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on Ancient Bronzes

edited by Dávid Bartus, Zsolt Mráv and Melinda Szabó

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the XXIst International Congress
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Budapest, 20–24 September 2022

Edited by
Dávid BARTUS – Zsolt MRÁV – Melinda SZABÓ

Budapest, 2024

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When bodies fall apart

Anatomical votives in pre-Roman Italy

Arianna ZAPPELLONI PAVIA 

Institute for Classical Archaeology, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
ariannaz@umich.edu

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Abstract: Anatomical votives have largely been considered by scholars in connection with Roman expansion in Central Italy. Within this ‘religious romanization’ frame, scholars have viewed the presence of the anatomical terracottas of the 4th–2nd cc. BC as the material manifestation of Roman presence in the religious sphere of the Italian peninsula. This paper presents the results from recent and ongoing archaeological studies on pre-Roman sanctuaries in Central and Northern Italian and focuses on the presence of bronze body parts among their votive offerings. The data allows for a reconsideration of the influence of Rome on local religious traditions and sheds light on the mechanism of continuity and change after the Roman expansion.

Keywords: Pre-Roman Italy, votives, Roman expansion, archaeology of religion

Introduction

To this day in many catholic churches worshippers dedicate, among other offerings, small metal or wax anatomical body parts. This long-lasting practice of dedicating body parts to the gods is commonly considered to have roots in the ancient Greek and Roman classical world. Indeed, anatomical votives are well known in the Italian peninsula through the hundreds of terracotta body parts showcased in most archaeological museums of central Italy. From legs to feet, from breasts to ears and genitalia, the ubiquitous presence of terracotta anatomical models in mid-Republican Italy has led scholars to associate their presence with the expansion of Rome into the peninsula. Debates have focused on their origin and dissemination within Italy, the gender and social status of the dedicants, the technique of their manufacture, and their possible meaning. Ironically, given their widespread presence, very few scholars, if any, have directed their attention to similar body parts in bronze, widely attested in Italic sanctuaries long before Italic peoples encountered Roman culture.

One of the main reasons for the narrowly focused interest in anatomical votives in terracotta is their alleged cultural baggage. Their appearance in the Etruscan cities of the Tyrrhenian coast of central Italy as early as the end of the 5th century BC has been connected to the external influences of either Greece or Magna Graecia. Some scholars associate this tradition with the contacts between southern Etruscan cities and classical Greece, where the custom of dedicating anatomical votives made of clay and other materials became popular in the same century;¹ others trace it to the production of statues of worshippers and heads in the Veian and Faliscan area in which they recognize the influence of the masks from Sicily and Magna Graecia associated with chthonic cults.²

1 LESK 2002, 200; HAYNES 2000, 172–173; HUGES 2017.

2 COMELLA 1981, 771–775; FABBRI 2010, 30.

Although there is no agreement on the origin of the Italic custom of dedicating anatomical fictile votive offerings, most scholars agree that there is a connection between the growing presence of these objects in the Italian peninsula in the 4th and 3rd centuries and Rome's colonizing ventures. Simply put, since Etruscan cities were among the first ones to be conquered by the Romans, the spread of anatomical votives outside Etruria and Latium has been read as the direct consequence of the exposure to, and the influence of, Roman hegemony.³ According to this view, the arrival of Roman and Latin colonists caused local Italian communities to adopt religious practices from Rome and Latium. These votives have consequently become a convenient instrument to measure the religious Romanization of Italy. Some scholars go as far as to suggest that Rome deliberately used terracotta votives to integrate Roman ideology into non-Roman communities on a cultural level.⁴ In this frame of reference, it is argued that colonies facilitated the spread of Roman ideology and function, as Olivier de Cazanove puts it, as "religious staging posts of Roman expansion."⁵

Within this traditional Romano-centric view, an often-posed assumption is that anatomical offerings had a healing function. Several scholars consider them to be offerings given in thanks for healing received in response to a worshipper's vow or a request for the *sanatio* of a wounded or ill part of the body.⁶ Often they associate this class of material with therapeutic and fertility cults such as that of Aesculapius.⁷ According to this conventional view, votive representations of feet, hands, etc., symbolized the body parts that needed healing by the god or those that had already been healed. Given this understanding, it is not surprising that thermo-mineral waters near cult sites, to this day thought to have salutary properties, have often been regarded as an essential confirmation of the healing nature of anatomical offerings.⁸

The assumption that votive body parts are linked to healing has its critics. Scholars such as Glinister and Recke have pointed out the difficulties of attributing anatomical votives exclusively to the field of sickness and healing and suggested a less literal and more nuanced interpretation.⁹ Emphasizing the late arrival of the healing cult of Asclepius in Italy and the broad range of deities to whom body parts were dedicated, Glinister associates anatomicals with rituals of wholistic well-being rather than medical health. This broader connotation encompasses wishes for a healthy, serene, and prosperous (physically and morally) life and not necessarily a concern for healing. Along similar lines, Recke proposes an alternative explanation for the dedication of body parts. He suggests that hands may have expressed the prayer of the dedicant, feet represented the donor's journey, eyes would have shown the god's attention, ears could have been intended as a sign of being heard by the deity, and heads may have symbolized the everlasting presence of the dedicant in the sanctuary.

Due to the scholarly focus on anatomical terracottas, little attention has been given to body parts made of bronze. These objects have not yet been the object of a systematic investigation. They are, for example, absent in the reference book on pre-Roman figurative bronzes, Colonna's *Bronzi*

3 TORELLI 1999; DE CAZANOVE 2000; DE CAZANOVE 2015a; DE CAZANOVE 2016, 75; FABBRI 2019, 16.

4 COARELLI 2000; DE CAZANOVE 2001, 191.

5 DE CAZANOVE 2000, 75.

6 LESK 2002; FABBRI 2010; IOZZO 2013, 16; DE CAZANOVE 2013; NOCENTINI 2018, 25; DICUS 2019, 502; BASSANI et al. 2019, 117, 141.

7 See, for example, TURFA 1994; POTTER – WELLS 1985; COMELLA 1981; DICUS 2012; HUGHES 2017; DRAYCOTT – GRAHAM 2017 with previous bibliography. In addition to the healing function of the anatomical votives, the last two authors also explore the possibility that they may indicate concerns about the fragmentation of the body and the relation between the whole and single parts.

8 GRIFFITH 2013; BASSANI et al. 2019 in particular 141–165. In general, on the topic of thermo-mineral springs in Italy and their healing function: ANNIBALETTO et al. 2014; DE CAZANOVE 2015a; BASSANI-GHEDINI 2016.

