged that votive offerings can highlight aspects of personal religious practice. Indeed, interest in this practice is now beginning to emerge and hopefully will provide future insight into this ritual. This dedication of anatomical votive offerings has the potential to demonstrate a great deal about individual practice in the ancient Mediterranean world. For now, the scope of this project will limit itself to the history of anatomical votive practice in Italy and Italian healing cults, with the knowledge that there is plenty of room for more scholarship on this topic.

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[10] Versnel, 105.

Chapter 1
Anatomical Votive Cult in Etruria and Italian[11] Provinces Before the Fourth Century 'Watershed'

Livy wrote that the Etruscans were "the most religious of men."[12] Much of the information that is known about the Etruscans concerns religion and religiosity, and comes from Greek and Roman sources. A central part of Etruscan religion is the use of votive offerings. Votive offerings are a physical and tangible artifact of Etruscan religious expression which can shed light on religious beliefs and practices.

During the fourth century, there was an explosion in the evidence for the dedication of these objects. Though votive offerings are present in the archaeological record before the fourth century, the fourth century 'watershed' is an important moment because of the changes that occur in the archaeological record. During the fourth century, the popularity of the practice increased drastically.

The cause of this growth is not known for certain. This seemingly sudden popularity of anatomical votive offerings in the archaeological record coincides with historical accounts of greater interaction between Etruria, Greece, and Rome. As a result, there has been a great debate over the influences of each of these cultures upon the practice. Scholars have debated what practices were brought to which culture by whom, and what sort of agency the Greeks or the Romans had within Etruria. I do not intend to separate out the various ethnic and cultural influences within Etruscan society in this study. This, though interesting, is outside of the scope of this particular study.

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[11] For the purposes of this study, most of the discussion will center on votives and archaeological sites in Etruria. However, because of the complicated nature of the cultural interactions of this period, and based on the areas in this chapter that will considered to be "Italy" in later sections of this study, other rural areas of what is now considered Italy may also be discussed as such in this chapter.
[12] Becker, 3; Livy 5.1.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate the traditions and religion of pre-fourth century Italy, and how these practices can be used to think about the tradition of anatomical votive use within Italy. This study will examine aspects of Etruscan religion generally as a way to note how this practice fit into the larger culture of Etruria. Part of this study will also include looking at an early Etruscan site—Veii—in order to examine early forms of anatomical dedication within Italy.

Anatomical Offerings in Etruria

Anatomical votive offerings have been found in many locations throughout Etruria. This practice seems to have been a continuous phenomenon throughout the region, occurring both before and after the fourth century watershed. As previously suggested, much of the evidence for the practice comes from this fourth century or later. In fact, approximately thirty one sanctuaries in fifteen locations in Etruria have anatomical terracottas ascribed to the fourth century.[13]

The archaeological record has shown that by the fourth century the use of anatomical votives became widespread throughout Etruria and that these votives came in a variety of forms. Though there are examples of the dedication of depictions of external body parts, many votives found in Etruria took the form of internal organs. The dedication of internal organs is seen as being distinctly Etruscan, for the typical Greek forms of votives were largely, if not solely, external body parts.[14] The internal organs that were dedicated by Etruscans demonstrate great medical knowledge, and they are largely anatomically accurate.

Again, in contrast to the Greek forms, which tend to depict disease and specific ailments, the Etruscan organs rarely demonstrate any malady. One exception to this pattern was a pair of breasts found at shrine dedicated to Minerva on the coast of Punta della Vipera near Santa

[13] Glinister, 2006, 20.
[14] Turfa, 1994, 225.

Marinella. One of the breasts was enlarged, and depicted an image of a scar made from an incision.[15] The lack of depictions of maladies suggests that the votives did not need to be entirely realistic or exact in their representation. Fay Glinister writes, "Strict anatomical detail is unlikely to have been important to the dedicating, however what mattered was that the offering formed an appropriate symbol of the worshipper's intentions and requirements."[16]

The majority of the anatomical votives that were dedicated in Etruria were made from terracotta. Many of the votives can be seen to have been made by the same mold, and even the same chloroplast. The widespread use of terracotta (over other media like gold or bronze) seems to suggest that these objects were more accessible, and enabled poorer classes of society to participate in religious practice.[17] However, this system of production does not necessarily assume that these were inexpensive objects, or that the practice was strictly limited to poorer classes. "Ancient eyes," Glinister writes, "did not view terracotta as inherently poor quality, cheap, or lower class."[18] In fact, many of the anatomical votives that have been excavated have exhibited embellishments. These features—detailing, stylization, and differing depictions of organs—must have been made by means of a commissioning process which would have been more expensive than many of the other forms of votive dedication, like dedicating coins or figurines.[19]

Therefore, the medium of the votive cannot determine the class or the status of the dedicator, nor can it explain the widespread popularity of the practice (as found in the archaeological record). Instead, the universality of health concerns can help explain the number

[15] Barker, 280. See Figure 2.
[16] Glinister, 2006, 11.
[17] Glinister, 2006, 27.
[18] Glinister, 2006, 28.
[19] Glinister, 2006, 11.

of votives found and the popularity of the practice.[20] For example, anatomical votive offerings were often dedicated as requests or thanks for a cure or in connection with childbirth.[21] This is certainly an issue that would have crossed class and geographical boundaries, and can help explain why votive offerings saturate the archaeological record. Health and fecundity were and are universal human concerns, and the dedication of these votives serves to illustrate these concerns in a visual and demonstrative way.[22]

Though terracotta anatomical votives were the most prevalent and popular form found in the archaeological record, other media for votives also had a longstanding tradition in Etruria. For instance, bronze anatomical votives including human limbs, hands, eye masks, and male genitals have been dated from the sixth century BCE onwards. These bronzes mainly appear in northern Etruria and Adriatic Italy.[23] These types of anatomical votives are much older and much rarer finds in the archaeological record. These rare votives demonstrate an earlier practice—one that existed before the fourth century watershed. They also demonstrate the variety and versatility of this practice: they can be made in various forms depending on the needs and desires of the dedicator.

Though these objects were used for healing rituals, not all shrines were connected formally with healing cults. Many of the sites that have strong associations with healing cults date to after the watershed. One such example is the sanctuary of Asclepius on Tiber Island in Rome.[24] Many of the shrines where anatomical offerings were found also have healing waters.[25] A large portion of these sanctuaries have connections to or associations with healing sanctuaries

[20] Glinister, 2006, 27. This may also be a reason why, despite its presence in the archaeological record, they have been largely ignored by "elite literary sources."
[21] Glinister, 2006, 10.
[22] Glinister, 2006, 11.
[23] Glinister, 2006, 14.
[24] See Chapter II.
[25] Glinister, 2006, 12.

are clustered in central and southern Etruria and Latium, are sites of particularly high density, and are in close proximity to Rome. Some examples listed and mapped by M. Fenelli and cited by Potter and Wells are: Ponte di Nona, Praeneste, Gabii, Veii, Mentana, Nemi, and Castel di Decima.[26] Perhaps these conditions occur because of the high population density, which would cause illness, and a greater need for votive dedications and healing shrines.[27] Glinister also clarifies that the population density of these locations meant that more people were available to donate anatomical offerings: "sanctuaries with large numbers of users (as Rome and its hinterland) mean sanctuaries with more offerings, period."[28] Additionally, Rome and its surrounding areas have been some of the most explored areas archaeologically because of the modern development which spurred excavation: "such exploration has naturally led to the discovery of far more [votive] deposits than elsewhere."[29]

The dedication of votive objects was seen as a way for an individual to communicate with a deity. As far as archaeologists can detect, at the fourth century watershed there does not seem to be any formal ritual or duty associated with this practice. Because there was no formal ritual, people would dedicate these votives wherever it seemed best, at any time, and for any reason. For this reason, the dedications were not necessarily reliant upon temples. When temples were destroyed, dedications often continued to be made in the same place, despite the loss of a formal altar or structure.[30] For example, at Orvieto there is a sanctuary found within the Canicella necropolis. Though this sanctuary was destroyed in 264 BCE, there is evidence that dedicators continued to frequent it into the Roman times.[31] Additionally, the temple at Loc

[26] Potter, 37. See Figure 1.
[27] Glinister, 2006, 19.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Barker, 277.
[31] Ibid.

Scasto at Falerii was sacked in 241 BCE, but remained in use through the first century BCE.[32] Though these sacred sites were destroyed, the space remained sacred, and these temples remained an important resource for individual dedicators.

Therefore, the dedication of votives in Etruria was relatively flexible. Nearly any deity could be worshipped by means of anatomical votives in Italy perhaps because "almost any god could be regarded as having healing powers."[33] Before the fourth century watershed, the connection to specifically healing deities is not particularly strong. Glinister explains, "in fact, anatomicals are so common in Hellenistic-period sanctuaries that the simplest and most logical explanation is that they represent the generic power of deities over the major aspects of human life."[34] Although the object of the dedication may not be a deity specialized in healing, the objects were still donated for the purpose of healing because, "their wide sphere of action made it acceptable and normal to offer them such gifts."[35] The practice of dedication in Etruria is often connected to sites where there is a long term continuity of cult—Montefortino di Arcevia in the Marche, Grotta Bella in Umbria, and the Grotta del Colle di Rapino in Abruzzo are examples. The practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings was widespread in Etruscan religion, in part because of its apparent flexibility: depending on what the votive signified to the dedicator, the objects could be dedicated at nearly any sacred space, to nearly any divine figure, and out of nearly any material.

Etruscan Religion

However popular the dedication of anatomical votives may have been, Etruscan worship and ritual was not limited to the use of these offerings. The use of votive offerings within this

[32] Ibid.
[33] Glinister, 2006, 13.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

region and during this period played a specific role within wider Etruscan society. This role enhanced overall religious practice, but did not dominate it. An examination of the wider context of Etruscan religion during the period surrounding the fourth century watershed can illuminate this study of Etruscan anatomical votives, and can highlight the ways in which these anatomical votives were used and what they represented.

In Etruria, anatomical votives were often seen within the context of other types of votives. In fact, many of the excavated anatomical hoards have been found within trenches that also contain many other kinds of votives offerings.[36] Votive objects can be personal objects, money, inscriptions— anything dedicated for the purpose of achieving a particular result. Nearly all of these objects have been found in Etruscan hoards alongside anatomical votives. The type and material of the votive dedicated would vary "according to the importance of the occasion or the wealth of the worshipper."[37] Whereas anatomical votives are dedicated in the context of healing, the other types of votive offerings demonstrate other situations and motivations for the dedication of an object to a god.

The dedication of anatomical votives in exchange for healing is one type of ritual behavior that occurs in the archaeological record, but the record also preserves other rituals that were prevalent within Etruscan religion. These practices demonstrate a similar mindset as votive offerings, but with different aims. Curse tablets, in particular, have been a good indicator of popular beliefs for archaeologists and ancient historians. These tablets are usually found buried in the ground and include inscriptions which call for a curse upon a person or persons. Similarly, inscribed figurines also demonstrate similar beliefs and ritual behaviors. The purpose of these

[36] Often, fragile items that were dedicated to shrines or temples would be stored in the treasuries. When these treasuries became full they would be taken out and buried in pits, trenches, or hoards nearby (Barker, 224). These hoards are the main avenue by which these dedicated objects reach modernity.
[37] Barker, 224.

figurines is debated. They could have been used similarly to anatomical votive dedication: as illustrations of the god to whom it was dedicated, or even as self-portraits of the person performing the dedication. Curse tablets and figurines demonstrate forms of ritual behavior which echo the dedication of votive offerings. These figurines, inscriptions, and tablets were another way of dedicating or presenting a need (or desire) to a god with the expectation of a result.[38]

Additionally, votive dedications have been found in many different types of Etruscan cults. Etruscan religion had a pantheon of gods that was similar to the Greek or Roman pantheons, and votive offerings were made to any number of these gods for any number of reasons. However, Etruscan religion also had divine figures that seem to be unique to Etruscan culture. Beginning in the fifth century, figures acknowledged as Death Demons became common in funerary art.[39] These types of figures are uncommon in the Mediterranean world at this time, and are therefore distinctly Etruscan.[40] Among the images of death and disease in the tomb of Orcus (II), in Tarquinia, is one of the only representations of Tuchulcha, a female Death Demon.[41] The iconography found in this tomb links the issues of death and disease to these divine figures, which suggests that these figures play a close role in the affairs of humans. In a way, these Etruscan figures seem to fill a divine niche; they focus on chthonic issues like disease, they work closely with humans, and perhaps even represent a somewhat intermediary presence in the pantheon.

Death Demons are not the only Etruscan instance of figures who serve as a midway point between gods and humans. Early Etruscan religion exhibits a type of ancestor worship. The first

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[38] Turfa, 2006a, 69.
[39] Barker, 240.
[40] Graeme Barker discusses a possible connection to Eastern influence, citing similarities with the epic of Gilgamesh (Barker, 242).
[41] Barker, 242.

notable piece of evidence for ancestor worship comes in the form of monumental sculpture.[42] A seventh century tomb—the "Tomb of the Statues" at Ceri—features monumental portraits which sit on either side of the entrance of the tomb and memorialize two deceased people. These figures have carved stone tables in front of them, which demonstrate a banquet scene. This banquet setting fits with the documented practice of feasting with the dead, and would suit both the veneration of the immediate dead and ancestor worship.[43] This banquet setting seems to support the theory that this tomb was a site of ancestor veneration. The practice of worshipping ancestors included dedicating libations, holding feasts and banquets for, and dedicating food to the dead because the "dead needed sustenance."[44] These banqueting rituals have been identified in context as early as the Protovillanovan (1100 BC to 900 BC) and the Villanovan period (900 BC to 700 BC).[45] In addition to offering libations, the practice of burying hoards of objects for the dead emerged—especially at the boundaries of settlements.[46]

Ancestors, the 'honored dead,' could sometimes even gain such devotion that they would become god-like figures. One such of these honored dead was the legendary figure Tages.[47] Tages was a fabled child who had died. A shrine was built to him at Pian di Civita.[48] Over time, Tages became a legendary prophetic figure who became venerated in nearly every Etruscan city.[49] This example shows that ancestor worship in Etruscan society ranged from ritual banqueting to deification or mythologizing.[50]

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[42] Barker, 128.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Barker, 251.
[45] Turfa, 2006a, 65.
[46] Barker, 251; Turfa, 2006a, 65.
[47] His story is also found in association with stories of other ancestor-heroes like Cacu, or "the hero with the plow" (Turfa, 2006a, 64).
[48] Barker, 228.
[49] Turfa, 2006a, 85.
[50] This variation can even be compared to Greek hero cult that occurs throughout the Mediterranean.

The temple of Ara Della Regina—one of the largest Etruscan temples to be found— has a potential archaeological connection to this legend. The origins of the temple revolve around the burial of a child in the ninth century BCE. This child has been characterized as epileptic—or even perhaps visionary or prophetic—and has been linked to Tages. Interesting, Ara Della Regina is also a site which is known for the dedication of votive offerings—specifically votive images of heads. These heads are not necessarily considered anatomical votives because of the uncertainty of the purpose of the objects. However, they are at least similar in concept to anatomical votives; they represent parts disassociated from the body.[51] The intersection of this form of divine ancestor worship and this dedication of votive offerings is important: it demonstrates the ways in which votives fit into many different aspects of Etruscan religion, and perhaps even how the importance of intermediary figures begins to be important to the practice.[52]

Thus, the practice of dedicating votive offerings did not emerge within a vacuum, nor was it the only practice apparent during this period. But, rather, it was a part of larger culture of rich religious practices. Nietzsche once remarked that the Etruscan customs and religious practices seem to revolve around death and chthonic figures; they were "gloomy Etruscans."[53] Much of Etruscan religion, culture, and society can only be learned through funerary art and tombs, and there does seem to be an emphasis on chthonic characters like Death Demons and the honorable/honored dead. Given that these other practices in Etruria are concerned with death, it is not difficult to imagine how a rich practice which focused mainly on disease and healing would have played a large role in the overall religious beliefs and practices of the Etruscans.

[51] Some—eleven—of the 234 votive heads found at the Ara Della Regina are veiled.
[52] Glinister, 2009, 208.
[53] Barker, 3. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy.*

Outside Influences and the Fourth Century Watershed

Many scholars attribute the increase in anatomical votive use in the during the fourth century watershed to the introduction of the Greek cult of Asclepius to Rome— perhaps an example of the Greek and Roman influence on Etruria and the wider area of Italy. [54] The societies of Rome, Greece, and Etruria were certainly all in contact with one another before and during the fourth century watershed, and each society influenced and was influenced by other cultures in formative ways.

Aspects of Etruscan religion have many similarities to Greek cults—perhaps demonstrating interaction and influence. One such aspect is the ancestor—or hero—cult. Greek and Etruscan culture had similar beliefs and practices surrounding the dead: practices which resulted in cult worship of ancestors and heroic figures. However, in Greece, there are many more extant examples of honored dead who became venerated in the cult of heroes. This hero cult celebrated the dead as intermediate figures—figures that were human but attained god-like powers. Though many of these were honored ancestors—dead who became so venerated that they were raised to 'hero' status— many others who came to be venerated as 'heroes' were actually figures of legend or children the gods such as Hercules, Achilles, and even Homer. [55]

In later periods, figures venerated within the Greek Hero cult made their way to Etruria and became Etruscan objects of veneration in their own right. Hercules, in particular, became a popular figure in Etruscan religion, received many votive offerings in Etruria, and had several shrines throughout the Etruscan region.[56] This is not to say that Greek hero cult influenced Etruscan ancestor cult—for it is apparent they emerged independently. But rather, it

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[54] Glinister, 2006, 21; See Section II.
[55] Jones, 1-2.
[56] He seems to have presided over both men and women as a healer, as votive breasts and uteri were found at several sites including his temple sites at Praeneste and Cora (Glinister, 2006, 23).

demonstrates the difficulty of navigating these cultural interactions and tracking this tradition which simultaneously occurred in different societies during the same periods.

