

Bodies of evidence: re-defining approaches to the anatomical votive

A conference to be held at the British School at Rome on 5th June 2012

Organised by: Dr Jane Draycott (BSR, University of Nottingham), Dr Emma-Jayne Graham (University of Leicester)

From Pharaonic Egypt to Roman Italy and from Classical Greece to the Byzantine world, anatomical votives have performed a continuous, if poorly understood, role in ritual and votive practice. Modern scholarship has categorised as ‘anatomical’ a range of ex-votos, made largely but not exclusively from terracotta, which depict parts of the body. These arms, legs, eyes, fingers, hands, feet, uteri, genitals, internal organs and other recognisable parts of the internal and external body have attracted much attention from scholars exploring both past religion and health alike. Nevertheless, the category of ‘anatomical offering’ remains noticeably ill-defined and remains to be integrated fully into the study of ritual, artefacts and the body. This conference will ask how we should define and interpret the ‘anatomical’ votive. Is a veiled portrait plaque an anatomical votive? Is a foot or a hand a distinct anatomical votive if it was constructed in such a way as to allow it to be connected to another part of the body? Indeed, to what extent can we consider a model of the whole body an anatomical votive if it was used to request general healing of a non-specific illness? Whilst feet and ears appear to fall easily into this class should we perhaps also consider other offerings, such as statuettes of the entire body and swaddled babies from a similar perspective? This workshop will bring together scholars working upon the anatomical offering in its broadest sense from across prehistoric, ancient and medieval contexts in order to explore and refine our understanding of this phenomenon. What were anatomical votives for, what did they represent to those who dedicated, encountered or made them, and what factors influenced the selection of a particular item? In particular we will be concerned with what these offerings reveal, not only about past religious and medical contexts and practices, but also about identity, society, politics and concepts or constructions of the human body.

We invite papers which address these issues from the standpoint of archaeology, ancient history, classics and history of medicine, as well as medieval history and welcome contributions focused upon Italic, Greek, Near Eastern, Egyptian and other European or Mediterranean contexts. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- **What is an anatomical votive?** Are whole bodies anatomical or only fragments? Can they also be a work of art, an ornament, a keepsake or a substitute for something else? How might the anatomical be conceived as an item with multiple levels of meaning?
- **The fragmentation, reconstitution or realignment of the body:** the anatomical offering as a proxy for the body or its constituent parts; miniaturisation; the intact body as an anatomical votive; (re)creating a body from individual pieces; the relationship between concepts of the body as expressed by anatomical offerings and the treatment of the component parts of the cult statue, other representations of the human or divine form, or the living body.
- **Standard forms and individuality:** evidence for individualism or artistic embellishment and its consequences; the process of commissioning an ex-voto and the potential for customisation; the anatomical votive as a work of art as well as a religious/medical object; the role of the manufacturer.

- **Change through time and space:** developing attitudes, practices and medical concerns; can we treat objects recovered from diverse cultural and historical contexts as a standard an expression of the same phenomenon?
- **Medicine, pathology and retrospective diagnosis:** distinguishing between concerns for general health and specific complaints; when did scholars begin to use these items to facilitate diagnosis and how has that influenced academic discourse on the subject and the definition of this category of object?
- **The anatomical offering and the divine:** connections with specific deities; defining the sanctuary through its votives; when is a healing sanctuary a healing sanctuary and not simply a shrine? How do more nuanced interpretations of ‘anatomical’ affect these issues?
- **The interpretation of discrete collections of material:** deposits that contain restricted forms of anatomical offering; the juxtaposition of terracotta and metal ex-votos in discrete contexts.
- **Reception of the anatomical votive:** the impact of modern academic discourse on their classification and interpretation; have scholars been too focused on the detail of the traditional anatomical offering at the expense of the broader picture? Links with the development of other areas of study such as magic, gender, women, medicine; discovery, publication and exhibition

Diverse methodologies are encouraged, although proposals should be written to appeal to a wide range of disciplines.

Confirmed speakers:

Dr Ralph Jackson (British Museum)

Prof. Olivier de Cazanove (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)

Dr. Jessica Hughes (Open University)

Dr Fay Glinister (Cambridge)

Papers should be of 20 minutes’ length, and should not have been previously published or delivered at a major conference. Abstracts of approximately 250 words should be submitted by **Monday 13th February**. Successful contributions may be considered for publication in a peer-reviewed conference volume.

At the present time we cannot guarantee funding support for travel expenses (although this is being sought) but accommodation and meals will be provided free of charge by the BSR.

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