9 GLINISTER 2006; RECKE 2013.

Votivi Umbro-Sabellici,¹⁰ which focuses on human figurines, if considered at all, in some site/museum-specific catalogs and broad discussion on Italic religions, they are succinctly identified as signs of a healing cult¹¹ and, in some cases related to the alleged presence of sacred waters, the symbol of health and fertility par excellence.¹² Although they mostly represent the same body parts as the later ones molded in terracotta, bronze votives are largely excluded from discussions of religious romanization of the peninsula.¹³

Despite this lack of scholarly attention, the presence of bronze body parts in several cult sites deserves further study. In particular, it triggers two questions this article aims to address. First, are there other possible meanings associated with the dedication of these objects besides the common connection with health and fertility? Second, what role do they play in the diffusion of terracotta anatomicals during the Roman period and in the current academic discourse on religious romanization? Bringing bronze dedications into conversation with the widespread practice of dedicating anatomical terracottas during the Roman period (3rd–1st centuries BC),¹⁴ this paper explores the diffusion of anatomical offerings in pre-Roman Italy. In doing so, it questions the religious change often associated with the anatomical terracottas of the Roman period. On a journey, by necessity short, from Northern to Central Italy (Fig. 22), from mountains to plateaus, from lakes to caves, the argument is structured as follows: First, I showcase all sanctuary sites that have yielded anatomical bronzes to date and briefly describe their topography, architecture, and votive deposits.¹⁵ Then, based on this discussion, I propose a possible meaning behind the deposition of such objects and join the ongoing discussion on the impact of Roman expansion in the transformation of ancient Italy. Ultimately, by tracing the presence of anatomical votives back in time, I suggest an alternative to the conventional view that regards anatomical terracottas as a clear sign of Roman conquest and as an instrument of Roman domination on a cultural level. Instead, I advocate for a more nuanced approach to the dynamics of interaction between Italic people and the Romans during the period of Roman conquest.

Veneto

Although rarely mentioned and poorly integrated into the scholarly debate on Roman expansion, bronze anatomical votives were widely present in the peninsula before the Romans began to encroach on surrounding territories. From north to south, the first area which has yielded pre-Roman anatomical bronzes corresponds to the modern region Veneto, occupied by the peoples known by the Romans as the Veneti. Their associated territory was rich and diverse, stretching from the low-lying and fertile areas around the Venetian lagoon and the Po delta to the high Alps. In contrast with Central Italy, where the Romans began their expansion as early as the 4th century BC, the Veneto region remained independent until 89 BC, when the entire peninsula was granted Roman citizenship.

10 COLONNA 1970.

11 COLONNA 1985, 24; SASSATELLI 1990, 600; CAGIANELLI 1999, 14; CHIECO BIANCHI 2002, 20; GROPPA 2011, 90; BONOMI – MALACRINO 2011, 79; TURFA 2013, 1033; CRISTOFANI 1985, 150; CARVALE 2003, 127; VILUCCHI et al. 2001; HAYNES 2000, 252, 125; NOCENTINI et al. 2018, 73; BORCHI 2007, 68. Interestingly, this class of material is almost entirely overlooked in most publications on Umbrian sanctuaries.

12 RONCALI 1989, 114, 124.

13 In their recent contribution on lakes and groves as markers of healing cults in Central Italy, Edlund-Berry and Turfa (BASSANI et al. 2019, 141) focus on anatomical votives in terracotta and limit themselves to noting that “a few metal versions are known for earlier periods”; CAGIANELLI 1999, 14 provides a first but incomplete list of sites that yielded bronze anatomical parts.

14 I refer to these centuries as Roman period, Hellenistic Period, or Middle/Late Republican period.

15 I do not delve into the stylistic description of the objects as this lies beyond the scope of this contribution.

Lagole

Lagole, located southeast of Calalzo di Cadore in the upper Piave Valley on the lower slopes of the Alps, was the site of an important Venetic shrine excavated between 1949 and 1956.¹⁶ The open-air sacred area was centered around a small lake fed by several mineral springs and was used from the 4th century BC to the Roman period, as indicated by the presence of coins dated to 380 AD.

These include small square bronze plaques—some inscribed with the name of the person making the offering and the dedication—ladles, cups, other drinking vessels, and seventy bronze figurines, among which is a small, bent right arm (Fig. 1).

San Pietro Montagnon

San Pietro Montagnon, in the municipality of Montegrotto at the border between Este and Padua, was the site of the fortuitous discovery of thousands of pots and bronze figurines. Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, a series of systematic excavations identified the presence of a buried thermal lake. Inside this lake basin, a 50 cm deep deposit of ceramic and bronze dated to between the 7th to the 3rd century BC was found lying on a clay surface. At the center of the lake, the presence of deep oak posts suggested that a platform for a cult structure or statue may have been in place.

The votive offerings amount to three thousand five hundred complete ceramic vessels, eighty bronze animal and horse figurines, and two anatomical bronzes consisting of an outstretched right arm and a left leg (Fig. 2.a–b).

Villa di Villa

Construction work carried out in 1976 in a quarry on the southern slopes of the Monte Castelir, in the locality Villa di Villa, brought to light a number of bronze objects spanning from the 5th–4th century BC to the Roman occupation of the area.¹⁷ Although the materials were found in a secondary deposition and had most likely fallen from the above plateau, they were immediately considered part of a votive deposit. Following this fortunate discovery, archaeological work conducted on the

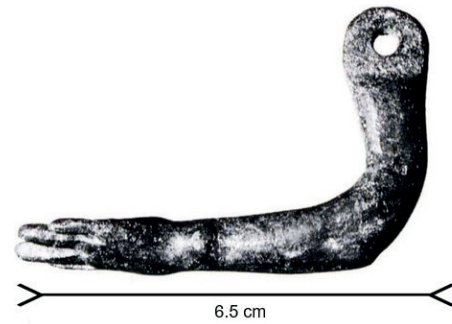


Fig. 1. Bronze arm from Lagole (after GAMBACURTA – FOGOLARI 2001, 81; by permission of the Soprintendenza archeologia belle arti e paesaggio per l'area metropolitana di Venezia e le provincie di Belluno, Padova e Treviso).