Greece and Etruria have many similarities that may have been established due to interaction. Similarly, the interactions of Rome and Etruria and their influence on votive offerings is also a difficult relationship to navigate. Some scholars have argued that the dedicatory practice began in Rome and that anatomical votives themselves were made in Roman territories and then exported to Etruria. However, Martin Söderlund argues the opposite, citing the finds at Tessannano as evidence. The type and origin of the clay used in the production of the votives demonstrates that at least some of the anatomical votive offerings were made in Etruria and then imported to the Roman colonies. At Tessannano, the anatomical votives that were dedicated by Roman colonists were made in Etruria.[57] Based on these assessments, it is clear that votive cult was not only active in Etruria, but also the Roman colonies and provinces of Italy, and even Rome itself. Although this pattern, as Söderlund outlines, may be accurate, it is difficult to determine the overall origin and pattern of transmission of this practice throughout the Mediterranean. Though each culture—Etruscan, Greek, and Roman—may have had independent votive traditions, these traditions certainly interacted with and influenced one another.

Glinister writes, "the assumption that the spread of these votives coincides chronologically and geographically with the extension of Roman political influence and of Roman religious ideologies is now commonplace."[58] In other words, it is commonly believed that Roman imperialism brought votives to Etruria. Greek and Roman culture was indeed influential in Etruria, but not entirely as transformative to Etruscan votive practice as previous

[57] Glinister, 2006, 25.
[58] Glinister, 2006, 15.

scholars may have assumed. The examination of outside influence can show that Etruscan votive religion was simultaneously a part of a general Mediterranean phenomenon, as well as a distinctly Italian tradition.[59] This votive tradition was not one that was introduced by foreign cults, but rather was one that had been established in Etruria long before the Roman conquest or Greek influence. These anatomical votive offerings have a history in Etruria before the fourth century watershed and the introduction of the cult of Asclepius. Glinister argues, "when [Asclepius'] worship became popular in Latin territory, it was already superfluous for Etruria, which had shrines and anatomical votives a century or more earlier, already linked to native god(desse)s."[60]

A study of comparative anthropology has noted that healing cults appear in societies during moments of great change.[61] Indeed, societies of Hellenistic Italy experienced great instability—especially during the expansion of Rome.[62] The fourth century brought 'international' exchange and great changes to Etruria.[63] In this way, the interaction of these cults could have sparked the interest in healing cults and the increasing popularity of votive offerings that is seen in the archaeological record during the watershed. It is difficult to determine or negotiate these complicated cultural interactions, but awareness of these interactions is necessary to understand the social and cultural dynamics of this period. The interactions of these cultures perhaps led to the emergence of similarities and distinct differences between cults that use votive offerings. Contrary to the belief that the Italian people were "passive recipients of elements from

[59] Livi, 113.
[60] Glinister, 2006, 22.
[61] Glinister, 2006, 32.
[62] Ibid.
[63] An anecdote noted by Graeme Barker is interesting to consider in this light. Supposedly, in 364 BCE (just after the destruction of Veii, and the Roman conquest), Etruscan dancers were sent to Rome to prevent a plague. They achieved this by means of pounding on the ground to communicate with those below it—the dead. In this way, healing is demonstrated as being important, and it was connected to chthonic cults (Barker, 254).

‘superior’ cultures (Roman or Greek),” the Etruscan people were active in the “dynamic Mediterranean *koine*.”[64]

Case Study: Veii

Veii has a long history: evidence shows that its earliest occupation began in the tenth century BCE. Greater urbanization occurred during the seventh century when Veii began to become one of the richest and largest cities in Etruria.[65] A wealth of anatomical votive material has been found at Veii, and this wealth of votive evidence can help to shed light on information about the Etruscan population, health, and religion. Veii was destroyed by Romans in 396 BCE, which allows for a good archaeological picture of the practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings before the fourth century watershed. Therefore, its early date, the unique type and style of votives found, and its impact on other votive production sites around Latin Italy make Veii an ideal example of early Etruscan votive use.[66]

The Portonoccio temple is the ‘foremost’ temple-complex at Veii, and had sanctuaries dedicated to Menerva (Minerva) and Aplu (Apollo of Veii). Massimo Pallottino, a professor at the University of Rome, excavated the temple complex from 1939-1940.[67] The excavation report was published in 2002 and demonstrates a wide variety of terracotta votive objects found at the Portonoccio sanctuary. These items include votive offerings like figurines, heads, faces, and painted and inscribed pottery. Although excavation and further study have shown that Veii was a center for anatomical offerings, the excavation report itself shows relatively few examples. The anatomical votives included in the catalogue of the report consists only of item numbers 703-

[64] Glinister, 2006, 24.
[65] Turfa, 2006a, 67.
[66] Barker, 6.
[67] Edlund-Berry, 2005.

710b. The pieces include one uterus, hands, one leg, two feet, and a lung.[68] Though small, this collection demonstrates that the Etruscans who made and dedicated these votives had knowledge of the entire body—both internal organs and external body parts— and therefore had a wide knowledge of healing various ailments.

Another form of anatomical votive found at Veii are the polyvisceral plaques. These plaques were created in the shape of a human torso, the middle of which would be open exposing depictions of the internal organs. In this way, the polyvisceral plaques can easily be considered a subset of the anatomical votive category, for the donation of one of these would be similar to donating depictions of several different organs at once. These plaques were not only found in Veii, but also seemed to have emerged from Veii,[69] since the votives found at Veii are considered to have been the models for other polyvisceral votives found throughout the rest of Etruria and Latinium. [70] For instance, the polyvisceral plaques that were found at Fregellae are of the same types that were originally produced at Veii.[71]

These polyvisceral plaques are interesting to study in the context of medicine during this period.[72] The organs found within these plaques seem to have been modeled after those found in pigs, sheep, and other animals. There is evidence to suggest that the organs were modeled after animals because of knowledge that the Etruscans gained from practices of augury.[73] Therefore, the two religious traditions of augury and votive dedication could have been tied together; augury would predict or answer questions based on the health of the animal, whereas votive

[68] Colonna, 203.
[69] Glinister, 2006, 20.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Turfa, 1994, 225.

dedication would ask for healing based on the representation of a human based on knowledge of animals.

The fact that these plaques seemed to be linked to the study and dissection of animals is an important indicator of ideas of health and healing in Etruscan society. Herophilus was the first person to dissect a human cadaver in the 3rd century BCE in Alexandria. His work, especially on the female reproductive organs, changed the way in which Greeks and Romans viewed medicine and healing.[74] However, these plaques show that the Etruscans were thinking about the human body in relation to the bodies of animals. This shows that this practice existed before Herophilus performed these dissections, and before conceptions about the health and the human body were revolutionized throughout the Mediterranean in Antiquity.

Like the polyvisceral plaques, which seem to have emerged at Veii and spread throughout Italy, many types of votives that were dedicated there were exported and used as artistic models for anatomical votives found at other shrines throughout Italy. The anatomical votives found at Veii can also communicate a number of other substantial themes within this study of anatomical votive dedication. The presence of many other types of votive offerings at Veii—including bronzetti, statues, and vases—demonstrates that the period before 396 BCE was a moment in time in which the anatomical votive dedications were becoming more popular, and other types of votive dedications were also still in common use. The evidence from Veii sets this votive tradition firmly within an Etruscan context.

Conclusion

The dedication of anatomical votives is a rich tradition that has a long history in Etruria. The case study of Veii demonstrates that these votives were in use in Etruria before the introduction of Greek healing cults during what is known as the fourth century watershed.

[74] Dean-Jones, 22.

During and after this period there was great cultural interaction throughout the Mediterranean and these interactions may have influenced and changed religion and votive cult within Etruria.

However, these interactions and changes did not occur to the detriment of the tradition of dedicating anatomical votives, but rather strengthened the tradition. This tradition has survived from Etruscan society and it has lasting meaning and influence in Italy. The Etruscan tradition of votive offerings was incorporated into other religious cults. One such example is the introduction of the Greek cult of Asclepius into Italy in the fourth century, which will be discussed in the following section of this study.

Chapter 2
Anatomical Votive Use in the Cult of Asclepius—Hero Physician and God of Medicine

Perhaps the most famous healing god in the antique world is Asclepius. His presence as a divine healer lasted well into the first millennium CE. For example, the sanctuary dedicated to him at Kos persisted as a major cult center until it was destroyed by an earthquake in 554 CE.[75] Similarly, the sanctuary at Epidaurus gained rather than lost popularity and status between the Republican and Imperial Periods.[76] Though his cult emerged in Greece, Asclepius was a popular and influential healing figure throughout the Mediterranean. Part of his power and popularity comes from his role as an intermediary figure.

Asclepius is a figure who embodies both human and divine qualities. The myths that surround him describe him as a heroic figure, who came from divine heritage, was trained by and associated with legendary figures, and who died tragically. However, his tragic death did not end his remarkable power to heal. Rather, Asclepius became venerated as a god because of his continued power to heal. Asclepius represents a figure that was part human, part god, who retained his powers after death, and used these powers to act on behalf of humans as an intermediary figure.

The cult of Asclepius developed specific practices and rituals for healing, of which anatomical votives are a major part. Archaeological material presents a connection between his intermediary status and the ritual use of offerings. For example, many anatomical votives were found dedicated to Asclepius at the 'shrine of the Hero Physician,' the title of which demonstrates Asclepius' particular statues as a part human part divine figure.[77] The cult of

[75] Sakula, 684.
[76] Potter, 40.
[77] Potter, 36.

Asclepius is a quintessential example of the ways in which anatomical votives were used to express both supplication and gratitude for healing to an intermediary figure in healing cults.

Asclepius and Rome

And now, you muses, divine presences
Who attend on poets, since you know the past
And vast extents of time cannot mislead you,
Reveal to us where Aesculapius,
The son of Coronis, came from and why
That island which deep Tiber flows around
Made him a part of sacred rituals
In Romulus' Rome.[78]

Asclepius was a Greek figure whose cult developed as a Greek cult. However, both the cult and the healing rituals became popular in Italy and became an important cult to both Italians and Romans alike. According to the account written in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Asclepius was introduced to Rome because of an epidemic in 293 BCE. The nature of Ovid's account describes this introduction as a self-conscious importation of the deity. In Ovid's account, there is no effort to pretend that Asclepius had always been a Roman deity, and, in fact, Asclepius' own desire to become a Roman deity is emphasized. Overall, Ovid's story suggests that the Romans were in dire need of assistance, and they sought out a deity who could protect them.

The story goes that the Sibyl told the Romans to build a temple to Asclepius and to go to Epidaurus to obtain a statue and the deity. When the Romans reached Epidaurus, the Greeks debated amongst themselves about whether they should allow their god to become Roman. Asclepius chose to go to Rome to save the Romans from the plague. Asclepius appeared in the form of a snake,

Then his body moved into the Roman ship,
which felt the heavenly load, as his weight
forced it to settle further in the sea.[79]

[78] Ovid *Metamorphoses* XV, l.940.

He, “from Epidaurus left Apollo’s shrine, where his own father’s hospitality had brought him joy,” and “there he stayed until the ship reached Castrum and Lavinium’s sacred shrines and sailed to where the Tiber’s waters meet the sea.”[80] The temple was built in the place in which the snake chose—the Tiber Island. Ovid ends the narrative of the sea voyage by proclaiming, “The god now entered Rome, capitol of the world.”[81]

Until this point, Asclepius had been a Greek deity—one sired by a Greek god, who emerged from the Greek hero cult, and was part of Greek legends. Thus, a Greek deity became savior to the ‘Capital of the world.’ At the heart of this account is a divine intervention by an intermediary figure, favoring one city, or even one people, over another. This raises questions about the reception of the Asclepeian cult in the ancient Mediterranean, and how his power and influence was viewed by ancient writers. Perhaps it even suggests that Rome grew and conquered because of the support of the most powerful gods, acquired from Greece and other places.[82]

In Ovid’s account, there is no suggestion that healing cults had existed in Italy in other forms. Thus, there is no way to tell if there were any healing cults, and if there were, why the Roman healing gods failed at protecting Rome from this plague. The text states,

> When they realized, after so much death,
> that human efforts were of no avail
> and their healing skills were ineffectual,
> they looked to the heavenly gods for help.[83]

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[79] Ovid *Metamorphoses* XV, l.1050.
[80] Ovid *Metamorphoses* XV, l.1093**,** l.1100.
[81] Ovid *Metamorphoses* XV, l.1114.
[82] Asclepius was by no means the only god that the Romans imported. This account provides an interesting look at the negotiation of the consequences of importing deities.
[83] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV, l. 951-954.

The text acknowledges a failure on the part of humans to heal the plague, but does not draw any attention to Roman or even Etruscan gods. When in crisis, it is the Greek oracle of Delphi to whom the Romans turn. These narrative events, and the lack of acknowledgement of the Italian role within the story, speaks to the complexity for relying on this narrative, and denotes that there are other tensions at play in this piece.

If anything, the story provides a particular etiology of the Asclepeion Sanctuary on Tiber Island in Rome. Several archaeological excavations have been carried out on the island.[84] Many anatomical votives have been found on the banks of the Tiber River, and have been ascribed to this sanctuary.[85] However, a complete catalogue of the anatomical votives is not accessible. Danuta Musial mentions two published inscriptions (of thirty two), which reference the "the god of Epidaurus." [86] These inscriptions help to prove that the structure on the island was indeed an Asclepeion. Based on the dating of the small finds and architectural pieces, the temple on the Tiber Island has been dated to around 293 BCE, the same date as it is recorded in Ovid's account.[87]

Because the introduction of this Asclepeion into Rome was perhaps one of the first instances of the Cult of Asclepius in Italy, it retained many of the original Hellenic traits and rituals including purification via water, incubation, and votive offerings. Musial even argues that the Greek language was possibly used at this site, because Greek was the language of origin for the cult.[88] The cult of Asclepius was a Greek cult, and the importation of the deity had not changed linguistic, ritual, and cultural aspects of the cult. It is not surprising that the Roman

[84] Bruce, 3; 29; 61.
[85] Though there is debate about whether this was the intended placement of the votives, or simply the resting place as a result of the flow of the river, perhaps suggesting that some of the votives may have originated elsewhere (Lesk Blomerus, 108).
[86] Musial, 235.
[87] Musial, 232.
[88] Musial, 235.

Asclepius began to be associated with the power of protection for foreigners. At least at first, Tiber Island was a sanctuary for those people from Greece or the East.[89]

The Asclepeion on Tiber Island is located towards the southern end of the Tiber River as it flows through Rome. The island is shaped like a boat, and since antiquity it has been connected to the mainland of the city of Rome by means of two bridges—the Ponte Fabricio and the Ponte Cestio.[90] The location of the sanctuary could have been an attempt at a method of quarantine.[91] Additionally, the island sanctuary's proximity to water served as an important asset in the purification and ritual processes of the cult, as well as a method of cure.[92] Although the sanctuary at Tiber Island is famous because of these features, it is not entirely unique; the Asclepeion of Kos was also considered to be a 'sacred island,' for similar reasons.[93]

The location of this temple in the heart of Rome connects the issues of health, healing, and public demonstration. Michael Compton writes that, "Cult was dependent on a complex set of rituals for formal public worship and private devotion."[94] From a modern perspective, the ritual of dedicating votive offerings involved both public and private actions. The giving of an anatomical votive declared publically a private concern—health. However, Romans lived much more publically than modern people. The layouts of houses, for instance, often included open, public areas. This domestic architecture suggests that the lines between what we would consider public and private were quite blurred, or simply that the Romans were operating under different definitions. Thus, what we would consider private –such as the display of an illness— may not have been so in Rome.

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[89] Musial, 236.
[90] Macadam, 231.
[91] Musial, 233-234.
[92] Musial, 233.
[93] Hart, 62.
[94] Compton, 304.

