Calloway Scott // In the previous post, I concentrated on the dedication of "anatomical ex-votos" within the healing sanctuaries of the Greek god Asklepios. These more-or-less realistic coroplastic representations of body parts were offered to the god of healing (as well as other divinities like Apollo and Aphrodite) as offerings of thanks for successful cures. There, I focused on the curated assemblage of these dedications as a way to think about subject-object relations and virtual community. Here, I want to move the conversation away from medico-religious practice in Greece to look at the parallel phenomenon in Republican Rome (c. 400-100 BCE) and from a different point of view. We will see that while both Greeks and Romans shared this dedicatory habit as a feature of a Mediterranean religious "koine," marked divergences in their respective practices illuminate medicine and the body as key loci for the historian investigating processes of cultural formation and adaptation.

Like their Greek counterparts, almost every part of the body is well represented in the Roman evidence: feet, hands, arms, legs, torsos, heads and half-heads split along the vertical axis, as well as ears, eyes, and genitalia. The first and most dramatic difference between Greek and Romano-Italic anatomical dedications is their sheer number. The total of physical remains from the Greek world number somewhere in the hundreds (excluding those we know only from inscribed inventory lists), while those hailing from Italy soar well into the thousands, with more and more catalogued as archaeological interest expands and looks increasingly to sites further from the Roman center. In Italy, very early representations of body parts cast in bronze are found in cult sites as early as the 6th and 5th centuries BCE as part of an elite religious practice (bronze was an important luxury good in the ancient world, sharply delineating the elite from an agricultural peasantry). The radical jump in the number of these dedications comes with the second half of the 4th century, where we find mold-made anatomical votives made of terra-cotta, allowing for much larger-scale production and wider-scale availability.

This rapid increase in the volume and visibility of a specific material practice focused upon the body raises number of (interrelated) questions. Why did this practice become so popular and widespread (and, correspondingly, why did it die out toward the end of the 1st century)? Does the shift in availability of anatomical ex-votos to a poorer clientele indicate a broader socio-political trend within the growing Roman world (that is, more egalitarian access to religious institutions and social spaces that had previously been dominated by the elite)? Did the growing urbanization of the Italian population in these centuries create new focuses on the body to deal with new demands for its care? Or, was the habit itself introduced via the cult of Asklepios in Greece, known

to the Romans as Aesculapius, which was established in the city of Rome at the beginning of the 3rd century BCE (apparently to contend with a plague in 293 BCE)? Indeed, a site with a concentration of such anatomical votives was the commercial town of Gravisca, an important port-of-trade which acted as an early meeting place, facilitating material and cultural exchange between Greeks and Italians. Can we see in these terra-cotta bodies the diffusion of medico-religious knowledge from the Greek east to the Roman west in the Hellenistic age of cosmopolitanism?

The latter suggestion has appealed to some religious and medical historians,[1] but as Jean Turfa and other Romanists have noted,[2] this cannot really be the case, or, at least not in the way we might think. In the first place, the earliest anatomical dedications considerably pre-date the emigration of Asklepios' cult. So too, excavation of Asklepios' Tiber cult reveals a paucity of anatomical votives when compared to the indigenous cult sites both inside and outside the Roman center. What is more, although it is often difficult to specify to what deity these healing offerings are dedicated (because most of these objects lack even basic inscriptions), *any* deity might receive such votives, not just Asklepios or Apollo. In fact, if there is a preference for recipients it would seem to tend towards goddesses like the aptly named Minerva Medica, or promoters of fertility and protectresses of childbirth like Mater Matuta, Diana, or Uni (the Etruscan version of Juno). The picture which emerges, then, is one of a deeply rooted indigenous religious practice, common to Romans and other Italic peoples like the Etruscans, which formed an important marker of shared cultural identity.

One good example of this continuity comes in the form of thousands upon thousands of votive uteri (below), which come in a number of regional styles. Again, as these figurines lack additional textual information, it is difficult to say whether these were meant as general prayers for fertility, specific requests for conception, protection against uterine ailments, or all the above. It is also precisely this anatomical form that marks most strongly cultural difference between Greek and Romano-Italian votives: the willingness to represent the *interior structures of the body*. It would be false to say that there are no examples of bodily interiors in the Greek world, but they are resoundingly few, particularly when compared to the proliferation of uteri at Italic shrines (counted, probably, in the thousands).

Roman offerings: models of uterus. Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

Perhaps more striking still are the many so-called “poly-visceral” votives, which have no comparandum in the Greek votive tradition. Through a characteristic teardrop incision, these near life-sized dedications put on prominent display the interior organs of the body with the heart, lungs, stomach and intestines stacked tidily atop one another.

anatomical ex-voto, (3rd c. BC; 2nd c. BC) Photograph: © 2013 Louvre Museum / Thierry Ollivier.

Votive male torso, Roman, 200 BCE-200 CE. Science Museum, London.
Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

The accuracy with which these votives are executed reveals not only an intimate and familiar knowledge with the inner structure of the body, but a comfortability with the body below the surface of the skin. This stands in striking contrast with general Greek religious attitudes about the skin as a boundary of self-hood which saw dissection as dangerously polluting.[3] Indeed, it was only with the Hellenistic anatomists Herophilos and Erasistratus (3rd century BCE), under the royal sanction of King Ptolemy II, that human dissection was briefly performed in the Greek world, and thereafter its value as an empirical and ethical enterprise was hotly contested. Now, it surely goes too far to say that the poly-visceral torsos are evidence for human dissection at Rome, but their very existence is evocative of different cultural attitudes and expressions of embodiment in the ancient world. Despite their underlying similarities as forms of ritual praxis, the dedications of Romano-Italic anatomical votives were elaborated by the local cultures to express their needs and views of the precarity of embodied life.

[1] Potter, T. W., and and C. Wells 1985. "A Republican Healing Sanctuary at Ponte di Nona near Rome and the Classical Tradition of Votive Medicine." *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 138: 23-47.

[2] Turfa, J. 2006. "Votive Offerings in Etruscan Religion," in de Grummond, N., and E. Simon, eds. *The Religion of the Etruscans.* Austin: 90-115; Glinister, F. 2006. "Reconsidering Religious

‘Romanization," in Schultz, C., and P. Harvey, eds. *Religion in Republican Italy*. Cambridge: 10-33.

[3] For a now classic treatment of the taboo surrounding dissection in the Greek world see von Staden, H. 1992. “The Discovery of the Body: Human Dissection and its Cultural Contexts in Ancient Greece,” *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 65(3): 223-41.