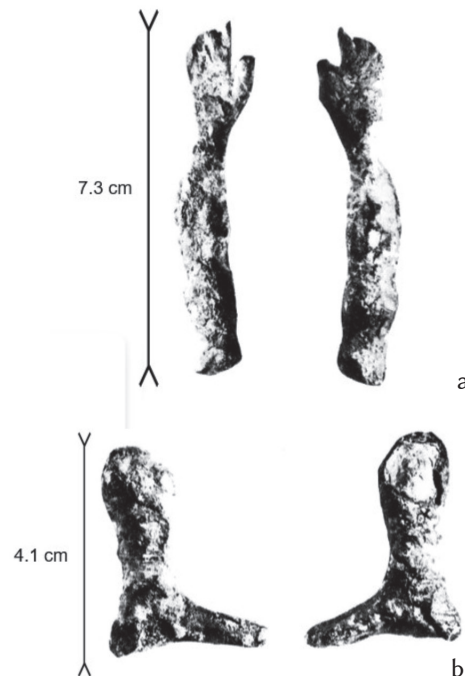


Fig. 2. a – Bronze arm and foot from Montegrotto (after DÄMMER 1986, Tab. 17.70a; by permission of the Soprintendenza archeologia belle arti e paesaggio per l'area metropolitana di Venezia e le provincie di Belluno, Padova e Treviso), b – Bronze foot from Montegrotto (after DÄMMER 1986, Tab. 17.73a; by permission of the Soprintendenza archeologia belle arti e paesaggio per l'area metropolitana di Venezia e le provincie di Belluno, Padova e Treviso).

16 GAMBACURTA – FOGOLARI 2001.

17 MAIOLI et al. 1992.

mountain confirmed the cultic function of the area, which, at least during the Roman time, appears to have been equipped with artificial terraces used to regularize the slopes of the mountain and a *favissa*, a sacred pit where ritual items used in the temple would be buried.¹⁸ In addition, the large number of iron nails and planks has led excavators to hypothesize that a sacred building once stood on the plateau.

The votive objects retrieved from the Monte Castelir include eighty-eight bronze male figurines, two lower parts of male figurines (Fig. 3), thin bronze plates dated to the 5th BC, and fibulae red slip and gray ware of the 1st century BC.



Fig. 3. Two bronze lower busts from Villa di Villa (after MAIOLI et al. 1992, Tab. 22; by permission of the Soprintendenza archeologia belle arti e paesaggio per l'area metropolitana di Venezia e le provincie di Belluno, Padova e Treviso).

Lova

Lova, a small hamlet in the municipality of Campagna Lupia near the Venetian lagoon, has been the subject of extensive excavations carried out in the late 1980s and then resumed in 1994 and 2009/2010.¹⁹ These revealed the presence of a sanctuary at the river mouth of the Moedacus (modern Brenta River) belonging to the 2nd century BC but where ritual activity appears to have begun in the 4th century and continued until the 1st century BC. The complex, whose layout suggests that more than one deity may have been worshipped, is articulated in three cult rooms facing onto a central court (Temples A, B, and C) and a smaller rectangular building (Temple D).

Over one hundred bronze figurines, including two bronze legs and one foot (Fig. 4.a–b), have been found near the well on the northern side of Temple B and in the area of Temple A and have been dated between the 4th and the 3rd century BC. Alongside these objects, republican asses, jars, and cookware came to light, together with four gold rings—two of them with the name of the owners—dated to the first half of the 1st century AD.

Este, Sanctuary of Raetia

The Sanctuary of Raetia at Baretella, just outside Este and 1.5 km southeast of the ancient Venetic settlement, was the most important cult place in the Veneto region. The shrine was discovered in 1880 on private property and excavated by landowners between 1880 and 1890. More scientific archaeological investigations resumed in 1987 under the direction of Heinz-Werner Dämmer.²⁰ These uncovered a sacred area

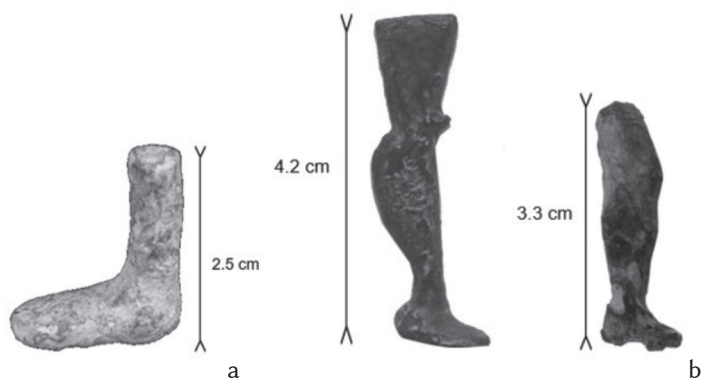


Fig. 4. a – Bronze foot from Lova (after GROPPA 2011, 98.15, Tab. 22; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per il Comune di Venezia e Laguna), b – Bronze legs from Lova (photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per il Comune di Venezia e Laguna).

18 BOARO – LEONARDI 2005.

19 BONOMI – ASOLATI 1995; BONOMI – MALACRINO 2009; BONOMI – MALACRINO 2011; VIGONI 2012.

20 RUTA SERAFINI 2002; CHIECO BIANCHI 2002; ICKLER 2013.

lying on a terrace near the old branch of the Adige River and consisting of an open-air shrine equipped with small altars, hearth-pits, and a 1st century BC porticus divided into five rooms.

Ritual activities at the site span from the end of the 7th century BC to the 2nd century and are attested by fourteen thousand votive offerings. These range from loom weights and fibulae to bronze sheets, bronze figurines, bronze objects, and hundreds of writing tools inscribed with formal dedications to the goddess Raetia or simply with alphabetic signs. The one hundred thirty figurines of the pre-Roman period (5th–4th century BC) include fourteen anatomical votives: one arm, three male genitalia, four legs, two feet, two hands, and two lower bodies (one female and one male; Fig. 5.a–f).



Fig. 5. a – Bronze arm from the Sanctuary of Reitia, Este (photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei del Veneto), b – Bronze male genitalia from the Sanctuary of Reitia, Este (photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei del Veneto), c – Bronze legs from the Sanctuary of Reitia, Este (photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei del Veneto), d – Bronze feet from the Sanctuary of Reitia, Este (photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei del Veneto), e – Bronze hands from the Sanctuary of Reitia, Este (photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei del Veneto), f – Bronze lower body parts from the Sanctuary of Reitia, Este (photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei del Veneto).

Etruria

The area extended from the Arno and Tiber on the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Apennines and along the Upper Adriatic, including Rimini and Bologna. Inscriptions and archaeological finds in Campania around the Bay of Naples and at Capua and Pontecagnano attest to another Etruscan enclave. After the conquest of Veii in 396, Rome began to gain power in the region through control of the Tiber and the salt mines, as well as the establishment of colonies, allies, and treaties.