Another way of thinking through the public dedication of offerings in Roman society is thinking about it in terms of an exchange, or a presentation of vulnerability. The act potentially could be have been construed as a way to gain health through a sacrifice of privacy. However, it could also be interpreted as a public act—demonstrating or proving divine favor for an individual. Or the act could have been a way to address what we would consider to be issues of public health. After all Asclepius was introduced because of an epidemic. Walter Addison Jayne supports this argument; "public health was considered of such importance that, early in the fourth century the council of the city assumed entire control of the administration of the Asclepeion."[95]

The precise Roman response to the display of these anatomical votives cannot be known for sure. The evidence of votives with holes in them shows that they were hung and displayed within the sanctuary. This image of a display of healed or unhealed body parts, which sometimes were even arranged to form full bodies, would have expressed a very strong message about piety and health to the Roman visitors.[96]

There was an idea throughout the Ancient Mediterranean that both healing and disease came from a god.[97] The concept of anatomical votive offerings, especially to an audience familiar with Greek customs, would have seemed eerily similar to σπαραγμός—a Dionysian ritual in which animals (and sometimes humans) were dismembered as a sacrifice. Σπαραγμός was seen as a punitive measure, and showed the capability of a deity to have power of the human body.[98] This power of a god over the human body—for healing and harming—can be seen in the cult of Asclepius. One anecdote recounts a man who kept money that should have been dedicated

[95] Jayne, 294.
[96] Hughes, 233.
[97] Hughes, 230.
[98] Ibid.

to Asclepius (at Epidaurus). Asclepius punished him for his impiety by transferring facial marks from his more pious friend's face to his own. [99] Hughes writes, "For the Classical Greek viewer, this belief that illness was a form a divine punishment would have been consolidated into the healing sanctuary, whose surfaces were scattered with 'dismembered' parts of the human body."[100]

In this way, in Rome, the display of so many healed body parts would have attested not only to the power of the god, but also the health and piety of what was considered to be the 'capitol of the world.' As suggested, those who were not pious could be punished by means of a medical affliction. At the same time, however, these votives also attested to a return to health by means of a miracle, regardless of the origin of the malady. The more votives there were in a sanctuary, the more healing miracles that occurred, and the healthier the population of the city. Simultaneously, this dedication could also have shown the idea that the gods favored someone, and that that favor was shown by healing.[101]

These votives carried many meanings and in each case, the votive reflects a different aspect of classical ideas of health and piety. Regardless of the meaning expressed, the images of body parts hanging from a shrine would have been a powerful image for visitors to a sanctuary. These dismembered images would have affirmed the importance of Asclepius to classical—particularly Roman— religion, and would reinforce Asclepius' role, that, "Asclepios' acknowledged claim to fame was precisely that—making things whole again." [102]

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] See Note 115.
[102] Hughes, 232.

Asclepeia and the Rituals of Healing

Though this study focuses on Italy, it is worth noting that the cult of Asclepius spread throughout the Mediterranean. The cult became popular and expanded throughout Greece, Asia Minor, and into Italy. As the cult spread, different methods of healing and different spaces for healing were established and used.

Asclepius' status as a part human part divine figure dictated how he was originally venerated. In the beginning, the cult of Asclepius was similar to that of the Greek Hero cult—localized, rural, shrines to a mortal figure, at which people would make dedications of wine, food, or votive offerings. But around 400 BCE, the city of Epidaurus recognized Asclepius as a god in his own right, the first cult site to do so.[103] A new space for the cult emerged: a sanctuary complex. Epidaurus became the largest example of such sanctuaries in the ancient Mediterranean.

This type of sanctuary complex— of which Epidaurus is just one example—combined aspects of worship and healing. The sanctuaries developed structures that were specifically tailored to the healing rituals of the cult. For example, Asclepeia generally included drinking water, water for bathing, water for ritual cleansing, gymnasia, a theater, an *abaton* (a dream room), and an area for the exhibition and display of votives and other testimonials.[104]

Nearly all sanctuaries had baths, fountains, or natural water sources nearby. Water seems to have been an important aspect of healing ritual, as Etruscan and Italic healing sites were also known to have had "effective systems of water-supply."[105] Both Pliny and Vitruvius cite clean water as being particularly effective for the treatment of practically any ailment: different kinds

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[103] Edelstein, 66.
[104] Hart, 53-54.
[105] Potter, 34.

of water could serve as cures for specific ailments.[106] In a period of history wherein clean water may or may not have been accessible, clean water at a healing sanctuary could have been particularly effective at preventing disease.[107]

In addition to the healing powers or properties that these water installations may have had, Pausanias describes an additional use for these features found at Epidaurus,

> The sacred grove of Asclepius is surrounded on all sides by boundary marks. No death or birth takes place within the enclosure the same custom prevails also in the island of Delos. All the offerings, whether offerer be one of the Epidaurians themselves or a stranger, are entirely consumed within the bounds.[108]

The sanctuary was a sacred space, with rules about purity and ritual. Typically, after the purification at a water installation, the devotee would present an offering inside the sanctuary. Often these sacrifices would take the typical form of small animals or birds. Votives in metal have been found at many Asclepeia and votives in terracotta have been found at sanctuaries at Corinth, and in Italy. These votives could reflect the sacrificial animals, inscriptions asking for cures, or anatomical parts. At this stage in the ritual, the gifts given are in supplication rather than thanks.[109]

Once the initial sacrifice had been given, the healing ritual would begin. The most essential and distinct part of the cult of Asclepius was the process of incubation. A person would go to a special portico which surrounded the sanctuary, and there the patient would sleep. It was thought that their dreams would either provide the cure, or would provide the key to the cure. In the latter case, the priest would interpret the dream and prescribe the action to be taken in order

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Edelstein, 381-384; Original source Pausanias Guide to Greece 2.27.1.
[109] Edelstein, 187.

to become healed.[110] By the first or second century CE, temple priests became more directly involved in the interpretation received.[111] Often the cure that the dreams or the priests would describe would be clean water, sunlight, fresh air, music, medicinal remedies, exercise, diet, change of temper, or rest.[112]

The person would then present a thank offering for the treatment. A segment of Pausanias' writing describes the thank offerings found at the Asclepeion at Epidaurus,

> Within the enclosure stood slabs; in my time six remained, but of old there were more. On them are inscribed the names of both the men and the women who have been healed by Asclepius, the disease also from which each suffered, and the means of cure. The dialect is Doric.[113]

These thank offerings existed in a variety of forms including the form of inscriptions, relief images, or even dedicatory statues, but often they included anatomical votive offerings. Asclepeia have some of the largest deposits of anatomical votive offerings of all healing sites in the ancient world, and the votives display great variation in style and design. Anatomical votives were made from silver and bronze in most of Greece, or terracotta as in Corinth and Italy. The offerings can be plain, inscribed, or demonstrative of the affliction. For instance, on a famous votive relief from the Asclepeion in Athens, the donator is shown dedicating a large votive leg, upon which is carved a large varicose vein.[114] The anatomical votives took the form of reliefs and also as three dimensional representations of body parts.

In Italy, however, votive offerings took forms that were more similar to those found in Etruscan cults than those found in the Greek cult of Asclepius. Votive offerings of internal

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[110] Aristides Oratio XLVII, 57; Edelstein 211 ; In a few cases, the patient would dream of Asclepius directly (Aristides Oratio XLVIII, 31-35; Edelstein 210).
[111] Compton, 304.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Edelstein, 381-384; original source Pausanias Guide to Greece 2.27.3.
[114] Although in this case, the inscription indicates that the offering was one of supplication not gratitude (Potter, 34). See Figure 4.

organs, for example, were much more prevalent in Italy than in Greece. Studying these internal organs can tell a lot about votive practice within the cult. Votive wombs, for example, show the artistry and variability of these offerings in Italy. Votive wombs were a common offering due to infertility and complications in childbirth, and they tend to show great variation in style for three dimensional anatomical votives. Votive wombs that have been found sometimes show no detail, whereas others show texture with grooves etched upon them, demonstrating inner musculature and an advanced knowledge of anatomy. [115] In some cases, these votive wombs demonstrate the effects of multiple births.[116] The type and specification of the votives donated at Asclepeia can carry many messages about the donor, and about medicine, and even about Roman society.

The inscription or detailing of votives can be linked to issues of class and class structure in the ancient world. The assumption is that the higher classes could afford to embellish their votives, whereas the lower classes could not. There is not a direct or concrete way to prove this theory, and aside from those which are inscribed with names, there is no way to tell who bought and donated which votive. However, the variation and personalization of votives was important in other ways. Personalizing a votive could have linked a person to divine favor as a way to express piety and importance through the demonstration of the favor of a god.

There is also evidence that different sanctuaries to Asclepius present different 'specializations' in healing. For example, the Asclepeion in Corinth had an overwhelming number of votive arms and legs, suggesting that Corinth had special abilities related to orthopedics.[117] In addition to appendages, Corinth is known for hordes of votive eyes. These are

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[115] Turfa, 2006b, 75.
[116] Even these un-inscribed votives can indicate a great deal about health and society, and again, ties into ideas about health and piety. In Antiquity, health was linked to morality and piety. Since giving birth was dangerous—many women died in childbirth—having multiple births would have signaled favor from the gods. Therefore, the dedication of anatomical votives which show multiple births would have both expressed gratitude to a deity, and also would have marked the dedicator as a pious and favored person. (Turfa, 2006b, 75).
[117] Chaviara-Karahaliou, 136.

especially notable because they depict eye diseases, demonstrating issues like scalding, ectropion, dacryrrhoea, and other eye related ailments.[118]

The specialization of cult centers could demonstrate that different population densities in different geographic regions experienced different ailments. For example, votives of genitalia are found in Rome and other urban centers. This could indicate a higher level of sexual activity within urban centers, perhaps because of higher incidences of sexual enterprise, and therefore a higher incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases. Conversely, the greater amount of votives representing arms, legs, and feet found in rural areas could indicate a higher incidence of farming accidents.[119]

Anatomical votives were an important part of the ritual in the cult of Asclepius. The isolation of a body part for dedication serves to isolate the area of illness. In antiquity, especially in Italy, the body was a sum of parts rather than a holistic entity.[120] Specification—such as depicting the particular area of pain, or even inscribing the name of the donor— would help to localize the treatment, showing Asclepius which place needed attention, and would facilitate the miraculous healing.[121]

Legend, Myth, and Emergence of Cult

Asclepius' power comes from his status as an intermediary figure, which is highlighted in his mythical biography. As early as the mid-fifth century BCE, an elaborate legend emerged around him as a heroic figure and divine character. [122] Though there are many variations on this legend, the following is a typical version of the story. Overall, Asclepius' legend carries many common tropes of Greek myths—especially myths surrounding heroes.

[118] Ibid.
[119] Potter, 39.
[120] However, Hippocratic medicine began to think of ailments in more holistic terms (Stok).
[121] Girardon, 34.
[122] Hart, 6.

For instance, the legend begins with a miraculous and divine birth. Asclepius' father was Apollo, who, interestingly, was revered, at least in part, as the preventer of disease and plague. Apollo fell in love with and impregnated a mortal woman, Coronis. But, tragically, he killed her after being tricked into thinking that she had been unfaithful. Later, filled with remorse, Apollo rescued Asclepius from his mother's dying womb. Apollo gave the child over to Chiron—the "foster parent of the gods," and, "Chiron educated the most gentle bestower of painlessness and health, the hero Asclepius."[123]

Asclepius became successful and renowned because of his healing ability. For example, he is said to have sailed with the Argonauts as the ship's physician. Other legends about the origin of his skill emerged to explain his healing talents. For instance, Asclepius came to be known as the first person to institute the practice of surgery and to practice pharmacology – skills learned from the fields of Medea.[124] Additionally, Apollodorus notes,

> Having become a surgeon and having developed his skills to a high degree, he not only prevented some people from dying, but even brought them back to life. For he had received from Athena the blood that had flowed from the veins of the Gorgon, and while he could use the blood that flowed from her left side to take away human life, he used the blood from her right side to bring them back to life." [125]

This particular etiology of his power explains not only the origin of his healing power, but also the origin of disease— both of which emerge from a deity.

Diodorus confirms this story and describes Asclepius as a hero with his talent serving as his fatal flaw,

> Asclepius' reputation became so great that he cured many who had not expected to recover and this is why

[123] Hart, 6; Hart, 8-9; Edelstein, 33; original source Scholia in Pindarum, Ad Pythias, III, 9.
[124] Hart, 10.
[125] Hart, 9; Edelstein, 9; original source Apollodorus Biblioteca, III, 10, 3, 5-1, 1.

> he seemed to have brought so many back to life. This is the origin of the story that even Hades brought a charge against Asclepius, accusing him before Zeus on the grounds that he was losing his powers; for the dead were constantly becoming fewer, because they were being healed by Asclepius.[126]

Because of Asclepius' healing ability, fewer people were dying. Meanwhile, Asclepius had also acquired the ability to resurrect people. Quickly, the underworld emptied. When Asclepius decided to bring Hippolytus back from the dead, Zeus felt the need to intervene. Apollodorus describes the event, "But Zeus, fearing that people might learn this healing art from him, and so rescue one another from death, struck Asclepius with a thunderbolt."[127] After Asclepius is struck down, he is resurrected and becomes a god; however, precisely how this occurs is unclear. Gerald Hart notes, "Unfortunately, no mythological or other source records Asclepius' return to medical practice on earth. Presumably, Apollo's violent protests influenced Zeus to resurrect Asclepius who returned to earth in the role of god of medicine, but was restrained by a caveat which prohibited him from reviving the dead."[128]

Whatever the process was, Asclepius seems to have retained his healing power, even after death. In fact, it seems that his ability to heal intensified after his resurrection and deification. His divine power to heal is explained several ways in the various legends. First, he is descended from the original God of medicine—Apollo. Next, he learned the skill from Chiron—the coach of heroes who also taught Achilles and Hercules. Additionally, he received instruction from Medea. Lastly, he was part god, part human. His human nature, and his experience treating humans as a physician, meant that he knew how to heal humans effectively as a divine figure.

[126] Hart, 9; Edelstein, 9; original source Diodorus Biblioteca Historica IV, 71, 1-4.
[127] Hart, 9; Edelstein, 9; original Apollodorus Biblioteca, III, 10, 3, 5-1, 1.
[128] Hart, 10.

Homer notes in the *Iliad* that Asclepius was a "blameless physician," from Thricca. [129] Many sources note that Asclepius was a physician and a man, and therefore worshipped in the manner that heroes or ancestors would have been worshipped. Later sources describe Asclepius not as a blameless physician, but as a full-fledged god. Cicero, in *De Natura Deorum*, writes,

> Human ways, moreover, and general custom have made it a practice to raise into heaven through renown and gratitude men, who are distinguished by their benefits. This is the origin of… Asclepius.[130]

This quote demonstrates the many legends about Asclepius, and in particular that he retained part of his humanity after his deification. Overall, Asclepius was a part human, part divine figure in many different ways cross different legends and sources.

It seems that in the early period of worship, Asclepius was venerated alongside other deities. The figures upon whom he relied during his life—Chiron, Apollo—are the same figures with whom he was associated after death in the contexts of sacred space and ritual. Although he was mortal, Asclepius became a healing god in his own right, even becoming more popular and effective as a healing god than his father Apollo, or even other high gods. T.M. Potter suggests that,

> at Corinth…the cult of Apollo, which was well established in the Archaic period, gradually declined in the fifth century and by the late part of that century the first anatomical ex-votos appear and cult to Asklepios thenceforth became so popular that it was eventually necessary to increase the size and form of the sanctuary.[131]

Over time Asclepius became more popular than Apollo; nevertheless, the two deities remain associated at many sanctuaries. The most famous of this type of associative reverence can be

[129] Jayne, 240; Hart, 4.
[130] Edelstein, 111 ; Original source Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II, 24, 62.
[131] Potter, 36.

found at the sanctuary at Epidaurus—at which inscriptions and anatomical votives have been dedicated to both deities. At other sanctuaries and shrines throughout the Mediterranean, Asclepius also became associated with his legendary and divine children. According to legend, he had two children who were physicians during the Trojan War. However, he also became associated with divine children. Hygeia is the most commonly evoked of these divine children, and inscriptions to her are found in many temples to Asclepius. Asclepius was also associated with figures like Hercules, and even other patron deities, perhaps in order to support his status as a deified human.[132] The association of Asclepius with other semi-divine figures helps to emphasize his own semi-divine status, and his powers to intercede or mediate between gods and humans.

This image of an intercessor who aids the process of healing is important to the emergence of early medical practice. Compton writes that, "the ascension of Asclepius from a mere mortal to an Olympian figure (who nonetheless retains local chthonic qualities) is physiologically symbolic of the physician leaving the earthly plane and effecting healing process at a higher level."[133] Although the comparison of Asclepius to a physician may be anachronistic, medicine played a role in the cult, and is historically linked to Asclepius. Hippocrates was said (and even claimed himself) to be a direct descendant of Asclepius through the Heracledian line, and doctors of Attica were required to sacrifice twice a year to Asclepius and Hygeia.[134] Asclepius healed people, and also acted as inspiration or patron god to humans who pursued a similar profession.

[132] Jayne, 252.
[133] Compton, 304.
[134] Compton, 307.

As was previously suggested, health and religion were not separated in antiquity.[135] Diseases were commonly regarded as the effects of the anger of the gods, and the restoration of the sick was felt to be dependent on ceremonies and ritual. The ability for a deity to protect against illness was linked to the ability for a deity to cause illness. This use of votives, then, does not necessarily draw the attention to the environmental cause of the illness, or a method of treating symptoms, but rather the power of Asclepius as a figure with divine powers.[136]

Asclepius was in a permanent state between god and man, and contained and manipulated both of these abilities. Some sources emphasize his humanness, while other emphasizes his divinity. Yet, all sources seem to agree that he was a mix of both. This combination of human experience and divine power establishes Asclepius in the position as a particularly powerful healer. These aspects, in combination, are important to the dedication of anatomical votive offerings.

Case: Fregellae

The previously mentioned Tiber Island sanctuary was not the only Asclepeion to have been established in Italy. Several others cities, including Ostia, Valle dei Templi, and Pompeii, have sanctuaries and impressive caches of anatomical votive offerings. This study will provide a closer inspection of the offerings found at the sanctuary of Asclepius at Fregellae in order to more carefully examine the connections between the divine status of Asclepius, the use of votive offerings, and healing ritual within Italy.

The sanctuary at Fregellae is located 100 km southeast of Rome, near the modern town of Cerpano, Italy. Fregellae was discovered in 1927 while a hydroelectric plant was being built, and explored further in 1975 when heavy rains exposed large travertine blocks and 3,000 votive

[135] Ibid.
[136] Compton, 305.

objects.[137] A team of Italian and British students from the University of Perugia and the University of Cambridge officially excavated Fregellae in 1978. The findings at Fregellae have greatly enhanced the ability for scholars to study Asclepeian ritual in Italy.[138] Fregellae was the second Republican era Asclepeion to be founded in Italy, but the excavation record is more complete than earlier sanctuaries (like the Tiber Island Asclepeion).[139] The sanctuary at Fregellae gives a much fuller picture of how the cult of Asclepius was practiced in Italy, and presents a unique opportunity to view life in rural Italy during the Republican era.

There is little evidence for any history of settlement of Fregellae area before the fourth century BCE.[140] Based on terracotta, pottery, and architectural findings, the founding of the site has been dated to 328 BCE. The site is located along the Via Latina, and it seems to have been part of a system of colonies that protected the routes from the central Apennines to the southwest.[141] Sources note that the settlement at Fregellae served as the leader and spokesman of the Latin colonies during the Second Punic war. Despite this participation in and protection of Rome, there are signs that the town rebelled against Rome in 125 BCE. This rebellion has been documented in source material, and is supported by the archeological evidence that suggests that the town was destroyed.[142]

The sanctuary at the site was identified in part because of an inscription that was found during the excavation.[143] This inscription had been dedicated to two deities, Asclepius and Salus.[144] Salus, interestingly, is the Roman goddess who is often conflated with Hygeia—Asclepius' divine daughter. Excavated fragments from the pediment of the temple also showed

[137] Edlund-Berry, 1991, 559.
[138] Crawford, 1984, 24.
[139] Musial, 234.
[140] Crawford, 1984, 21.
[141] Crawford, 1984, 22-23.
[142] Crawford, 1984, 23.
[143] Musial, 234.
[144] Edlund-Berry, 1991, 560; Crawford, 1984, 25. See Figure 3.

figures that were identified as Asclepius and Hygeia. Some other scenes from the pediment and sculpture depicted the Argonauts—another pivotal scene in the story of Asclepius. These findings all help to verify the identification of the site as an Asclepeion.[145] Excavator Crawford writes, "… enough remains to give a reasonably good idea of a complex which must, for its date, have been one of the most spectacular in central Italy outside Rome."[146]

From the excavated remains, it appears that the sanctuary contained all of the essential elements of a typical Greek Asclepeion. The temple seems to be of appropriate proportions. It contained a fountain and other hydrological installations for purity rites and healing. It had two L-shaped wings with porticoes flanking the temple itself, which in this context would have been used for the ritual of incubation. Along the northern side of the podium there was a treasury, at which many of the offerings were found.[147] Based on the comparative architecture and use of space at Fregellae, and its similarities to the architecture at the Asclepeion at Kos, the excavators felt confident dating the building of the temple to the beginning of the second century BCE.[148]

The location and orientation of the temple provides valuable information about how the residents of Fregellae at that period perceived and understood Asclepius as a divine figure. The direction in which the temple faced was the same as that of other chthonian healing sanctuaries. This idea, put forth by J.M. Turfa, can connect the direction of the temple to the characteristics of the deity through the god's legendary seat. For example, temples which face southwest indicate that the seat of the god is northeast. This directionality indicates that the seat exists within the realm of the celestial gods, and that the god has the power of celestial beings—or in other words—the high gods. The Asclepeion at Fregellae, on the other hand, faces

[145] Edlund-Berry, 2005, 590.
[146] Crawford, 1984, 25.
[147] Edlund-Berry, 2005, 599.
[148] In all of Italy, the sanctuary at Fregellae is the closest example to the Asclepeion at Epidaurus—the original and largest sanctuary (Turfa, 2006b, 65).

south/southeast, indicating that Asclepius would have his seat in the west. The west, in this tradition, is the "domain of the chthonic powers."[149] This location emphasizes Asclepius' experience as a human figure—particularly one who has experienced death.

Likewise, the area directly below the Asclepeion at Fregellae served as a necropolis in the Republican period.[150] Not only does this enforce the connection to chthonic power, but it is also a similar practice to (or a holdout from) Etruscan healing cults. This directionality and proximity to the necropolis enhances the identification of Asclepius as a figure with chthonic powers, and underscores Asclepius as an intermediate figure—an immortal mortal—aiding his legitimacy as a healing figure in this Italic version of his cult.

The votive offerings are largely anatomical and date from the middle republican period—from the late fourth to the early second century BCE.[151] Part of the deposit of votives that was found predates the erection of the larger sanctuary. This indicates that perhaps there was an earlier version of the cult site, perhaps also to Asclepius. This 'predecessor cult' received 100 votive plaques, 69 uteri, 3 hearts, and several other models during its period of use. The nature of these votives offerings are more closely related to those found at other Italian sites—especially sites in southern Etruria, Latium, and Campania—rather than those typically associated with Asclepius.[152]

Of the votives found at Fregellae, the majority depict feet, legs, and heads, followed closely by arms and hands. This assemblage of votives is consistent with similar nearby sites like Ponti di Nona and Lavinium. These sites also have a larger proportion of appendages—arms,

[149] Turfa, 2006b, 74.
[150] Crawford, 1986, 44.
[151] Crawford 1984, 24.
[152] Turfa, 2006b, 70; Edlund-Berry, 2005, 590.

legs, feet—than internal organs.[153] Additionally, an analysis by F. Ferrea and A. Pinna determined that the clay that was used for the votives at Fregellae was the exact same type of clay used in the nearby shrines as well. [154] Therefore, the items were similar in style and composition and were sold locally.

The nature of the votive dedication and cult at Fregellae demonstrates a strong local Italian connection. The cults used votives which were made of local material, and incorporated other religious aspects that drew strong connections to Etruscan cults. The devotion at Fregellae can be contrasted to the Tiber Island Asclepeion which can be seen as an imported Greek cult due to its early date, the language, and the rituals used.

Fregellae presents a unique opportunity to view how Asclepius was venerated and how votives were used in the Republican period in rural Italy. The documentation of the findings helps to flesh out a picture of wider votive use during this period, by providing a solid collection against which to compare others. Overall, the site helps to demonstrate how the veneration of this cult fits in to not only Greek ideas of healing, and the power to heal, but also to Etruscan models. Fregellae is a good example with which to think about the ways in which the cult of Asclepius bridges not only the realms of celestial and terrestrial spaces, but also Greek and Etruscan societies.

Conclusion

Asclepius was an influential and important deity to the people inhabiting the area which is now called Italy. The popularity of the cult withstood the test of time since, “the cult of Asclepius appears to have attracted a greater amount of attention and from a better class of Rome, so that after the first century CE it steadily gained influence until the time of Antoninus

[153] Potter, 29.
[154] Edlund-Berry, 2005, 590.

Pius when there was a definite revival of interest in it."[155] Asclepius' influence in the region has to do with already established cults, his intermediate status, and the effective nature of votive offerings on the psycho and somatic issues of the practitioners.

The Asclepeion on Tiber Island is now the hospital of Saint Bartholomew, and has continued to heal people within that same sacred space once occupied by the temple of Asclepius. In Italy in particular, this same transformation occurs as many shrines to Asclepius and other healers became churches or hospitals dedicated to martyrs, saints, and Mary. Thus, this religious idea of healing—which was central to the cult of Asclepius—was appropriated and carried into Christianity.

[155] Jayne, 471.

Chapter 3
Introduction to and Methodology of the Study of Christian Cults

The Rise of Christianity and Christian Healing Cults

Whereas the first two chapters of this paper dealt with healing cults in Italy before the turn of the millennium, the remainder of the paper will focus on healing cults that emerged along with Christianity. Christianity[156] began as an apocalyptic Jewish movement, but quickly redefined Judaism to include gentiles. Paul's letters are one of the first pieces of evidence for this movement away from Judaism.[157]

The Acts of the Apostles is possibly the first source which discusses the movement of Christianity out of the area of Israel and into Europe. This text was written before the end the second century and discusses Paul's travels. In this text, Paul is arrested by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and sent to stand before Caesar in Rome. Though he is arrested, he continues to spread the message of Jesus.[158] This story demonstrates that "the gospel would go to the 'ends of the earth,' for the message of Christ was now spread far and wide, and is proclaimed in the very heart of the empire, in the capital city itself."[159] The account in the Acts of the Apostles demonstrates how "the gospel came to cross ethnic boundaries," and "how the Christian gospel ceased to be a message only to Jews."[160] Specifically for the purposes of this study, this book recounts the introduction of Christianity into Italy by way of Rome—"The heart of the empire."[161]

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[156] At this point, the idea of Christianity or a Christian had not been fully developed—these people would more likely have been identified as followers of Christ. In fact, the Acts of the Apostles is the first text to use the term 'Christian.' For the sake of convenience and consistency, the term 'Christian' and 'Christianity' will be used in this paper.
[157] For example, in Galatians he discusses the issue of circumcision and whether it was needed to be a follower of Christ. He concludes it was not (Galatians 5:6).
[158] Ehrman, 146; Acts 28.
[159] Ehrman, 146.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

Christianity grew and spread throughout Italy, and by the end of the first century Rome had grown to be a city of particular importance to Christian belief. There is evidence that there were presiding leaders early on, and by the end of the first century there is a documented letter from Bishop Clement to Corinthian Christians about financial issues, a source which solidifies what becomes papal power, and also reveals the importance of Rome during this early period.[162]

By 165 CE the Roman Christian community had begun to build monuments celebrating martyrs and apostles. The necropolis on Vatican Hill and a shrine to Paul on the road to Ostia are such examples.[163] During the fourth century, martyrs began to be "made present in spaces" and Rome seemed to "turn its back on the ancient temples and civic monuments within the city, to pay its respects in throngs to the martyrs beyond the walls."[164]

With the conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century, Christianity gained political importance. At this point the figure 'the bishop of Rome' was changed to 'the pope,' and gained much more power. During this period, the pope claimed Rome as the official capital of the Church. In the eighth century, the pope established Rome as the capital of the Papal States—the territory of Italy. This remained the case until Italy received independence in 1870.[165]

Throughout these periods, Rome remained a Holy City and a seat of power, even during times of stress like the Avignon captivity. Because of Rome's influence, Italy became strongly identified with (what we now consider to be) Catholic Christianity. However, many ideas and religious practices from previous time periods and religious traditions were retained in popular Christianity. Anatomical votive offerings are one of these practices, which can provide insight

[162] McManners, 39.
[163] Ibid.
[164] McManners, 85.
[165] Lagasse.

into how all of these changes affected the religiosity of Italians. The two cults that will be examined in order to highlight these changes are the cult of saints and the cult of Mary.

Important Characteristics and Changes in Votive Cult

There are several changes which occur regarding the dedication of anatomical votive offerings within Christian cults. Several of these changes will be discussed further in the following examinations of the individual cults. However, a background of the changes will help contextualize that discussion.

In these cults, the personalities and natures of the figures are important, and this changes the way that votives are thought about and dedicated in Christianity. The type of votives and the reason for dedication of a votive to one figure, for instance, are not necessarily the same as for another. The status of the figure is also important. Both the saints and Mary become popular figures of veneration in part due to their intermediate status. Saints were humans that died and with their deaths gained extraordinary powers. Mary was the mother of Jesus and has the ability to pray to Jesus and God on behalf of a petitioner. These qualities are important to the cults themselves and to the practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings.

The fabric and material of the votives change during this period. Whereas before, the anatomical votives were largely terracotta, the emergence of Christian cults brings variability in the material used, and wax becomes the standard. Though wax anatomical votives were present in antiquity, wax is seems to have been introduced to Christian anatomical dedication in the eleventh century, and became widespread in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as the preferred medium for anatomical votives.[166] Wax became popular because of its verisimilitude and the ease of the molding technique. Additionally, silver anatomical votives were introduced in

[166] Holmes, 161.

part as a status signifier in the fourteenth century.[167] However, all such theories are simply a matter of the survival of evidence. The votives that remain are the ones which tell the story.

Again, these issues will reemerge later in the chapters; however, it is important to have a basis for the changes that occurred, before beginning the detailed discussion of the cults. These changes, both in the introduction of Christianity to Italy, and the changes in how votive cult was practiced and thought about, bring about difficulty in methodology and scholarship.

Methodology and Scholarship

Though the act of dedication and the type dedicated objects are similar in the cults of the Etruscans, Asclepius, the Saints, and Mary, the method of studying these acts of dedication differ. The methods of studying these cults diverge because of the history of each of the cults. The cult of Etruscans and the cult of Asclepius were venerated within a very specific time period—largely the fourth through the first centuries BCE— that is easily isolated within the archaeological record. Therefore, the study of these two cults—and the study of votive use within these cults—is facilitated by this specific chronology and the material evidence that has been found in the archaeological record that has been dated to this period.

Conversely, the cult of saints and the cult of Mary have thriving religious followings to this day. Many sites and churches are still used for the same purpose as they were when they were built. In sites that are continually functioning, it is impossible to access or isolate information about earlier periods of worship from only the site itself. In some cases, sites have not been excavated, and there simply is no archaeological evidence from which to draw information. For this reason, a reliance on primary literature and textual sources is key to understanding the history of the cult and the votive practices that may have occurred at a site.

[167] Ibid.

Though the general veneration of Mary and the saints has been continuously documented throughout history, the dedication of votive objects within these cults has not. There is a distinct gap in archaeological and textual records regarding this practice in Late Antique Italy. According to extant sources and archaeological information, the dedication of anatomical votives jumps from the cult of Asclepius during the Republican and Early Imperial periods to the cult of the saints and Mary during the High Middle Ages. There is strong evidence for continuity of this practice from the Middle Ages into Modernity; however, there is no such evidence to definitively lay that claim for Late Antiquity.

It is unclear whether this silence emerges from lack of documentation or the lack of the practice. This time period deserves further study—particularly archaeologically. In gathering more information about this period, we can determine the role of the dedication of offerings during the Medieval, Early Modern, and even Modern periods. That is—with more evidence about Late Antiquity we could determine whether this tradition of dedicating anatomical votives is one which has had unbroken continuity, or whether it is a tradition that has been self-consciously renewed.

Since the sources available on the dedication of votive offerings come from Medieval, Pre-Modern, and Modern periods, the study of this veneration will be located in these time periods. It is clear that votive offerings were present and popular both before and after Late Antiquity. Whether the period of Late Antiquity saw the dedication of anatomical votive offerings is an important question, but cannot be proven or disproven within this project. What is important is that the practice was popular in the Medieval period and continues to this day. Additionally, it is important that this practice, as it is manifested in the Medieval period, contains

many of the same characteristics which can be found in prior healing cults: dedications of images of body parts to an intermediary figure in the expectation of healing.

As previously suggested, the evidence for the practice of dedicating anatomical votives in the cult of saints and the cult of Mary primarily comes from textual sources. There are several primary textual sources about wax votives; however, the objects themselves no longer exist due to changes in church thought and practice, and the fragility of the items. With the advent of such variety in votives, church officials began to document the rare and expensive votives rather than the wax votives.[168] Part of the lack of evidence for wax anatomical offerings in records is also due to the malleability and fragility of the wax.

This lack of material evidence can also be explained using the following example about wax votives within the cult of Mary. In the early sixteenth century, a friar at the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Mantua decided to display all of the anatomical votives that had been dedicated to the Maria della Grazie. The friar melted down the existing votives and regenerated them to form more cohesive decoration. The friar used eleven different molds.[169] Thus, he created,

> hundreds of new, uniform anatomical waxes and combined them to form courses of breasts, eyes, hearts, and hands; ornamental bands of alternating eyes and breasts encircled by smaller button-like breasts; and swags made of eyes, converging upon flowers fashioned out of breasts and radiating hearts.[170]

Whereas in some cases the churches only documented the votives that were of value, in other cases the wax votives were destroyed. Overall, records of the original wax votives and the artifacts themselves at many sites are largely nonexistent.

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[168] Holmes, 164.
[169] This number has been estimated based on the remaining votives in the church.
[170] Holmes, 180. See Figure 5.

The study of anatomical votives in the cult of saints and the cult of Mary must rely heavily upon primary textual evidence. These accounts help to describe the practice of votive dedication and provide a picture of what the ritual looked like during the Medieval and Early Modern periods, and also provide a knowledge of the votive objects, though these objects no longer exist. The study of these cults show the richness of this practice within Italy, the continuity of the practice from the Medieval period to today, and the uncanny similarities of the votive dedication to those found in ancient Etruscan and Roman cults. The difficulties involved in undertaking this research and establishing a methodology demonstrate a need for further scholarship in this area, particularly of dedicatory practices during Late Antiquity, in order to sort out some of the larger questions of continuity.

Chapter 4
Fragmentation, Dedication, and Healing in the Cult of Saints

The terms 'martyr' and 'saint' refer to two distinct phases within Christian veneration. Christianity began to develop a strong following in the third century. During this period there were a number of conflicts between Roman polytheists and the newly emerging 'Christian' monotheists. The conflicts occurred when a Christian would refuse to "acknowledge respect to the gods, including the emperor, by whose favour the empire was preserved."[171] Refusing to swear an oath to the emperor's genius (spirit) resulted in imprisonment, torture, being fed to wild animals in the amphitheater, or, if the offender was a Roman citizen, beheading.[172] What resulted is what many people think of as the 'persecution' of Christianity. These punished Christians—martyrs— began to be venerated as semi-divine early in Christian history as saints.