Our exploration of Etruscan cult places will begin with the Etruscan Po-Territory, known today as Padanian Etruria,²¹ and continues in Northern Etruria, an area roughly corresponding to northern

21 Beside the votives from Marzabotto presented below, another area that yielded bronze anatomicals is Modena. A bronze leg, whose findspot remains unknown, is now displayed at the Museo Civico Archeologico ed Etnologico di Modena and has been dated to the 5th century BC: [MIARI 2001](#), Tab. 9.11.

Tuscany (between the Arno River to the north and the Albegna River to the south) and eastern Umbria (west of the Tiber River).²²

Marzabotto

Fontile Sanctuary

The Fontile Sanctuary, considered to be a cult place dedicated to sacred water, was identified between 1968 and 1969 in the suburban part of Marzabotto, on the northern edge of the Misano plateau.²³

The monumental area measures 9 m on the N–S side and 7.5 m on the E–W side. It consists of a drainage channel with N–S orientation in addition and in connection with a basin lined in terracotta where the spring water was captured and contained, some of it in a well 1.5 m deep. The well and the tank are built in *opus quadratum* and are slightly off-center in the direction of the eastern perimeter boundary.

Votive offerings found in situ indicate that the sanctuary was in use from the mid-6th to the 4th century BC. From an open-air part of the sanctuary come fourteen figurines of male and female offerors, two anatomicals (one foot and one leg; Fig. 6.a–b), bowls in marble and terracotta, including a ‘Little Master’ cup dating to the sixth century, and two Siana cups dating to around 540 BC, as well as several cippus bases that once held the figurines.

Acropolis

In 1939 and 1941, 34 bronze figurines were found on the slopes of the city’s acropolis hill (Misanello).²⁴ These include male and female worshippers and four anatomicals—two arms and two legs (Fig. 7).

Fonte Veneziana

The Fonte Veneziana deposit was discovered in 1869 in the area called Fonte Veneziana, located within the modern city of Arezzo and corresponding to the north-east edge of the hill of S. Donato, where the Etruscan settlement of Aretium was located.²⁵ In a field belonging to his property, antiquarian Francesco Leoni recovered the remains of a round masonry construction (perhaps a votive pit) and one of the wealthiest Etruscan votive deposits.

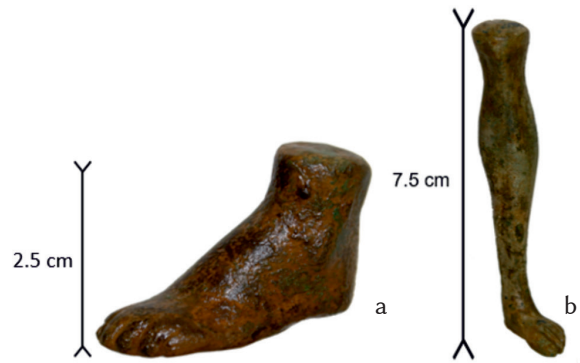


Fig. 6. a – Bronze foot from the Fontile Sanctuary, Marzabotto (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei Emilia-Romagna), b – Bronze leg from the Fontile Sanctuary, Marzabotto (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei Emilia-Romagna).



Fig. 7. Bronze legs and arms from the slopes of the Acropolis in Marzabotto (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei Emilia-Romagna).

22 Besides the anatomical figurines from this region discussed in the text, the Museo Claudio Faina in Orvieto displays a number of bronze anatomicals of unknown provenance: CARVALE 2003, 126–130.

23 SASSATELLI 1990; MIARI 2000.

24 MANSUELLI 1967; VITALI et al. 2001.

25 BOCCI PACINI 1980; BOCCI PACINI 1984; CRISTOFANI 1985, 250–253; VILUCCHI et al. 2001.

The latter comprises one hundred and eighty objects, including small bronzes from 530–480 BC,²⁶ small jewelry, a large number of *aes rude*, and pottery fragments spanning from the 5th century to the end of the Republican period. Among the bronze figures are anatomical body parts—four arms, eyes, one male genitalia, and four heads (Fig. 8.a–f)—which scholars connected to a healing cult due to the sacred deposit's proximity to a water fountain.²⁷