As Christianity became an accepted religion, and eventually the major religion of the empire, the number of martyred Christians began to wane. Instead, in the fourth century a second wave of 'saints' emerged. These figures were predominantly ascetic Christians.[173] The ascetic men and women would deprive themselves of food, water, shelter, and human contact in an attempt to emulate the suffering of Jesus. These 'living dead' came to be the new martyrs of Christianity and such examples include chaste devotees like Saint Catherine, and desert fathers like Saint Anthony. However, a third type of canonization emerged as the church began to disapprove of the ascetic lifestyle. These figures were largely monastic figures who were canonized on behalf of their work for the church and their good deeds during their lifetime.[174] These include many of the Medieval, Pre-Modern, and Modern saints like Saint Francis of Assisi, and even Mother Theresa.

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[171] McManners, 47.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Wilson, 13.
[174] Bagnoli, 8.

One essential facet of the cult of saints is the role of the saint as an intercessor. The saint is viewed as a holy figure who is able to act as an intermediate intercessor between humans and god—allowing a human to petition God for help. Saints are most often petitioned in cases concerning health, disease, illness, and infection.

In the Medieval cult of saints, health and piety were linked. Though dramatic and complete healing miracles occurred, they were much rarer than miracles which temporarily relieved suffering or helped one to cope with chronic illness or maladies. In fact, Medieval pilgrims often had to make multiple pilgrimages to shrines because their condition was not healed completely, or it had returned.[175] This healing as relief did not diminish the power or meaning of the miracle from the saint. In fact, it emphasizes how the idea of suffering is part of "a cosmic vision of redemption."[176] Christians sometimes conceived of disease and suffering as coming from forces of evil and sin, and led to the Medieval practice of asking for forgiveness and conducting acts of penitence as a way to receive healing.[177] Pain and the healing of pain were central to religious life, and represented the power and meaning of the faith of the petitioners.[178]

In the cult of saints, the dedication of votive offerings demonstrates the power of a saint to intercede, and demonstrates the importance of healing as it relates to relieving suffering and showing forgiveness for sins. These requests for help are visually explained by dedicating images of the body part, and the votive offering localizes the affliction in order to help the saint

[175] Porterfield, 4.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Porterfield, 5.
[178] Porterfield, 4.

locate the exact area which is in need of a miracle. This ritual is an important aspect of the cult, as it connects the power to heal to the power to intercede. [179]

There are many Italian saints who performed healing tasks or miracles, and it is not possible to explain or examine all of them within this study. For the purposes of the discussion, I will focus on one type of saint in particular in order to highlight how all of the facets of martyrdom, canonization, healing, and dedication of votives operated. This cult—the cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian—demonstrates a particular synthesis of characteristics which served to make up successful and vibrant healing cults within Italy, and demonstrates the lasting popularity of the cult and the votive practice within the region.

Patron Saints and Healing Cults

An important role of a saint is the power to intercede to provide miracles. Each saint has the power to intercede; however, a personalization and specialization of saints develops as an important aspect of the cult. Patron saints—as they are called— are claimed by towns, areas, countries, families, professions, and diseases. They use their special and specialized powers, gained from their martyrdom or their acts during life, to protect and heal these specific places, people, and even parts.

The power of a patron saint comes from the intercession and intermediacy of the figures. Peter Brown places this status of the saints firmly within the established late Roman notions of the patronage system. The saint was akin to a patron, supporting and working on behalf of a client. Instead of providing financial, political, or social support, the patron saint provided spiritual support and protection: “the martyr took on the distinctive late-Roman face. He was the patronus, the invisible, heavenly concomitant of the patronage exercised palpably on earth by the

[179] Wilson, 3.

bishop."[180] This image of the saint as a late Roman patron comes from their intermediary status as figures halfway between the realm of humans and the realm of heaven. Saints were "special bodies [which] mediated between humanity and the divine,"[181] and "the patron saint was duty bound to provide both earthly and heavenly protection."[182]

Brown notes that this image of the saint as an intercessor is both a continuity of and change from ideas of divine figures in antiquity. A comparison can be made to the Greek hero cult: both the hero and the saint are figures that become sanctified after death and retain certain powers. In Late Roman society, it was an accepted notion that, "even to offer some form of worship to the deceased whether as a family or as part of a public cult in the case of exceptional dead persons such as heroes or emperors, was common, if kept within strictly defined limits."[183] However, the way in which the relationship between the human and the universe was construed changed during this period; the lines between the human, the dead, and the divine were "subtly redrawn" during Late Antiquity.[184] The saints became powerful divine figures, much more powerful than ancestors or heroes.

Brown writes that there was, "the insistence of all Christian writers that precisely because they had died as human beings, [saints] enjoyed close intimacy with God."[185] Their human nature made them closer to God, and gave them greater powers. Saints were good advocates as figures that were dead but divine humans. Saints also had the capability to become intercessors with other deceased persons, and fielded many requests for intercession on behalf of deceased family members.[186] Saints were considered to be extremely powerful intercessors—on account of

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[180] Brown, 38.
[181] Bagnoli, 5.
[182] Bagnoli, 24.
[183] Brown, 5.
[184] Brown, 5-6.
[185] Brown, 6.
[186] Leemans, 11.

their close relationship with God— who were able to provide influential connections, either between humans and the dead, or between humans and God.[187]

Brown writes that, "The intimacy with God was the *sine que non* of their ability to intercede and so to protect their fellow mortals. The martyr was the 'friend of God.' He was an intercessor in a way which the hero could never have been."[188] The patron saint had a wealth of power and held an important role within Late Antique Christianity, and within the Late Antique Mediterranean worldview. Part of the saint's responsibility came in the form of protecting someone for the afterlife, ensuring their escape from purgatory, and securing a place in heaven. However, an additional part of this power came in the form of protecting humans on earth. This intercession combined with knowledge of human bodies, and experience as humans was part of the reason why saints gained such reputations as prolific healers. Since they were once humans, and indeed suffered as humans did, saints had the capacity for dealing with these essentially human, corporeal issues, like disease and bodily trauma.[189]

There are a multitude of saints whose sole skill revolves around curing (and in some cases causing) disease. Some saints are considered to be general healers—Saint Sebastian, Saint Roch, and Saints Cosmas and Damian are examples. However, there are many more examples of saints who have specialized and specific healing skills. As the canon of saints became large, and came to include all types of sanctified figures—martyrs, ascetics, and monastic figures— there was an overabundance of shrines and saints available for worship. It is possible that in order to keep from having too many redundant 'general healing' saints, specializations occurred. The

[187] Ibid.
[188] Brown, 6.
[189] Leemans, 11.

specialization of saints may have occurred in towns and cities in response to the multiplicity of shrines available.[190]

An example of a specialized saint is Saint Lucy. Saint Lucy was and remains firmly associated with eyes and eye related ailments, and is considered to be the patron saint of eyes. Saint Lucy was killed during the time of Diocletian and was formally canonized in the Jeromian Martyrology in 450.[191] Her martyrdom story and its alternate versions help to explain her association with healing and the incorporation of votive dedication into her cult.

One version of her hagiography comes from the *Legenda Aurea*[192] written by Jacobus de Voragine.[193] The tale begins in 304 CE, when Lucy made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Agatha in Catania in order to pray for a cure for her ailing mother. While at the shrine, Lucy fell asleep and the Saint appeared to her in a dream. Upon waking, Lucy's mother was healed. Lucy declared her belief in Jesus, and renounced sexuality and material goods.[194] Rejected, her suitor reported her to a Roman consul, who commanded her to sacrifice to the Roman gods. When she refused, she was carried off to a brothel "to be sexually violated until she died."[195] Her chastity was preserved by the Holy Spirit, when it caused her to be too heavy for even "a thousand men, and even a thousand pairs of oxen" to carry.[196] After further torture, she was burned alive at a stake. According to another source by Aldhelm, heaven-sent rain showers extinguished the flames, [197] though the earliest Greek accounts from the fifth or sixth century state that Saint Lucy was beheaded or stabbed.[198] A temple was constructed over her place of martyrdom. The site

[190] Wilson, 18.
[191] Cassell, 74.
[192] The *Legenda Aurea* is a famous book of hagiographies.
[193] Cassell, 73.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid, original Jacobus de Voragine.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid. Original Aldhelm.
[198] Ibid.

became a place where her body cured the faithful of disease; the original tale unfortunately fails to specify the maladies which were cured.[199]

Alternate versions of this story hold important keys for interpreting how Saint Lucy became a specialized healing figure, and how she became associated with diseases of the eye. In these accounts, Lucy is depicted as a young and beautiful maiden. Many men were in love with her, and in particular one man named Paschasius. In order to remain chaste, and in order to keep him chaste, she "pried her eyes out with a wooden stake and sent them to a youth on a meat platter. Thus disfigured, she removed a cause of sin for others and vowed to remain chaste."[200] This version of her story is highly contested. Cassell argues that the account emerged to reconcile discrepancies between her hagiography and how she was venerated. He writes, "Perhaps because some need was felt to bridge the discrepancy between the early account of Lucia's martyrdom and the common invocation of her intercession for visual problems, there arose the later legend of her self-mutilation."[201]

The religious iconography of Saint Lucy expresses this association with eyes. She is often depicted holding a tray displaying eyes—as a symbol of her name, story, or healing powers. Though this association could be linked to this hagiographical narrative, Lucy's patronage of light and sight seems to predate or simply be independent of this alternate legend of the ocular

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[199] Ibid.

[200] Cassell, 74.

[201] Ibid. An interesting textual connection to Italy, Italian culture, and the Cult of Saint Lucy emerges from this alternative martyrdom tale. Scholars, including Anthony Cassell, have made the connection between this tale and a line in Matthew 19:12: "there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven" (Cassell, 74). Thinking that this story was meant to reflect this passage could have made Saint Lucy seem more holy or virtuous: a blind woman making herself blind for the kingdom of god. However, this story can also be read as a literal retelling of a tale found in Valerius Maximus' *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilius Libri,* written around 31 CE.(Found in Cassell, 74. Original source : IX, IV, 5, ext. 1). This tale recounts the story of an Etruscan youth named Spurinna. Spurinna, like Lucy, deformed his own face because its beauty attracted the love of too many women. In disfiguring himself, he was able to remain pure and modest—retaining *pudor* (Cassell, 74). In this way, the story of Lucy plucking out her own eyes in order to remain chaste, and Spurinna the Etruscan disfiguring himself to remain pure, demonstrate the important value of *pudor* in Italy. This story demonstrates a longstanding Italian influence on the cult of Saint Lucy.

mutilation.[202] The association could also be a result of her name. Lucia is linguistically related to the Latin *lux, lucis* meaning light, and things that can be seen. Cassell writes that this tradition could, "Link patronage and iconography to the saint's name…on the pattern of such legends as that of Saint Christopher as bearer of Christ, Saint Brendan as a bearer of a brand or torch, or Saint Maurice as a Moorish soldier.[203] Regardless of origin, this association with visual healing power intensified her cult and established her as a powerful and popular saint throughout Italy.

Though Saint Lucy was said to have been from Syracuse, in Southern Italy, her main shrine was eventually established in Venice, where her bones were interred at the church of Santa Lucia. However, in 1860, the construction of the Venezia Santa Lucia railway station necessitated the destruction of the church and the attached convent.[204] Although the church was destroyed, Saint Lucy's relics are said to remain in Venice, where they remain venerated to this day.[205] Saint Lucy was undoubtedly one of the most popular and long standing cults among the 'holy incorruptables' in Venice.[206]

Saint Lucy's position as a saint with power to heal eye-related ailments means that her cult had particular emphasis on the dedication of votive offerings. Even now, a quick search of the internet will turn up many sites selling what are known as "Saint Lucy eyes." These eyes are often metallic renderings of a pair of eyes, but are also common in wax, as amulets, or even as small baked rolls formed in the shape of eyeballs.[207] These offerings often include a hole from which they can be strung and displayed in a church. Many votives are inscribed with messages of thanks—recognizing Saint Lucy's role in healing, or petitioning her for help. Such votives have

[202] Cassell, 72.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Munk, 84.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Cassell, 83. See Figures 6 & 7.

been dedicated to her in shrines Florence, Venice, Syracuse, and even in New Orleans.[208] Anatomical votive dedication to Saint Lucy is so popular that the origin of her association with eyes, discussed previously, could have emerged from this practice. Anthony Cassell argues, "her 'severed eyes' were originally merely an ex-voto representation."[209] Regardless of the origin or consequences of this practice, dedicating anatomical votives to Saint Lucy is a firmly established part of the veneration of her cult to this day.

In Saint Lucy's many and varied martyrdom tales, there are interesting mentions of and allusions to other famous healing saints, particularly Saint Agatha—who is also venerated as a Patron Saint.[210] It is Saint Agatha to whom Lucy goes to in order to petition for her mother's health. Not only is Saint Agatha considered to be one of the major healing saints, she is specifically remembered and worshiped as a patron saint of women's health issues—particularly breast cancer and breast related maladies.[211]

Interestingly, the cult of Saint Agatha also functions similarly to the cult of Saint Lucy in terms of votive dedication, and the iconography is similar to Saint Lucy's. Saint Agatha is often depicted as presenting a plate upon which are images of breasts—just like Lucy is portrayed presenting a plate upon which there are eyeballs. This could be related to her martyrdom tale, which includes the amputation of her breasts.[212] Just as Saint Lucy receives mostly (but not exclusively) eye related votives, Saint Agatha also receives mostly breast related offerings. These votives are wax or metal images of breasts which are dedicated for healing; they come in three dimensional sculptural, relief, and semi-spherical ornamental forms.[213]

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[208] Francis, 343.
[209] Cassell, 72.
[210] Francis, 335.
[211] Francis, 342.
[212] Cruz, 207.
[213] Churchill, 124. See Figure 8.

Italy had a wide range of cults, in which specialization played a large role. Saint Lucy and Saint Agatha are two examples of this phenomenon of Patron Saints dedicated to certain maladies. However, as the previous sections of this study have demonstrated, this tradition of healing—particularly by means of votive offerings— is a well-founded tradition within Italy and may have, in turn, impacted the spread of such specialized cults.

The saint as a part-human part-divine figure allows for a special relationship of patronage. Many saints specialize in healing the sick, and this aspect has become an important part of Italian popular religion. This emphasis on healing patrons can help to demonstrate how the dedication of votive offerings was able to emerge and thrive within the cult of saints. But the status of the saint, lingering between heaven and earth, and retaining powers from both, may not be the only reason why they were credited with such ability to heal and why the use of anatomical votives was so widespread and popular. The relics of the saint are an essential piece of information which helps to put together this picture of votive dedication, intercession patronage, and healing.

Disembodiment, Fragmentation, and Healing: Relics and Anatomical Votives

Relics are a central part of the veneration of saints. Relics can consist of any holy object—a piece of the true cross, a piece of cloth that touched a saint, a shroud. However, in the context of healing, the most popular relics were body parts of the saints. These relics could consist of bones, hair, fingernails, skin, or even tears and sweat. The cult of saints used relics—dismembered pieces of a saint—in order to heal, and the devotees of these cults also used anatomical votives— isolated images of a body part needing to be healed—to indicate their need. The parallel imagery between these two practices, and their close interaction within this cult,

inspire interesting questions and issues to consider about the meaning of this fragmentation and dismemberment.

The practice and use of relics is unique in the history of the Ancient Mediterranean. Brown writes, "Burial customs are among the notoriously stable aspects of most cultures. They are also an element in the religious life of a society that is splendidly indifferent to the labels usually placed upon forms of religious behaviors by the tradition of religious history" and "burial practice is part and parcel of being human."[214] The importance of the relics to the cult of saints would have been a massive shift from the established burial practices in Greco-Roman or Jewish society. Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions had emphasized keeping bodies intact and buried. In fact, it was taboo to dismember the dead. Nevertheless, saintly relics are literally torn apart pieces of a skeleton. Brown writes, "as for the handling of dead bodies, the Christian cult of saints rapidly came to involve the digging up, the moving, the dismemberment…of the bones of the dead, and frequently, the placing of these in areas from which the dead had once been excluded."[215] The disinterment and fragmentation of a saint's body would have been scandalous and shocking, and would have been a strange and appalling shift for those outside of the cult.[216]

However, the use of religious relics became so popular that after the council of Nicaea churches needed to have a relic of a saint in order to be considered a legitimate institution.[217] This change was, in part, due to pilgrimage. Religious pilgrims would travel to (and spend money at) shrines where the remains of saints were located. Visitors to saint shrines perceived a benefit from contact with the relics and desired to keep a part of the power of the saints; visitors

[214] Brown, 24.
[215] Brown, 4.
[216] Bagnoli, 7.
[217] Wilson, 5.

would take pieces of saints as souvenirs. This taking of 'saintly souvenirs' could have added to the amount of division and trade of saint relics around the Mediterranean.[218]

Despite fragmentation, the saint provided miracles. This fragmentation could be compared to the Eucharist. Just like the wafer represents the entirety of Jesus' body, a relic represents the entirety of a saint's body.[219] The remains of the saint would become more powerful and more potent after death than the saint could have been in life.[220] As a human, the body was marked by sin and human weakness, which disappeared after death, leaving only the sanctified remains of the heavenly intermediary.[221] Brown writes, "It was a place where the normal laws of the grave were held to be suspended. In a relic, the chilling anonymity of human remains could be thought to be still heavy with the fullness of a beloved person."[222]

Tactility became an essential part of the pilgrimage and healing process. Brown mentions the "touching and kissing of the bones of the dead" as being distinctly different from the process of digging and dismembering.[223] Both gestures are inherently tactile, but each carries a different connotation and meaning. This tactile action of veneration was an essential part of the healing process. Basil of Ancyra said, "He who touches the bones of a martyr partakes in the sanctity and grave that resides in them."[224] In this way, the bones facilitate the intercession: the touching of the relics connects the venerator to the divine power of the saint, who then intercedes.

This tactility as a requisite for healing is an idea that can be found in biblical literature. In Mark 5:21-34 there is an account of a hemorrhaging woman in the crowd. She reaches out and

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[218] MacMullen, 131-132.
[219] Bagnoli, 8. In fact, most saints' celebrations, wherein the relics are paraded about the town, include a formal taking of the Eucharist (Wilson, 11).
[220] Bagnoli, 8.
[221] Wilson, 9. Many canonized saints, especially from the Medieval period, were engaged in ascetic behavior. The goal of this behavior was a denial of the body. As a result many of these ascetics were little more than the dead, but after death, their bodies were thought to continue on, uncorrupted (Wilson, 10.).
[222] Brown, 11.
[223] Brown, 4.
[224] Leemans, 12.

touches Jesus' cloak in order to be healed. He notices the power go forth from him, and reacts: "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'"[225] In this scene, Jesus' power is seen as partitive—with the one part of him exerting enough and more power to heal, and the touch takes it away. He says, "He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." The belief of the woman, and this tactile act of veneration, allows her to be healed.

Likewise, the power contained in the relics of the saints was so powerful that there are also accounts which state that even being in the neighborhood of a relic, or touching (or in some cases consuming) the dust, plants, or ground nearby could result in successful healing.[226] This distinct method of communication was how healing transferred from the spiritual body to the infirm.

The imagery—particularly the more violent aspects of dismemberment of saints' bodies—is reminiscent of older healing cults. Brown likens the experience of petitioning the saints to an experience Aelius Aristides had and described while within an Asclepeion. While at the Asclepeion, Aelius Aristedes dreams that Asclepius says it is necessary to rip Aelius apart to replace his nerves in order to properly heal him.[227] Brown uses this example to show the violent aspects of more ancient healing cults, and how they may relate to the use of relics. The dismemberment of body parts—in the form of creating relics—is necessary to provide healing.

Anatomical votives work in parallel with the use of relics within this cult. Just as relics are made by dismembering saints, anatomical votives are dismembered and fragmented body parts. In fact, the presence of votives hanging at saints' shrines might have struck a visitor as a gravesite, or even a butcher shop. Just as the dismembered body parts of saints represent and

[225] Mark, 5:21-34. Citation is from the NRSV.
[226] MacMullen, 131.
[227] Brown, 80.

even hold the power of the whole, anatomical votive offerings likewise represent more than simply an isolated limb or an organ. A terracotta or wax body part does not represent an amputated body part, rather it represents the body part isolated from the whole.[228] As Jessica Hughes writes, "the detached corporeal fragment can never fully suppress the memory of the body to which it once belonged."[229]

Anatomical votives serve to localize an ailment. This isolation allows for the petitioner to demonstrate a specific problem, to help the saint find the cause, and to create more efficient and accurate healing. Alternatively, they are dedicated in thanks, recognizing the specific part that was healed—noting the exact location of the miracle that occurred. It is interesting to think about the donation of votives in conjunction with the veneration of relics. Both practices emphasize ideas of dismemberment and fragmentation, a localization of power, and a representation of a whole. Most importantly, both practices are central to the healing practices found within the cult of saints.

Case Study: the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Isernia

Isernia, a small rural town located north of Naples and south east of Rome, had a documented votive cult as late as the eighteenth century. The votives were dedicated to the twin saints Cosmas and Damian. Their origin story and the documentation of their continued veneration in Italy make their cult a good demonstration of the ways in which the cult of saints used and thought about votive objects. This church in Isernia is an important example of this long lasting healing tradition within Italy.

Saints Cosmas and Damian were twin brothers who were martyred during the time of Diocletian—around the year 287. The *Legenda Aurea* says that they were beheaded, but only

[228] Cassell, note, p. 83.
[229] Hughes, 223.

after miraculously surviving torture by means of fire, water, and crucifixion. During their lives, they were doctors in Asia Minor. They “were learned in the art of medicine and of leechcraft, and received so great grace of God that they healed all maladies and languish, not only of men, but also of beast.”[230] They achieved great fame and renown as doctors, but refused to be paid for their service, being popularly known as the □νάργυροι—“the silverless ones.”[231] This connection to medicine and healing during life only intensified with their deaths, when they became known as the patron saints of medical practitioners.[232]

The *Legenda Aurea* explains this intensification of healing power after their deaths in the form of an anecdote about a Roman man. This Roman man was inflicted with a cancer so large that it had virtually “consumed all of his thigh.”[233] The man prayed to Cosmas and Damian for their aid. While praying the man received divine incubation—he saw the two saints in a dream. In the dream, the saints discussed with one another about the method of healing: “bringing with them an instrument and ointment, of whom that one said to that other ‘where shall we have flesh, when we have cut away the rotten flesh to fill the void place?’”[234] One of the twins suggested that the cancerous flesh should be replaced with that of a recently deceased Ethiopian man, buried in Saint Peter’s churchyard, whose flesh “was yet fresh.”[235] The saints then proceeded with the surgery within in the dream. When the man awoke, he was healed, yet no one believed the dream or his miraculous healing. The Roman proved his miraculous recovery “by opening

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[230] Francis, 333. Original source citation as found in Francis: Caxton, William. *The Golden Legend or Loves of the Saints as Englished* (Transcription is from the Italian original of Jacopo da Voragine). Venice, 1494. Vol. V, p. 172-173.
[231] Meier. Legend says that Cosmas and Damian had to explain to worshippers that they were not Castor and Pollox (MacMullen, Note. 68)
[232] Gentilcore, 83.
[233] Bonser, 7.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.

the tomb of the moor; where 'they found the thigh of him cut off and that other thigh in the tomb instead of his.'"[236]

Cosmas and Damian were powerful healers with a thriving cult in Rome (the setting of this story), and throughout Italy. The cult in Isernia had documented votive practice as late as the eighteenth century. The documentation of the practices of this cult comes from a letter written by Sir William Hamilton. Sir Hamilton visited Isernia in 1780 and observed the local veneration of Cosmas and Damian. He described this veneration as the continuation of devotion "still paid to Priapus, the obscene divinity of the ancients through another denomination."[237] Sir Hamilton relates this cult behavior to similar acts performed in the cult of Priapus in antiquity, since he perceived the specialization of cult in Isernia to have been fertility and sexual health. He uses the history of the city—'one of the most ancient cities' to legitimize this claim of continuity, and to support his argument that they venerate, "the modern Priapus, St. Cosmo."[238]

In this letter, he gives a fascinating and detailed account of votive practice in Isernia. In the following passages, he recounts the festival, the saints, and the types of anatomical votive dedications:

> This church is dedicated to St. Cosmos and Damianus. of the days of the fair, the relicks of the saints are exposed, and afterwards carried in procession from the cathedral of the city to this church, attended by a prodigious concourse of people. In the city, and at the fair, ex-voti of wax, representing the male parts of generation, of various dimensions, some even of the length of a palm, are publically offered to sale. There are also waxen vows, that represent other parts of the body mixed with them; but those there are few in comparison of the number of the Priapi. The devout distributers of these vows carry a basket full of them in one hand, and hold a plate in the other to receive the money, crying aloud "St. Cosmo and Damiano!" If you

[236] Bonser,7-8.
[237] Knight, 8; 4.
[238] Knight, 8; 7.

> ask the price of one the answer is,*piu ci metti, piu meriti*—
> the more you give, the more's the merit." In the vestibule
> are two tables, at each of which one of the canons of the
> church presides, this crying out *Qui si riceveno le miffe,*
> *e litanie*: "here masses and litanies are received"; and the
> other, *Qui so riceveno li voti*—here the vows are received."
> The price of pass is fifteen Neapolitan grains, and of a litany
> five grains. On each table is a large basin for the reception
> of the different offerings. The vows are chiefly presented
> by the female sex; and they are seldom such as represent
> legs, arms, etc. but most commonly the male parts of the
> generation.[239]

His account also describes the practice by which these votives are dedicated:

> he heard a woman say at the time she presented a vow…
> *Santo Cosimo beneditio, cosi lo voglio*: "blessed St. Cosmo,
> let it be like this" another "*St. Cosimo, a te mi raccommendo*
> St. Cosmo, I recommend myself to you" and a third "*St.*
> *Cosimo ti ringrazio*—St. Cosmo I thank you" The vow is
> never presented without being accompanied by a piece of
> money and is always kissed by the devotee at the moment of
> presentation.[240]

Although Sir William Hamilton presents this practice as a fertility ritual, he makes a special point to highlight the unique and specific healing practices that are associated with this ritual and festival. He writes, "Those who have an infirmity in any of their members, present themselves at the great altar, and uncover the member affected (not even excepting that which is most frequently represented by the ex-voti) and the reverend canon anoints it, saying *per intercessionem beati cosmi, liberet te ab omni malo. Amen*."[241] This prayer translates to: through the intervention of the blessed Cosmas, may he free you from all evil Amen.[242] Additionally, an oil— "the oil of St. Cosmo"— can be applied to injured or diseased parts, particularly sexual

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[239] Knight, 8-9.
[240] Knight, 10.
[241] Knight, 11.
[242] Translation is my own.

organs “or parts adjacent.”[243] During this festival, in 1780, Sir Hamilton notes that no fewer than 1400 flasks of this oil were used.[244] In exchange for the healing that results from these actions, the patrons were expected give alms or votives to Saint Cosmas.[245]

Unfortunately, Isernia was destroyed by an earthquake on July 26, 1805, leaving behind little physical evidence upon which to draw for this study.[246] However, Sir Hamilton not only took extensive notes on these practices, he provided extensive visual evidence of the practice. He drew pictures, made etchings, and collected several examples of the wax votives he witnessed. Upon his return from Isernia in 1784, he donated five examples of the votives to the British museum. This collection highlights examples of “St. Cosmas’ big toe”—a euphemism for phallic votive offerings.[247] The votives vary in size and shape, but are all constructed of wax and are highly detailed. Several of the remaining votives have been damaged because of the fragile medium and the stress of time. The detailed illustrations that were included in the publication help to fully visualize and contextualize the votives.[248]

Sir Hamilton connected these practices to the Roman fertility god Priapus. He viewed this practice as being centrally about fertility, and the focus upon the votives of those body parts in his letters is perhaps misleading. He does mention that several other body parts were dedicated, “There are also waxen vows, that represent other parts of the body mixed with them; but those there are few in comparison of the number of the Priapi.”[249] His emphasis is not on those body parts, and it is possible that he was overemphasizing the importance of the fertility-related aspects of this practice in order to strengthen his argument. Indeed, his strong conviction that this

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[243] Knight, 11.
[244] Knight, 11.
[245] After the publication of the practice, it was delegalized in Isernia by the local clergy (“Anatomical Votive”).
[246] “Anatomical Votive.”
[247] “Anatomical Votive.” See Figures 9-11.
[248] “Anatomical Votive.”
[249] Knight, 8-9.

practice is a manifestation of the cult of Priapus does serve to demonstrate a possible continuous practice of this cult over time, but it also potentially demonstrates his particular perspective that this ritual was primitive. Overall, his perspective on this ritual is problematic.

Despite Sir William Hamilton's problematic perspective, the incorporation of this account into the study of Italian votive dedication is useful because it demonstrates this practice in rural Italy during the early modern period. Whereas Sir Hamilton expresses this continuity as the continuing worship of Priapus, it perhaps is more constructive to view it more broadly in terms of the continued practice of votive dedication within Christianity. Whether these healing votives were dedicated to Priapus or any other divine figure is not as relevant as the fact that the inhabitants practiced dedicating votive offerings in exchange for healing. The dedication of these objects to Christian saints highlights the function of this practice within Christianity, and this timeless tradition of votive dedication.

Conclusion

The use of anatomical votive offerings not only remained with the advent of Christianity, but grew and thrived with the introduction of the cult of saints. The intermediary status of the saints allowed for a strong intercessionary figure upon whom people would rely for matters of body and spirit. For this reason, healing became an important role for saints. As human figures, the saints had unique hagiographies which influenced how they were viewed and venerated, and created a situation which resulted in specialization in healing practices. These factors allowed for the transfer of the practice of votive dedication from ancient Greek, Roman, and Etruscan cults to Christian believers. After all, Brown writes, "The study of 'popular religion' in late antiquity

must be the study of continuity and not of change for it is assumed to be a study of the unmoving subsoil from which Christianity sprang."[250]

Saints are important intercessors, and are often shown in conjunction with perhaps the most powerful saint and intercessor: the Virgin Mary. As often happens at churches and shrines – especially ones known for healing miracles—when saints are venerated alongside Mary the holy power is even more potent than when saints are exhibited alone. Whereas this section of this study discussed the cult of saints generally, the next section will serve as a large case study to examine the role of the Virgin Mary in healing cults which use dedicated votive offerings.

[250] Brown, 20.

Chapter V:
Our Lady of Health: Anatomical Votive Dedications in the Cult of the Virgin Mary

Veneration of the Virgin Mary makes up a large portion of popular veneration in Italian Catholicism. Though Mary is often the sole figure of veneration in a church, she is also venerated alongside saints. One example is the church of Santa Maria Trastevere in Rome which is also the location of the relic head of Saint Apollonia (the patron saint of dental problems).[251] In *Madonnas that Maim*, Michael Carroll notes, in total, 87% of sanctuaries throughout Italy are dedicated at least in part to Mary.[252] The cult of Mary is an established and popular religious tradition in Italy. Nevertheless, the establishment of this cult is not founded in biblical literature, but rather emerges from Italian practices and theological doctrine established in Late Antiquity.[253]

In canonical biblical texts, Mary the mother of Jesus is only mentioned a handful of times: during nativity and resurrection narratives, and once during Jesus' childhood.[254] She is mentioned a number of times in non-canonical texts like the Infancy Gospel of James.[255] However, these textual traditions have little to do with popular veneration. It is estimated that the very beginnings of the popular veneration of Mary did not emerge until around the fifth century.[256] The council of Ephesus, which occurred in 431, produced a decree which acknowledged Mary as the θεοτόκος—the bearer of God.[257] This decree established Mary as a venerable figure in Christianity, and perhaps sparked her popular devotion.

The first Marian shrine built in Italy occurred as a result of the council of Ephesus; Pope Sixtus III built what is considered the 'most important shrine' to Mary in Rome, the Church of

[251] Walsh, 57.
[252] Carroll, 1992, 85.
[253] Carroll, 1986, 4 .
[254] Ibid; Luke 2:39-52.
[255] The Gospel of James is a text that was written during the fourth century.
[256] Carroll, 1986, 4. This veneration of Mary emerged later than the beginning of the practice of venerating martyrs.
[257] Carroll, 5; Pelikan, 56.

Santa Maria Maggiore.[258] Overall, the cult of Mary quickly increased in the West during the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, eventually reaching what scholars see as its height in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[259]

Mary has a special role within Christian cosmology. Mary has been viewed in terms of a figure that is less than God, "but just as certainly she was more than ordinary human being and more than any other saint."[260] Early church fathers established a hierarchy of worship for three metacults: God/Jesus, Mary, and the Saints.[261] This hierarchy allowed the veneration of all these figures, while avoiding accusations of paganism or idolatry.[262] In order to organize and legitimize the veneration of these figures, John of Damascus produced a special distinction among the metacults: *latris* and *dulia.* Only God and Jesus were entitled to *Latris,* which is somewhat akin to 'worship.' *Dulia* on the other hand, is appropriate for saints, and is akin to 'reverence.'[263] Since "…God had chosen her for the specific task of pleading the cause of humanity before her son, she was entitled to '*hyperdulia*.'"[264] Therefore, Mary exceeded the level of admiration for the saints, but at a level that was less than that of Jesus or God.

Because of her relationship to Jesus and God, Mary is considered an intercessor, and her intermediate nature allows her to grant favors. This intercession places Mary in a role which allows healing, and an important part of this veneration is the use of anatomical votive offerings. However, the ways in which votives are dedicated in Italian Marian cult differ from other forms

[258] Pelikan, 56. This church contains mosaic art which emphasizes the doctrine established at the council.
[259] Carroll, 1986, 5.
[260] Pelikan, 102.
[261] Metacult is a term that Carroll uses to describe the three main figures/groups of figures who are venerated in Christian tradition: God/Jesus, Mary, and the Saints. Interestingly, Carroll notes that, in Italy, the popular veneration of these figures is contrary to these distinctions. Saints and Mary are much more likely to be called upon and venerated in time of need, because of their closeness to humans and their power of intercession, than Jesus or God who deserve full veneration (Carroll, 1992, 14).
[262] This was a large topic of debate during this period.
[263] Pelikan, 103.
[264] Pelikan, 132.

of dedication previously seen in Etruscan, Greco-Roman, and Christian cults. The votive dedication in the cult of Mary presents another unique installment of this tradition of healing and votive dedication within Italy.

This section will include several examples of Marian devotion, and several different places in Italy in which this devotion occurs. These examples will explore the many different facets of Marian devotion. However, there will also be a case study included, in order to demonstrate how these many different facets of her image and cult interact with the practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings.