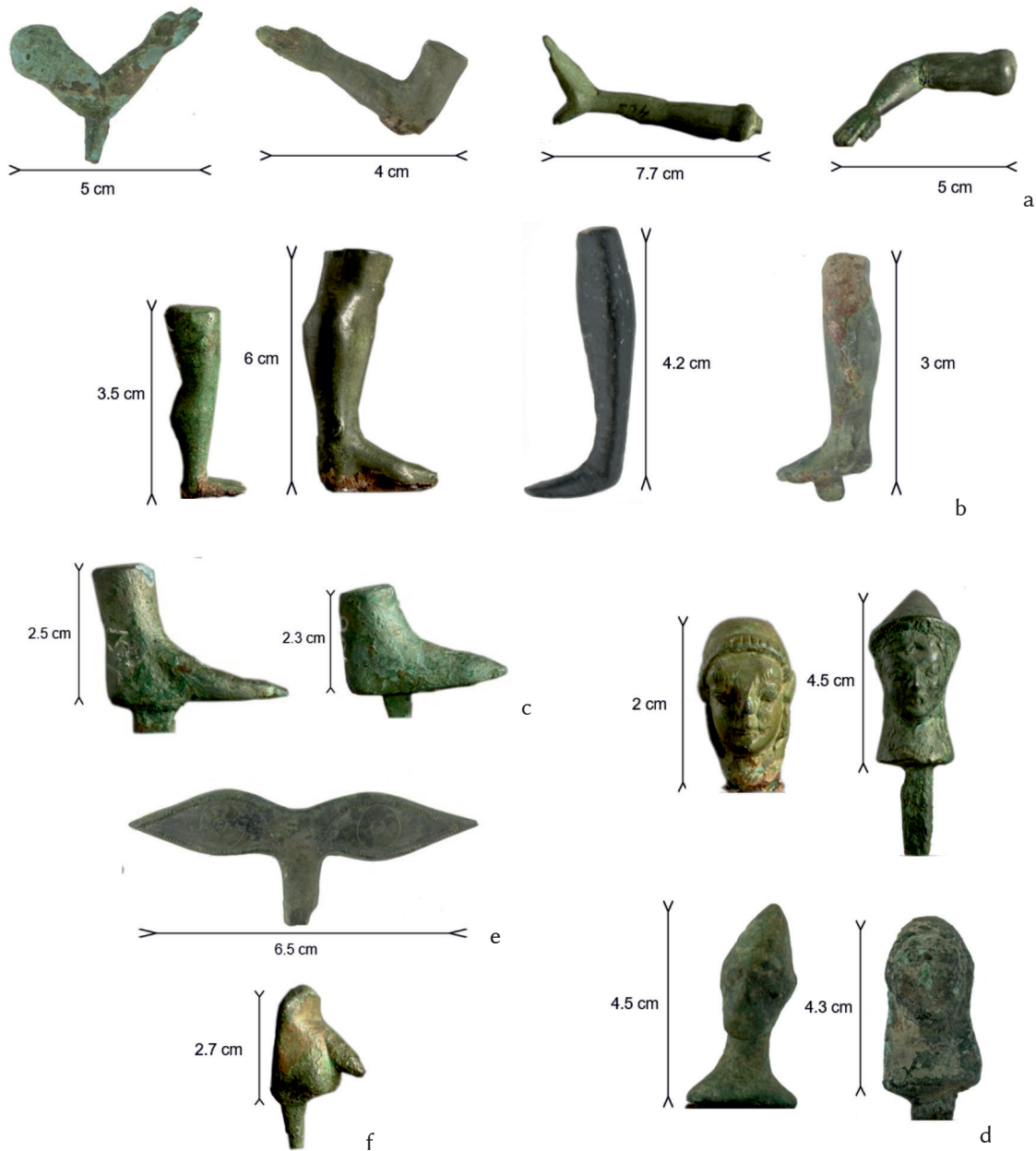


Fig. 8. a – Bronze arms from Fonte Veneziana (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Museo Mecenate di Arezzo), b – Bronze legs from Fonte Veneziana (Photo by the Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Museo Mecenate di Arezzo), c – Bronze heads from Fonte Veneziana (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Museo Mecenate di Arezzo), d – Bronze eyes from Fonte Veneziana (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Museo Mecenate di Arezzo), e – Bronze male genitalia from Fonte Veneziana (courtesy of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze).

26 The bronze figurines were initially dispersed among multiple collections and then identified by Bocci in the 80s' as belonging to the same deposit: See footnote 23.

27 BOCCI PACINI 1980, 88; CRISTOFANI 1985, 250; TURFA 2013, 1033; VILUCCHI et al. 2001, 116.



Fig. 9. a – Bronze heads from the Lake of the Idols (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Siena, Grosseto e Arezzo), b – Bronze legs from the Lake of the Idols (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Siena, Grosseto e Arezzo), c – Bronze feet from the Lake of the Idols (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Siena, Grosseto e Arezzo), d – Bronze hand from the Lake of the Idols (Photo Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Siena, Grosseto e Arezzo).

Lake of the Idols

The Lake of the Idols is located in Arezzo province at the highest ridge of the northern Apennines and some 1380 m a.s.l. atop Mt. Falterona. According to tradition, a shepherd's discovery of a bronze statuette of Herakles in 1838 on the banks of a small lake led to the draining of the water and the recovery of an impressive number of metal finds that worshippers had once thrown or floated in the water. Recent excavations carried out between 2003 and 2007 clarified the physiognomy of the votive deposit and its chronology which seems to span from the 6th to the 4th century BC.²⁸

The findings amount to six thousand items, including over six hundred bronze figurines (female, male, and warrior figurines), one hundred fragments of *aes rude* vases, and two thousand arrowheads, which may indicate that the cult had a militaristic character. The bronze anatomical votives include twelve small heads, eight legs, two feet, two arms, one hand, one female breast, and one pair of eyes (Fig. 9.a–e).²⁹ Scholars have assumed that these votives are associated with healing and the curative qualities thought to have been attributed to the lake.³⁰

Albagino

In the northern Apennines, the Albagino plateau lies on the northeastern side of Mt. Gradi at an altitude of 625 m and is protected by woods, lakes, and mountains. Ongoing archaeological investigations on the plateau near a dried-up lake have yielded the discovery of fourteen bronze figurines from the 5th century BC, including warriors, animals, male and female (?) votive offerings, and two small heads (Fig. 10).³¹

Fiesole

Main sanctuary

The main sanctuary of the Etruscan town of Fiesole, located on a hill overlooking the Arno valley and in use between the 7th century BC and the Roman imperial period, has yielded the remains of a Late Archaic temple. These consist of fragments of a block carved with a recumbent lion, a frieze of lotus, palmettes, and spirals—possibly part of a monumental altar—and several bronze votive statuettes found inside the temple's *cella*.³² These depict female and male worshipers, and body parts: two bronze legs, two feet, one left arm, one right arm, and three bronze heads (Fig. 11.a–c).³³ The presence of anatomicals in bronze among the votive findings led to the speculation that the temple was dedicated to a healing deity, perhaps Minerva.³⁴

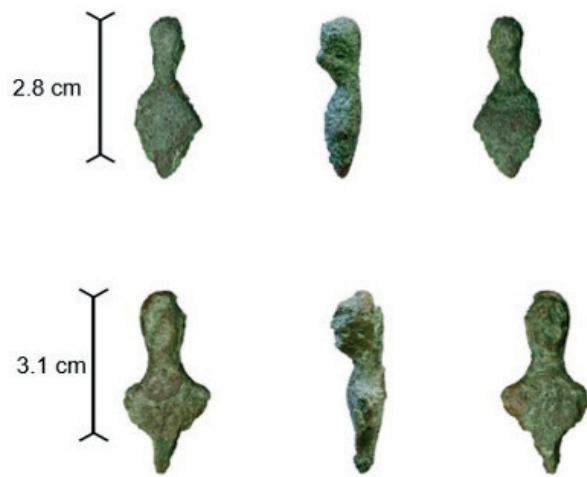


Fig. 10. Bronze heads from Albagino (after NOCENTINI 2018, 98, A13 and A14; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato).

28 BORCHI 2007; SETTESOLDI 2013.

29 The last two are unfortunately missing.

30 CRISTOFANI 1985, 253; FEDELI 2001, 53 and 90; NOCENTINI 2018, 73.

31 NOCENTINI 2018, 83–101.

32 ORLANDINI-PASSIGLI 1990, 85–91; CAGIANELLI 1997.

33 The arms and one head are reported missing by Cagianelli (CAGIANELLI 1997, 49, 190–191).

34 HAYNES 2000, 252.



Fig. 11. a – Bronze legs and feet from the main sanctuary at Fiesole (photos by Chiara Ferrari; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato), b – Bronze arm from the main sanctuary at Fiesole (after CAGIANELLI 1997, Tav. 14.37; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato), c – Bronze heads the main sanctuary at Fiesole (photos by Chiara Ferrari; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato). The image on the right is after CAGIANELLI 1997, Tav. 14.36; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato).