Votive Dedications in Italian Marian Cult

Since the emergence of the cult of Mary in Late Antiquity, popular Marian veneration has been widespread throughout Italy. The dedication of anatomical votive offerings has been a central practice to this cult in each location and time period in which Mary is venerated. However, there is variation in the votive practice and the overall cult across time and geography. In the following section, several different locations and churches will be discussed in order to highlight the widespread nature of this practice throughout Italy, and the different ways in which this ritual was and is practiced.

Marian sanctuaries are overwhelmingly popular in both the North and the South of Italy.[265] However, English language scholarship tends to promote scholarship focused on the South of Italy because of issues of ancestry, accessibility, and popular conceptions of the Southern Italian life.[266] Therefore, there is more evidence for the use of anatomical votive offerings in this region. The following examples of churches and shrines in Southern Italy

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[265] Carroll, 1992, 25. Since the time of Dante, there has been a popular conception that there are two Italys. This division has often been made between the North and the South—with the perception of the South as being rural and poor, and the perception of the North as being urbane and well off. However, overall, there seems to be little, if any, difference in the veneration of Mary within these regions (Carroll, 1992, 87).

[266] Carroll, 1992, 89.

demonstrate how anatomical votives within Marian devotion were, and continue to be, an important part of the social landscape of Italy.

Naples, in particular, has received a great deal of scholarly attention in part because of the number of shrines there which have reputations for healing. The church of Santa Maria della Sanita in Naples is particularly well known for the number of miraculous cures that are said to have occurred there in the Medieval and Early Modern periods.[267] In fact, the number of miracles that occurred drew suspicion from episcopal authorities. The priests at the Santa Maria Della Sanita drew too much attention to the miracles and to the offerings which attested to the miracles,

> When a miracle cure was reported [the priest] made sure that everyone knew about it. As one witness testified, “When any person brings some votive offering to his church of Santa Maria dela Sanita, he takes the ex- voto into his own hands in the middle of the church, and shouting amongst the people, says, “see this, see this sisters! Here, Here the virgin works [miracles], come here, recommend yourselves here.[268]

In this case, church authorities were concerned that this priest used the popularity of the cult and the popularity of the practice of dedicating votive offerings as a way to promote his own church. That the priest would use them potentially to promote his own church suggests that the votives had a certain authority: they visually expressed the power of the Madonna at the church, and thereby expressed the sanctity of the church itself.

The church of Santa Maria della Grazie is another site which shows examples of Neapolitan votive use during the Medieval and Early Modern periods. This church was located

[267] Author Gentilcore considers the church of Santa Maria della Sanita to be the greatest of these Neapolitan healing shrines (Gentilcore, 21).
[268] Gentilcore, 20-21.

in a private shrine belonging to the Paliuca family.[269] This shrine was formally investigated in 1596 to determine whether the many miracles that occurred there were legitimate; “Physicians were called in to report on the presumed miracles, which they failed to convalidate. The archbishop’s vicar-general ordered the shrine closed except for religious services and that all ex-votos…be removed from around the image.”[270] In this case, the votives also serve as evidence for the miracles, and that their authority was one of the first aspects to be removed with debunking of the miracles.

Both the church of the Santa Maria della Grazie and the church of Santa Maria della Sanita were famous for their healing miracles, and for the votives which attested to the power of the shrine. More importantly, these two examples demonstrate that votive dedications were an important ritual in Southern Italy in the Medieval and Early Modern periods. Votives were an important part of the image and reputation of a church—whether promoting the church, as in the first example, or condemning it, as in the second—because of their nature as evidence for miraculous healing. The votives attested to the power of Mary and provided (or attempted to provide) legitimacy to the shrine and to those who venerated there.

This characteristic of the votive as evidence for miracles and as an attestation of the power of Mary is an important part of the power of the votive and remains central to the use of votives to this day. The Santuario della Beata Vergine del Santo Rosario di Pompei (The Sanctuary of the Madonna of the Rosary) in Pompeii provides a more modern look at the donation of votive offerings in Southern Italy. This church, restored in 1873 and consecrated in 1901, has a remarkable votive tradition which dates to the earliest years of the church’s

[269] Gentilcore, 21.
[270] Ibid.

history.[271] These votives are displayed in repeated patterns of silver hearts, figures, and body parts. Though the tradition of dedicating anatomical offerings persists in a recognizable way, the church also displays variations on anatomical offerings which demonstrate a tradition, "different from the ancient one and powerfully exposed to industrialism's new means of communication."[272] One such example of this is a votive image of a young girl which was dedicated along with an x-ray of the lungs and ribs.[273] Though this does not fall under the category of the type of anatomical votive examined throughout the remainder of this study, it certainly is a votive which depicts a part of the anatomy and describes a cure attributed to Mary.

The display of these votives at this church is purposeful. More than 3,000 votives are hung high on the walls. In 1939, nuns organized these votives around the transept so that they "punctuate the architectural interior."[274] There are also glass cases which house many other anatomical objects including life sized silver-cast infants. In addition to anatomical offerings, the church displays collections of votive paintings, photographs, fabric, human hair, and collages.[275] These votives were purposefully organized to present the most impressive image of the power of Mary. This site, though far removed in time from the Neapolitan churches Santa Maria della Sanita and Santa Maria della Grazie, demonstrates a similar desire to dedicate anatomical votives to Mary out of gratitude, and a similar desire to display the anatomical votive offerings as a way of displaying the miraculous cures attributed to the Madonna at that church.

The previous examples of Marian votive practice examined dedications which occurred in churches. However, not all locations of Marian worship and votive dedication are formal locations. In large cities, especially in Rome, many informal shrines can be found. The street

[271] Briscese, 55.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Briscese, 63. See Figure 12.
[274] Briscese, 55.
[275] Ibid.

shrine of Madonna del Perpetuo Soccorso in Largo Preneste is a great example of this phenomenon. [276] This roadside shrine is located at a busy Roman intersection. Dozens of plaques line the wall, including one rather famous one, entitled the 'Sabina' plaque. This plaque reads, "PER GRAZIA / RICEVUTA / : SABINA / ROMA, 1972," and includes a sketch of a stomach.[277] Though this example is not a three dimensional example of votive offerings (as have taken the bulk of the attention throughout this paper), it is still a good example of how the idea of anatomical votives persists and is adapted to many different kinds of Marian shrines throughout Italy.

Dedicating anatomical votive offerings is a strong and longstanding tradition within Italy, and it is an especially well-documented practice in Southern Italy. However, similar practices can be found in 'Italian' regions outside of Italy proper. Malta and Gozo, islands off of the coast of Sicily, have had a rich anatomical votive tradition that has lasted up until the twentieth century. Though Malta is an independent nation, it was occupied by Romans from 219 BCE- 397 CE.[278] During the earliest period of occupation, the healing cult of Asclepius was reaching its peak in popularity in the Roman Empire. During the latest period of Roman occupation of Malta, Christianity was becoming strong within the empire; it is said that the inhabitants of Malta were converted by Saint Paul in 60 CE, and Christianity grew strong on the island before the Byzantine and Arab invasions occurred.[279]

There is archaeological evidence of anatomical votive practice coming from the period of Roman occupation. This evidence, as Cassar notes, "is represented by one solitary ex -voto

[276] Killgrove.
[277] Ibid. See Figure 13.
[278] Cassar, 24.
[279] Ibid.

consisting of a clay model of the lateral view of a leg and foot."[280] This example was found on the northwest of the island along with a cache of other Roman items.[281] It is possible that other examples exist but have not been discovered yet. Nevertheless, the existence of one example shows that the practice did exist on the island during this period of Roman occupation.

However, this same type of anatomical votive dedication resurged in the eighteenth century within the context of Catholicism, and specifically within the context of Marian veneration.[282] Cassar notes, "The interruption in the time sequence and the change of religious beliefs do not, however, prevent us from perceiving that they have a common purpose and that the ex- votos of …Roman times foreshadow the similar ones of later years. Indeed the same ideational process links the ancient ones with those of our own times."[283]

Many of the votives are images of the complete human body—several examples include swaddled babies, or kneeling men and women. However, the partitive anatomical examples still seem to have been the most popular, and include examples of faces, eyes, ears, upper limbs, hands, trunks, female breasts, hearts, thighs, legs, and feet.[284] None of these examples include artistic details of the injury or malady. Despite this, Cassar suggests that some of the items were donated for specific maladies: legs for paralysis, anomalies, and ulcers; the arms and hands for fractures, injury, or gangrene; ears for deafness; eyes for ocular diseases.[285] Cassar suggests that 'trunks,'[286] faces, or even female breasts are not specific to a disease and could carry several meanings.[287]

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[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Cassar, 25. See Figures 14-16.
[285] Ibid.
[286] These busts are not unlike the polyvisceral plaques of the Etruscans.
[287] Ibid.

In 1935, the ecclesiastic council of the Catholic Church, under the presidency of Cardinal H. Lepicier, disallowed the exhibition of votive offerings 'showing parts of the human body.'[288] This is why the anatomical votive offerings cease on Malta and Gozo in 1935. Nevertheless, the council made one exception—votives in the shape of a heart.[289]

The practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings was widespread throughout Italy. Though sources tend to favor Southern Italy—and therefore most evidence comes from this area—the practice can be seen throughout the country, and even in neighboring regions. Though the tradition of dedicating images of body parts for healing has remained similar throughout the Medieval, Early-Modern, and Modern periods, some changes have occurred. These include the presence of photographs (and even X-rays), and the focus on images of the heart. These changes and others will be discussed further.

Variations in Anatomical Dedication within the Cult of Mary

In many places, like in Malta, the images of body parts were banned or replaced with dedications of other objects. This ban on the images of body parts is an example of changes to the anatomical votive tradition which occurred within the context of Italian Marian veneration. In the medieval period, a new type of 'anatomical' votive offering emerged—the sacred heart—which became especially popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[290] These votives are silver images of hearts. They are often hollow to allow the dedicator to place slips of paper inside, upon which they have written their desires or thanks.[291] Many places in Italy made the dedication of the sacred heart the primary—and sometimes sole—method of votive dedication.

[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Carroll, 1992, 83.
[291] Boyer, 51.

The sacred heart is certainly a departure from the wax or terracotta anatomical offerings, and presents a shift in the perception of anatomical votive offerings. Although these offerings sometimes represent the illness of the dedicator—or carry a message about healing— they often have a more abstract meaning. The hearts may represent the heart of Mary or Jesus, and can be used for several reasons: to express gratitude, to express love and devotion, to show her strength as a divine figure, and even to express "desire for a mythical union with a supernatural being."[292]

Other changes to Marian votive dedication occurred over time. Specifically, during the middle ages, the gesture of giving votive offerings became a status symbol. Author Megan Holmes notes this phenomenon in at a church in Florence,

> During the fifteenth century there was an increasing tendency by votaries from the middle and upper social ranks to encode markers of social identity and the particular votive experience in the material form of the ex-voto and to take a greater interest in the display of the ex-voto once entered the sanctuary environment.[293]

The medium out of which the votive was made emphasized the class and status of the dedicator. Wax became popular as a status symbol in the form of effigies of the dedicator. These offerings lent a name and a face to a votive. These effigies were personalized and no doubt were more expensive than traditional votives; to dedicate one of these offerings was to declare ones income and one's status.

Similarly, the popularity of silver anatomical offerings, as an alternative to wax, emerged in the fourteenth century. This new medium added a level of conspicuous value to the votive and signified the wealth of the dedicator.[294] In addition to these changes, individuals began to

[292] Carroll, 1992, 83.
[293] Holmes, 163.
[294] Husabo, 3.

embellish their votive offerings. There are accounts of gold and jewel encrusted votives, which also were inscribed with the name of the dedicator.[295] There are also cases of people—particularly after the birth of a child—dedicating the child's weight in gold or silver. Even entire towns would give gold or silver models of the town, if they believed the Virgin Mary had successfully protected them from some harm.[296] Giving precious metals had several consequences: it expressed gratitude in a monetary amount, showed the class of the dedicator, and also provided a means of revenue for the church.

However, anatomical votive offerings and the sacred hearts are not the only type of votive offerings given. Perhaps one of the most unique forms that emerge in the Medieval and Early Modern periods is the painted ex-voto. These ex-votos are similar to the anatomical ex-votos in that they depict a hardship or an illness. These votives are paintings which often depict a specific scene: a shipwreck, a high fever, someone falling under a cart or suffering from the plague. The images often include not only the image of the dedicator—demonstrating their peril—but also the Virgin Mary herself in the act of granting the favor. These votives must have been donated out of gratitude after the favor was received.[297]

These changes in votive dedication do not mean that anatomical votives ceased to be dedicated. The dedication of wax votive offerings continued throughout the years, remaining a popular practice for those who wished to give thanks to the Virgin Mary. This practice remained popular in Italy, and in Italian territories such as Malta or Gozo. However, with time the votives took on new meaning—the introduction of the sacred heart allowed for the abstract dedication of votive offerings, and embellished votives allowed for a personalization of the votive and a

[295] Holmes, 166.
[296] For instance, this type of dedication occurred in cases of the plague.
[297] Carroll, 1992, 83.

demonstration of wealth and class status. Therefore, the dedication of these objects took on new meaning at each site of Marian dedication.

Intercession and Splintering in the Marian Cult

Like saints, Mary was seen as a powerful intercessor. Her status as an intermediary figure allowed her to intercede between humans and God or Jesus to grant favors. As mentioned in the introduction, a hierarchy was established which indicated that Mary was a very powerful, if not the most powerful, saint. Though Mary may be considered to be a very powerful saint, the veneration and the logistics of the cult of Mary differs from the cult of saints.

Whereas the cult of saints thrived on the use of relics, this form of veneration was impossible when venerating Mary. This impossibility is because, "no parts of her body had remained on earth, because at her death she had been assumed bodily into heaven, a belief that was finally promulgated as dogma by Pope Pius XII 1950."[298] Images and icons replaced relics as a way to contact the intercessor and to petition for healing. For this reason, iconography became important to the cult of Mary. The image of Mary embodied her power in the same manner as relics.

Iconography could have played a part in the splintering of Mary and of Marian shrines.[299] Although each shrine and cult to Mary references her as the mother of Jesus, the way in which she is venerated and the way in which she is perceived differs greatly from cult to cult. This phenomenon— 'splintering'— is a way in which each cult to Mary venerates a different personality, and receives different blessings: "the Mary cult in Italy, like the cult of the saints, is really a metacult that involves the worship of several different supernatural beings."[300]

[298] Pelikan, 133.
[299] In certain cases, there is specific iconography that goes with each Madonna, and many people can spot the differences between different Madonnas based on the way she looks, or what she is holding (Carroll, 1992, 62).
[300] Carroll, 1992, 2; Carroll, 1992, 59.

Each different shrine to Mary has a different name which denotes a different type of Madonna figure. Carroll writes that, "Madonnas are always identified by a title which almost always has two parts."[301] The first part of the title is a reference to Mary: Madonna, Maria Santissima, Nostra Signora, Santa Maria, Maria Verigne, Madre.[302] The second half of the title usually denotes a power or a personality, or associates the Madonna with some location, object, or attribute.[303] Overall there are 397 unique titles applied to Mary in Italy.[304]

Place names are a common category of Marian epithets. Naming a Mary after a place localizes her cult, and allows her intercession to be personally applied to a small geographic area or shrine. However, two of the most common epithets are Della Grazie "of thanks" or Dei Miracoli "of miracles." In fact, Della Grazie is the single most common Marian epithet in Italy. In a study of 697 sanctuaries, 12% held this name and were known for miracles—particularly of healing.[305] It is important to note that Madonnas with the same name have no other relationship to each other aside from name, "Titles are not all that creates a Madonna's identity. She is likely to have her own sanctuary, her own *festa*, her own processions, her own cult places where she alone is venerated and so on."[306]

Though, as Carroll argues, all Marys have some ability to heal and protect, splintering allows for some shrines to be more closely associated with healing than others.[307] Santa Maria della Salute and Santa Maria della Sanita are two such examples. The names of these churches spell out her association with healing: Saint Mary of Health. However, the concept of a healing Mary has even been splintered further to be applied to specific illnesses or health issues. One

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301 Carroll, 1992, 27.
302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
304 Carroll,1992, 62.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.
307 Carroll,1992, 59.

such example is the church of Sant'Agonostio in Rome. The cult statue in this church represents the Maddona del Parto (the Madonna of Childbirth). This Mary receives votive offerings which are dedicated to ensure health for both the mother and the child.[308]

Another example of a healing specific Madonna is the Salus Populi Romani, an icon which is located within the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The church itself is the oldest Marian church in Rome and is said to have been established when a vision of Mary drew the foundation of the church with snow.[309] The name Salus Populi Romani ("the Salvation of the Roman People") refers to the specific icon of Mary rather than the church itself. In 593 AD, the image of Mary was brought out from the church and paraded around Rome in order to save Rome from the plague.[310] The image has been used similarly many times since then to protect the city from disease and disaster. In this case, the Salus Populi Romani is firmly linked to healing and protection. Thus, this church is distinctive and unique because Mary has two epithets—one for the church, and another for the image—and could even represent two different personalities of the Madonna.

Since each Mary has a different personality, different levels and types of power have been ascribed to her. In some cases, Mary is said to have the power to harm along with the power to heal. This is not necessarily a unique power: saints are also cited as having the power to harm, as are the Greek deities like Apollo, Artemis, and Asclepius, as discussed previously. However, the power to harm is a significant aspect of the Marian personality, and is important to consider in conjunction with the concept of splintering and with miracles of healing. In his book *Madonas that Maim*, Carroll discusses the phenomenon of the Madonna which causes illness and

[308] Macadam, 200.
[309] Macadam, 294.
[310] Cruz, 96.

disaster.[311] He claims that in many cases the veneration of the Madonna, and the donation of votive offerings, comes from fear, rather from loving veneration.

The following story demonstrates this aspect of a Marian personally. It is said that Aureilia del Prete from Sant' Anastasia went with her husband to the shrine of Madonna dell'Arco (Madonna of the arch). He intended to dedicate a votive offering because he had been cured of an eye disease.[312] Along the way she lost a pig that she had brought, and she "exploded with a string of blasphemies against the Virgin."[313] She grabbed the ex-voto from his hands, threw it to the ground, and trampled it."[314] As a result "exactly one year later, during the night before the *festa*, Aurelia's feet detached from her legs."[315] This story was immortalized by the cornerstone of the sanctuary which reads, "To the Madonna dell'Arco [in reparation] for the blasphemer Aurelia who was punished in her feet on the 20th day of April in the year 1590."[316] In this particular case, the power to harm is related to the power to heal as the Madonna dell'Arco both heals and harms in the same narrative. Indeed, she even heals and harms in a same way—by applying her power to a localized part of the body.

Previous sections of this chapter have already discussed various examples of Marian splintering by way of the examination of different examples of Marian shrines and healing powers. In this short sampling we can see that a large majority of the epithets of the churches and shrines relate to miracles, healing, and help. These sites, all described in above passages for different reasons, demonstrate the various manifestations of the cult of Mary in Italy, and how healing and the ritual use of votives fit in to the practice and make each cult unique.

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[311] Carroll, 1992, 68.
[312] Carroll, 1992, 72.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Carroll, 1992, 72-73.

Case Study: Santissima Annunziata, Florence

Many examples of Marian shrines have already been mentioned in this chapter. However, it is useful to take a close look at one shrine in particular in order to get a clear and detailed picture of votive cult at Marian shrines in Italy. For this study, the Church of Santissima Annunziata (Sacred Annunciation) will be examined. The church of Santissima Annunziata is located in Florence. It was founded in 1250, but little is known about the church before the fourteenth century. Some of the earliest extant information about the shrine itself comes from descriptions and observations of its supply of anatomical votive offerings. These sources demonstrate that the practice of donating votive offerings was popular at this site from an early period.[317]

By 1447, so many votives had been dedicated at this church that there was no more room to place the votives in the shrine; the church officials began to hang them from the beams of the church.[318] In a letter from Franco Sacchetti to Jacopo di Conte, written in the late fifteenth century, Sacchetti writes that "the church was so completely filled with ex-voto images, many hanging from the ceiling, that the roof of the church might have collapsed had not the walls been reinforced."[319] In fact, the walls of the church had to be strengthened in the sixteenth century to prevent this type of collapse.[320] Scholar Aby Warburg notes, "The church might be called a *wachsfigurekabinet,"* and in fact, the Dutch traveler, Arnout van Buchell, said, "There is such infinitude of votives statues and painting that when you first enter the church you would think you were entering a field of cadavers."[321]

[317] Husabo, 3.
[318] Freedberg, 228.
[319] Husabo, 3.
[320] Freedberg, 228.
[321] Freedberg, 228- 229.

The popularity of the practice is reflected in the documented commercialization of the ritual. Florence had a votive industry; "the via de' servi itself, the road leading to the church, came to be crowded with shops selling votive limbs of wax and papier-mâché."[322] In fact, the painter Ludovico Cardi is said to have preferred to take a detour to get to the church rather than have to walk past the shops that, "so offended his pride in the status of his own art."[323] These sources demonstrate a picture of the economy of Italian votive offerings in the Marian cult. The dedication of wax votives clearly provided an opportunity for a specific trade which was prevalent during this period.

The votives dedicated at Santissima Annunziata were made in silver, papier-mâché, or most often, wax.[324] The votives demonstrated the recovery from illness or injury, and usually lacked detail of the ailment. However, Megan Holmes notes descriptions on some late fifteenth century silver limbs which say, "*il segno della pest*" or "the sign of the plague."[325] Specific descriptions of maladies on anatomical votive offerings are rare in Italy, and inscribed anatomical offerings are rarer still. These inscriptions may help to explain the popularity of anatomical votives during the middle ages, and why the practice remained popular; the plague may have played a role in the continued importance and popularity of healing shrines and anatomical votive practices.

Freedberg notes that, though silver became a popular medium for these votives, which showed wealth, wax remained popular still because the medium, "enables verisimilitude far more easily and effectively that most other media."[326] People continued to donate anatomical votive

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[322] Freedberg, 228.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Husabo, 3. The popularity of silver votives begins in the fourteenth century, and begins as a conspicuous display. However, the use of this material becomes popular, and soon becomes the dominant medium for these offerings.
[325] Holmes, 163.
[326] Freedberg, 226.

offerings made in wax because of their distinct ability to look like human skin. For this reason, effigies of a dedicator were popular as a way to donate objects which were self-referential. M. Oen Husabo summarizes these changes, "Ex-voto sculptures in SS. Annunziata appear to have become markers of social position within Tuscan society."[327]

The anatomical votives, especially those made of silver, hung close to the cult image of Mary at the Annunciation.[328] The placement of these votives close to the image was done so that they would be "in the sight of the mother of God."[329] The public display of these votives was done to honor Mary, but also to present the richness of the church, and to "[keep] these more valuable ex-votos under the watchful eye of the servite sacristan of the chapel."[330] The ex-votos made of precious metals were protected and even seen as a form of valuable income to the sanctuary.[331] In fact, a register from Santissima Annunziata from the fifteenth century exposes the value of these objects and the revenue for the church. When the votives were first presented to the sanctuary, they were weighed by a priest and their weight and value recorded in the register.[332] Unfortunately, for this reason the votives were often melted down and used as raw material, or sold for revenue.

Sources suggest that the chapel was covered with anatomical and other types of votive gifts.[333] By the end of the fourteenth century—only 50 years after the founding of the church itself— the site had become famous for its cache of votive offerings.[334] However, beginning in

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[327] Husabo, 4.
[328] Holmes, 166. The fresco depicts the annunciation, itself a votive gift dating to 1448.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid. Other silver ex votos were locked away within a cupboard in the oratory to the side of the image, where they were shown to distinguished visitors.
[331] Holmes, 165.
[332] Ibid.
[333] This includes silver hearts (Husabo, 3).
[334] Husabo, 3.

1665 the church began to ‘modernize.’[335] The wax votives were removed and placed in a cloister: “the beginning of the end” of the anatomical votives at Santissima Annunziata.[336] Under the authority of Archduke Leopold, “the final remains were destroyed.”[337] Though the actual artifacts no longer exist, the popularity of the site for pilgrimage, the flourishing of the production of votive offerings as a side industry, and the sheer numbers of votive offerings dedicated were mentioned in several primary sources. These sources demonstrate a vibrant and successful Marian healing cult and anatomical votive tradition at this Florentine church.

As Husabo writes, “By examining this practice of setting up ex-voto images for the virgin in Santissima Annunziata we get an idea of the importance of the cult and its transformation during its first centuries.”[338] The cult of Mary was powerful, in part because of her status as an intercessor, and her healing shrines attracted many pilgrims and worshipers. From the examination of this site we also can get a good idea of the importance and popularity of anatomical offerings in Italy during this period. Votive offerings provided an outlet for suffering people, especially during the plague years. Votives provided class identification and prestige. Votives promoted pilgrimage, and even provided income for the church. Overall, this case study signals the important roles that votive offerings played in medieval popular religion within the cult of Mary.

Conclusion

The cult of Mary is an important part of popular Catholicism in Italy. Mary is seen as the most powerful intercessor in Italian belief. Her role as the mother of Jesus grants her special access to Jesus and God, to whom she prays to on behalf of people. This intermediary status

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[335] Freedberg, 229.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Husabo, 3.

allows for miracles of healing, and encourages the donation of votive offerings. The number of shrines mentioned in this chapter can speak to the fact that this practice was established and widespread in Italy.

The study of votives in the cult of Mary provides useful evidence for the understanding of the dedication of votive offerings. In this study, many primary literary sources divulge important information about the cult and votive practice, and how this practice changed over time. However, these sources also highlight aspects of the cult that may in fact be much older, but have not been documented in older sources. Commercialization is one such example. These sources document the mass production and the workshop industry which produced these images for worshippers.[339] Archaeology suggests that this may have been the case in previous periods. However, there is not earlier textual evidence for the commercialization of this practice. The evidence for the dedication of votives in the cult of Mary provides evidence for the continuity of this dedicatory practice between the Medieval period and Modernity, demonstrates important connections between this votive practice and the votive practice in the healing cults of Antiquity, and also allows insights into the larger society and culture surrounding this practice.

[339] Holmes, 161.

Conclusion:
Final Thoughts on Anatomical Votives in Italy

The practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings is a long-standing tradition in Italy. In many of these cults, the practice is directed toward a figure that has both human and divine qualities. This semi-divine status characterizes the figure as an intercessor, and this intermediary status plays a role in the figure's ability to heal. Overall, the practice and the dedication to intermediary figures develops and changes over time. This phenomenon is most easily seen in the cults of Asclepius, the Saints, and Mary, though the roots can be seen within the Etruscan cults.

Anatomical votives have been documented at least as early as the mid-first millennium BCE in Etruscan cults. Throughout Etruria, archaeological evidence points to the practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings as an important and central ritual to these cults. In Etruria, the practice of dedicating votive offerings is not directly tied to an intermediary figure. However, during the time period in which the majority of these objects are found, veneration of ancestors as intermediary figures also existed. Thus, these two practices were operating at the same time, and show that both of these traditions—votives and veneration of intermediary figures—have longstanding importance in Italy. Though the origins of this practice, and how the practice influence or was influenced by other cultures is unknown, the evidence for exportation and mass production suggests that it was an independent Etruscan practice. The examination of the Etruscan use of votive offerings serves as a starting place for this study because it explores the early documented stages of this practice, and provides a background for the other votive cults that emerge.

The cult of Asclepius emerged in Italy in the fourth century and quickly grew to become a popular healing cult. Asclepius, as a human who was deified, exhibits this intermediary status

and this power of intercession. His status as the god of medicine allowed for the development of many healing rituals and practices, among which offering anatomical votives was central. Votives were used in his cult as part of a wider ritual of healing which included sacrifice, purification, incubation, and dream interpretation. The anatomical votives were hung within the sanctuaries and served an important role as an attestation to the power of the deity. The cult of Asclepius and its practice of dedicating anatomical votives were important and influential in the ancient Mediterranean, and Asclepius remained popular up through the middle of the first millennium CE.

The practice of dedicating anatomical votive offerings retained its importance to popular religion with the advent of Christianity. Anatomical votive offerings were, and still are, dedicated to Christian saints. These saints are figures that were humans that were then established as semi-divine figures. Almost since the advent of the martyr cult, Christians have petitioned the relics of the saints for divine aid on account of this semi-divine status and thus their ability to intercede. These relics, a dismemberment of the saints' bodies, are another way in which this dismemberment for healing manifests itself. In this way, the dedication of anatomical votives to relics enhances the fragmentation of the practice and the association with healing. Over time, saints have become specialized figures—they have powers that specifically relate to protecting a person, place, or thing. Their powers for intercession and this specialization have produced many saints that specialize in healing or protection of health. Sometimes this specialization is as specific as the healing of a particular feature—eyes, for example. The specialized healing power influences the way in which they are venerated. Though many saints receive anatomical votive offerings of many different body parts or ailments, often their dedications are largely made up of anatomical offerings referring to that specialization.

The cult of Mary is another Christian cult in which this practice has remained popular. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is often considered in a cosmological category of her own. She is saint-like, but she is more powerful and worthy of greater veneration than the saints. For this reason, she is often considered to be the most powerful intercessor. The cult of Mary similarly exhibits specialization—deemed 'splintering'—wherein different manifestations of Mary exhibit different qualities. Many of these splintered versions of Mary specialize in healing, and receive anatomical votive offerings as a major part of the veneration. Within the context of the cult of Mary, the practice of anatomical votive offerings adapted to include votive hearts, which represent more abstract ideas rather than images of human anatomy. Regardless, the practice of dedicating images of body parts remains an important aspect of Marian cult within Italy.

Overall, the tradition of dedicating anatomical votive offerings is rich within Italy and its surrounding areas. The same practice that can be found in Etruscan archaeological evidence is also found in Medieval, Early Modern and Modern churches and shrines throughout Italy. With time, there have been changes to the method of practice, and the type of and reason of anatomical votive dedication. However the basic meaning and purpose of the ritual remains the same—dedicating images of body parts in exchange for healing.

Although this study focuses on the phenomenon of the use of votives within Italy, votive practice is vibrant and manifests itself quite strongly in other societies, and often these traditions interact with one another. A good example of the interaction between Italian votive tradition and other regions can be seen in France. There seems to have been a wealth of communication between the two societies, and as a result similar but distinct votive traditions emerged.

An interesting way to think about the interaction between these two societies which occurred in Late Antique, Medieval, and Pre-Modern periods is to look forward in time. During

World War I, there was an explosion of votive dedication. Both Italian and French citizens dedicated votives to local or national figures. However, they were dedicated by different people and for different reasons. The Italian soldiers dedicated the votives on their own behalf to Mary. They dedicated anatomical offerings of their wounds, images of themselves for protection, objects of injury like bullets, or objects which received injury, like bullet-pierced bibles:

> In the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Naples there is an imposing array, an impromptu museum, in fact, of ex-voto objects, such as bullets, bayonets, swords, water flasks, representations in silver of parts of the body and of fully equipped soldiers and sailors in miniature. Nearly every offering is accompanied by a postcard photography of a soldier saved by the intervention…and all of them have accounts of the miracle."[340]

Those votives dedicated by the Italian soldiers are very much in line with the idea of anatomical votives—dedicating an object (a bullet ridden shirt, a bloody bayonet, an image of an injured soldier) to attest Mary's power of healing or protection.

On the other hand, the French soldiers dedicated votive offerings on behalf of themselves far less frequently. Instead, families dedicated votives on behalf of the soldier—the father, brother, or son that was fighting, and these votives were dedicated to saints like Joan of Arc. Several of these votives were documented as having inscriptions like, "bienheureuse Jeanne d'Arc, Protégez mon papa," or "Bienheureuse Jeanne d'Arc, Protégez mon neveu et filleul Louis. Je vous en serez reconnaissance."[341] Eugene McCartney writes, "At Naples the soldiers themselves for the most part presented grim reminders of perils and adventures in which they owed their safety to the intervention…at Bordeaux a large majority of the petitions to Joan of

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[340] McCartney, 441.
[341] McCartney, 445.

Arc were made by relative and friends, and they invoked protection and a safe return for those still in danger. The French gave nothing that suggested the horrors of the battlefield."[342]

Additionally, one of the largest modern sites to have votive dedications is the Cemetery of Saint Roch in New Orleans. This cemetery is located in a historically French city and dedicated to a French saint. However, many of the votives at this site are dedicated to Saint Lucy, an Italian saint. This site is noteworthy for its large displays of votives ranging from legs to arms to hearts, and even including similar offerings like shoes, crutches, prosthetics, and even dentures. These votives hang on the walls, next to a statue of Saint Lucy displaying her eyes on a platter. It is interesting to think that even in the United States this interaction between French and Italian saints and their votive traditions continues to play out.[343]

Interactions between anatomical votive traditions in Italy and France produced distinct traditions in both localities that remain vibrant to this day. This discussion demonstrates that by no means is the dedication of votive objects solely an Italian phenomenon. However, the focus upon this practice in Italy provides a valuable context, and can highlight how this tradition influenced and spread throughout Europe. Most importantly, it can emphasize the enduring nature of the tradition across time, regional geography, and deep political and religious change.

The previous examples not only highlight the continuity of this practice, but also the importance of the practice. For those people dedicating these objects, there is a lot at stake— a child praying for her father, a soldier thanking Mary for his life— and the practice is pregnant with meaning. The people who dedicate these objects—in whatever form in which they may come—dedicate them with the knowledge that they are doing whatever they are able to do in order to receive divine help. This reflection of the practice, seen from modern sources, is a

[342] McCartney, 446.
[343] Ebenstein.

reminder that this practice is not simply a study in material remains and past cultures, but rather a practice that carries emotional weight and importance for the dedicator.

That being said, the topic of anatomical votive offerings has been neglected in the fields of Classics, Archaeology, and Religious Studies. There is more archaeological evidence available for Etruscan and Asclepeian cults, but the documentation of individual anatomical votives is largely overlooked in light of other types of votive offerings, or other archaeological evidence at sites. With regards to the Christian cults, much of the research that has been done on healing is specific to miracle stories. The art historical analysis of the dedicated objects is neglected, in part due to the fragility and obscurity of the objects. Overall, specific analyses of individual anatomical votive offerings have been overlooked.

As of late, scholars are becoming more interested in studying these topics. Hopefully, as interest grows in the scholarly community more evidence will emerge that illuminates how these transitions and changes happened within the ritual. New evidence could highlight how different votive cults in different areas interacted, where the practice emerged, and how the perception of the practice changed over time. More study could help determine the answers to other pressing questions, including: how does the role or status of the divine healer play into the dedication of anatomical votives, and why is this practice more popular with certain (types of) divine beings? At present, it is clear that it was and is a popular, dynamic, and important practice within Italian religious life, and deserves closer examination.

Appendix: Images

(See print copy)

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