Villa Marchi

The main sanctuary of Fiesole is not the only area where anatomical bronzes have been discovered. In 1932, during the construction of a small villa on the private grounds of Villa Marchi, forty-four bronze figurines, some still attached to their stone bases and dated to between the 6th and the 5th century BC, were identified on the site of a small rectangular building.³⁵ The rich votive deposits include women and men worshipers and seven small bronze heads (Fig. 12).

35 MINGAZZINI 1932.



Fig. 12. Bronze heads from the votive deposit in loc. Villa Marchi (photos by Chiara Ferrari; by permission of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato).

Arna

Objects in the Bellucci collection preserved at the Archaeological Museum of Perugia have been identified as coming from one or more votive deposits. Although any record of their discovery is lost and the exact findspot unknown, their provenance from the ancient town of Arna, 10 km east of Perugia, is certain.³⁶ Among dozens of figurines of female and male offerors and animals, the assemblage includes four legs, four arms, and eight small heads.³⁷

Magione

Between 1984 and 1986, excavations carried out by the Soprintendenza dell'Umbria on the upland of Magione, 18 km west of Perugia, brought to light the remains of an Etruscan sanctuary located on a dominant position overlooking the Trasimeno Lake.³⁸ The excavation revealed a small quadrangular room dug directly into the ground, with a floor in limestone slabs and walls in dry-stone masonry, perhaps a basin designed to collect spring water.³⁹ No temple was found, but a wooden temple structure, decorated with some of the architectural elements found among the fill material, has been hypothesized as originally standing above the small basin.

36 FERUGLIO 2001.

37 The objects are published in: FERUGLIO 2001.

38 RONCALLI 1989, 113–123.

39 The presence of a water basin was conjectured primarily based on the few anatomical votives found during the excavations: RONCALLI 1989, 114.

Among the materials found filling the quadrangular room, were courseware, black slip pottery, decorated architectural terracotta, roofing elements, and six hundred bronze figurines, among two of which represent body parts: one foot and one arm.⁴⁰ On the basis of the materials recovered, the use of the sacred space is believed to have spanned from the 5th to the 3rd century BC, with sporadic frequentations during the imperial period, as attested by the presence of sigillata pottery and coins.



Fig. 13. Bronze pair of legs from Bettona (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia; by permission of the Direzione Regionale Musei Umbria)

Bettona

Votive offerings from Bettona, located 20 km southeast of Perugia, were identified in two 19th century private collections.⁴¹ They consist of thirty-eight bronze figurines dated between the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th century BC, representing male and female offerors, animals, and body parts. There are six specimens: two legs, one foot, two heads, and one pair of legs (Fig. 13).⁴² Although no sanctuary site has been identified, the presence of anatomical votives has led to the hypothesis of a healing cult connected to a spring.⁴³

Umbria

Bordering the Etruscan territory to the north and west, ancient Umbria encompassed a larger territory than the one embraced by the modern region. The former included the northern part of the Adriatic side of the Apennines (the modern regions of Le Marche and Emilia Romagna) but initially excluded Etruscan areas, such as Perugia and Volsinii. This position made the region a crucial node in Rome's progressive expansion toward the inland of Etruria and its northern extremities. In 299 BC, the Romans established the first colony in the Umbrian territory and secured the route towards the north which was threatened by the Gaul.

Monte Acuto

The site is at an altitude of 926 m on the summit of Monte Acuto. This mountain lies on the right bank of the Tiber River in northwestern Umbria. From its peak, it dominates the surrounding territories: the river and the Fratta plain, at the border between the Etruscan and the Umbrian regions. Between 1986 and 1995, archaeological campaigns brought to light a cult place used from the 6th to the 4th century BC and sporadically frequented until the 4th century AD.⁴⁴

The sanctuary is characterized by a pseudo-rectangular enclosure (35 × 20 m) with a wall of about 3 m wide built with local stones and aligned and constructed without using mortar. On the western

40 Ten anatomical bronzes appear to have been retrieved during the excavation, but, unfortunately, eight are missing from the archaeological record.

41 RONCALLI 1989, 124–133.

42 One bronze hand went missing but was originally part of the collection. The legs, foot, and heads are published in: RONCALLI 1989, 125–126, 133.

43 Roncalli suggests the area of the ancient necropolis as a suitable cult area for a healing cult place: RONCALLI 1989, 124.

44 For the topographic framework of the sanctuary and the excavation's results, see CENCIAIOLI 1991; CENCIAIOLI 1996; CENCIAIOLI 1998.

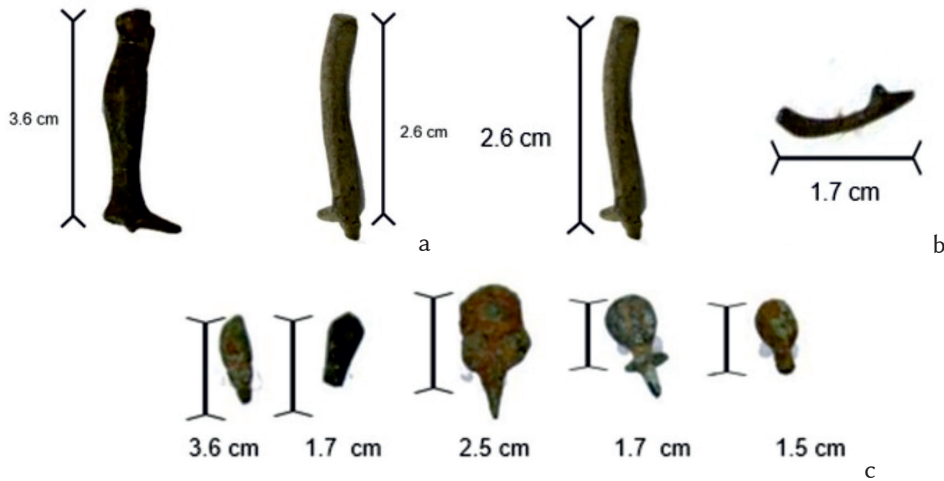


Fig. 14. a – Bronze legs from Monte Acuto (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), b – Bronze arms from Monte Acuto (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), c – Bronze heads from Monte Acuto (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria).

side of the enclosure, a small drystone corridor led to the *sacellum*, made with two courses of dry-stone rocks. A 4 m deep votive pit has been identified as dug into the rock south of the *sacellum*. Besides bones and votive figurines, the pit has yielded brick fragments—interpreted as the material of the structure’s roof—one spindle, impasto clay, the base of a cup, and a ribbed handle related to a previous occupation of the area.

The excavation has retrieved one thousand six hundred votive figurines representing males, females, warriors, animals, and body parts. These consist of nine specimens: five heads, two legs, and two arms (Fig. 14.a–c).

Colfiorito, Sanctuary of Cupra

The sanctuary site lies 200 m north of the ancient settlement of Plestia, in the large upland plateau of Colfiorito, situated in Apennine Umbria between modern Foligno (Umbria) and Camerino (Le Marche). Excavations carried out between 1962 and 1967 established that the sacred area was used from the 6th to the 1st century BC and equipped with a permanent architectural structure starting in the 4th century.⁴⁵ Although the complete layout of the sanctuary during this phase is unknown, it consisted of a *temenos*, wherein a small *sacellum* was erected. The latter was covered in the 3rd century BC with Etrusco-Italic architectural slabs depicting floral motifs (palms, garlands, lotus flowers) and antefixes with female and male heads. East of this room, there was a quadrangular basin, possibly a cistern.



Fig. 15. Bronze foot from Colfiorito, Sanctuary of Cupra (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria).

A large number of votive materials were found scattered around the sacred area. The earliest findings include Etruscan red-figure pottery and two hundred and sixty bronze votive figurines, while

⁴⁵ The results of the excavations have been briefly summarized in CIOTTI 1964, 99–112; FERUGLIO 1966, 306; MANCA – MENICHELLI 2014.

later finds include overpainted Etruscan/Faliscan vases, black gloss vessels, and coroplastic objects. The votive figurines depict males, females, warriors, and one foot (Fig. 15).

Cancelli

The sanctuary site is in the modern cemetery of Cancelli, 13 km east of Foligno (ancient Fulginae), on a mountain almost 1000 meters above sea level. It is situated in the heart of Apennine Umbria, along a mountain chain that marks the eastern boundary of the Umbrian valley, on the left of the River Menotre, a tributary of the Topino. Although the sacred area has been known since the last decade of the ninth century, it is only in recent years that the site has been the object of systematic archaeological campaigns.⁴⁶ In 2012 and 2013, excavations targeted the central and northern sectors of the modern cemetery of Cancelli. They exposed an area of 20 × 8 m belonging to the ancient cult place in use from the 6th century BC to the 1st century AD, when it seems to have been abandoned, possibly due to an earthquake.

No permanent architectural structure is known for the pre-Roman phase of the sacred area; its earliest monumental phase belongs to the 4th/3rd century BC and is attested by drystone walls built directly on the bedrock and the presence of a large dolium buried into the ground. In the 2nd century BC, these structures were rebuilt and rotated on a north-south/east-west axis. Three rooms—two of them equipped with floors in *opus signinum*—and a water channel were built following the new orientation. Although the function of these spaces remains unknown, a drain suggests that water-related rituals may have been performed in this period.

Votive objects of the 6th–5th century BC include vessels, one bronze fibula, one bronze pendant, loom weights, and twelve figurines representing warriors, worshippers, animals, and body parts—one head and one arm.⁴⁷

Spoletto, La Rocca sanctuary

The cult site takes its name, ‘La Rocca,’ from the imposing medieval papal fortress (Rocca Albornoziana) that occupies the entire summit of the Colle di Sant’Elia, a foothill of the Apennines (452 m above sea level) in the town of Spoleto in east-central Umbria. Although the construction of the Albornoziana Fortress

leveled any preexisting structures, restoration and construction work carried out in the last thirty years on the slopes of the hill and inside the Fortress have yielded evidence of the existence of at least one sacred area used from the fifth century BC to the fourth century AD.⁴⁸ Although it was impossible to retrieve any ancient architectural structure, fragments of terracotta antefixes and *antepagmenta* could be attributed to the architectural and coroplastic decoration of the sacred building(s) that existed on La Rocca during the Roman period.

Votives included eleven bronze figurines of the pre-Roman period representing males, warriors, one bronze arm (Fig. 16) and several pottery fragments, one Roman bronze coin from the 3rd century BC, nine anatomical votives, two heads, and one terracotta figurine of a bovine dated to the Roman period.



Fig. 16. Bronze arm from Spoleto, La Rocca (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria).

46 MANCA – MENICHELLI 2014.

47 These votives are published in: MANCA – MENICHELLI 2014, 57.

48 The analysis of the pottery typologies found on La Rocca shows that the area was only scarcely frequented in the Imperial and the Early Medieval period. The first excavation results are published in BRUNI et al. 1983; ERMINI PANI et al. 2011 summarize all excavation seasons from 1993 to 2007.

Monte Santo sanctuary

The sanctuary site lies one km west of Todi in southern Umbria and close to the border between Etruria and Umbria. The existence of an archaic sacred place on Monte Santo has been hypothesized based on scattered material found on the mountain, namely a statue of Mars in the act of libation, parts of an honorary travertine column, and several small bronze figurines. The limited available evidence pinpoints two moments of the sanctuary's frequentation: the 5th and the end of the 1st century BC when Tuder became Colonia Iulia Fida Tuder.

Forty-nine bronze figurines have been associated with the sacred area that may have existed on Monte Santo. These include figurines of male and female worshippers, warriors, striding men, and three body parts: two heads and one hand (Fig. 17.a–b).

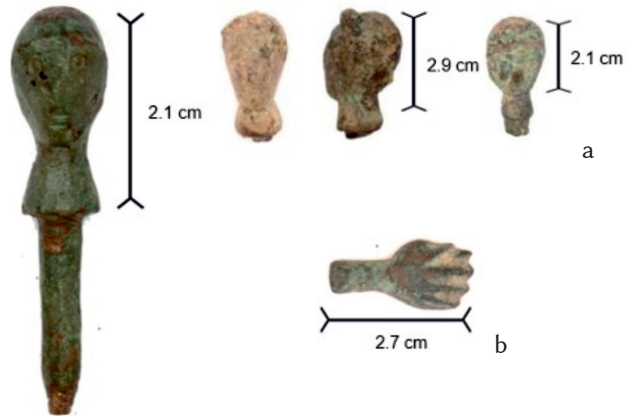


Fig. 17. a – Bronze heads from Monte Santo, Todi (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell'Umbria), b – Bronze hand from Monte Santo, Todi (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell'Umbria).

Monte Moro

Monte Moro is a limestone upland mountain (696 m above sea level) located on the north bank of the Nera River, at the border between Umbrian and the Sabine territory. In 1998, 2004, and 2010 the Soprintendenza Archeologica per l'Umbria carried out archaeological campaigns and surveys of the mountain summit to investigate structures brought to light by previous clandestine excavations.⁴⁹ Here, the excavators identified the presence of a sacred building of the 2nd century BC whose stratigraphy had been entirely compromised by looters and reforestation activities. The complex was 26 m long and divided into at least four rooms with one corridor granting access to these spaces. Although it received an architectural form only in the Roman period, the ceramic analysis allowed excavators to determine that the area was used from the 5th century BC to the 3rd century AD when it seems to have been the object of spoliation aimed at removing construction materials. Only sporadic frequentation is attested in the 4th century AD.

The votive material from the 5th century BC comprises fragments of *aes rude* and seventeen human and animal bronze votive figurines, among which one small bronze head (Fig. 18). This material has been found in two pits mixed with objects of the Roman period such as bronze nails, architectural elements, and anatomical votives in terracotta.



Fig. 18. Bronze head from Monte Moro (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell'Umbria).

⁴⁹ The results of the excavations are summarized by Sisani (SISANI 2013, 132–134).

Monte Torre Maggiore

The sanctuary site is located on the summit of Monte Torre Maggiore (1120 m above sea level). This mountain is the highest peak of the Monti Martani and lies about 20 km north of the Umbrian settlement of *Interamna Nahrs* (modern Terni) in southern Umbria. From 1984 to 2006, the peak of this mountain was the object of intermittent archaeological investigations that allowed excavators to ascertain its development as a cult site from the pre-Roman period to the 4th/5th century AD.⁵⁰

In the 6th–4th century BC, the sanctuary site was not marked by permanent architectural structures. The original sacred area was most likely marked only by a funnel-shaped pit and a channel connected to it. Because of the pit's peculiar location in the pronaos of the later 3rd century temple (Temple A) and because it was found filled only with sterile sand, the excavators interpreted this depression as the foundation ditch, the *mundus*, of the sacred area. In the third century BC, a temenos in *opus quadratum* was laid around the area of the earlier pit and organized in nine small utility rooms. The center of this precinct was occupied by a temple (A), which incorporated elements of the Etrusco-Italic temple architecture and those of Hellenistic type.⁵¹ This temple's plan did not obliterate the ritual pit of the sixth century BC, but incorporated it inside the *pronaos*, proof of its importance. The area underwent a second renovation in the 1st century BC. A second temple (B) in *opus caementicium*, covered with limestone slabs, was built northwest of temple A and oriented north–south. In addition to the construction of a new building, the renovation of the sanctuary included the extension of the temenos to the southern side with more facility rooms.

Ritual activity in the pre-Roman period is indicated by several fragments of *aes rude*, a gilded bronze object in the shape of a thunderbolt,⁵² and almost two hundred bronze figurines of males, females, warriors, and anatomical body parts: five heads, one foot, and one hand (Fig. 19.a–c). These objects were recovered in disturbed layers throughout the sanctuary and in a well in the northwestern corner of the area, where they were mixed with later materials, such as fragments of pottery and terra sigillata, black gloss bowls, plates, miniatures vases, coins of the *as* and *semis* denominations, a black-gloss bowl, and anatomical votives in terracotta.

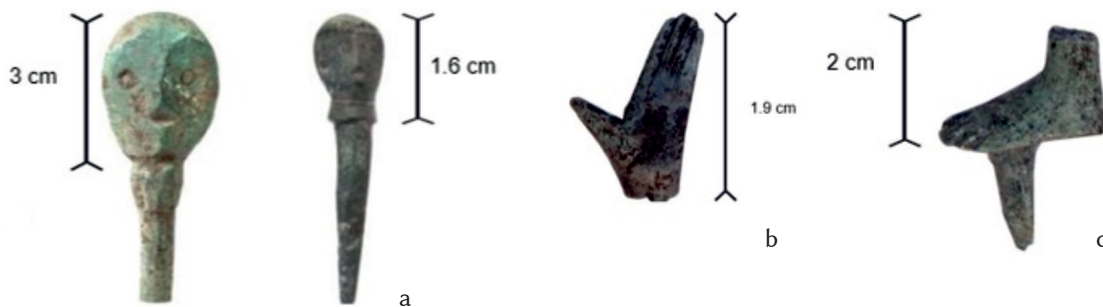


Fig. 19. a – Bronze heads from Monte Torre Maggiore (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), b – Bronze hand from Monte Moro (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), c – Bronze foot from Monte Moro (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria).

50 BONOMI PONZI – DE ANGELIS 1988; BONOMI PONZI 1989; ANGELELLI – PONZI 2006, 118–130. The latter publication fully summarizes the results of these excavation seasons.

51 The temple was oriented east–west (11.8 × 7.9 m), with *pronaos* (5.7 × 2 m) and *cella* (5.7 × 5.7 m). The presence of fragments of columns around the temple and the impression left on the ground by a column's base allowed the excavators to hypothesize that, unlike Etrusco-Italic temples, the one on Monte Torre Maggiore was surrounded by columns on all sides. The entrance to the building was by a flight of stairs.

52 BONOMI PONZI et. al. 1995, 47 have suggested that this object may either have been deposited as *fulgur conditum*, or buried lightning-struck object, or connected to Iuppiter Fulgurator, whose presence is attested at Interamna Nahrs during the Roman period.

Monte S. Pancrazio

The sanctuary is located on the southern Umbrian massif known as Monte San Pancrazio, some 9 km to the east of the ancient settlement of Otriculum (modern Otricoli) in southern Umbria. Our knowledge of this site is highly fragmented. In the 1960s, following the fortuitous discovery of votive material on the mountain's slopes, Umberto Ciotti carried out an archaeological investigation of the mountain peak, where a few travertine blocks were visible on the mountain peak surface. In his short description of the Monte San Pancrazio sanctuary, he reports that he uncovered the remains of a Hellenistic porticus. Based on this evidence and the analysis of the votive objects, he suggests that the sanctuary was used until the second century BC.⁵³ However, the results of Ciotti's excavation remain undocumented, and the votive objects unpublished.

The material found scattered on the mountain peak includes twenty-seven bronze figurines of the pre-Roman period—among which were five heads, two arms, and two legs (Fig. 20.a–c)—, fragments of a terracotta head, and twelve coins of the Roman period.

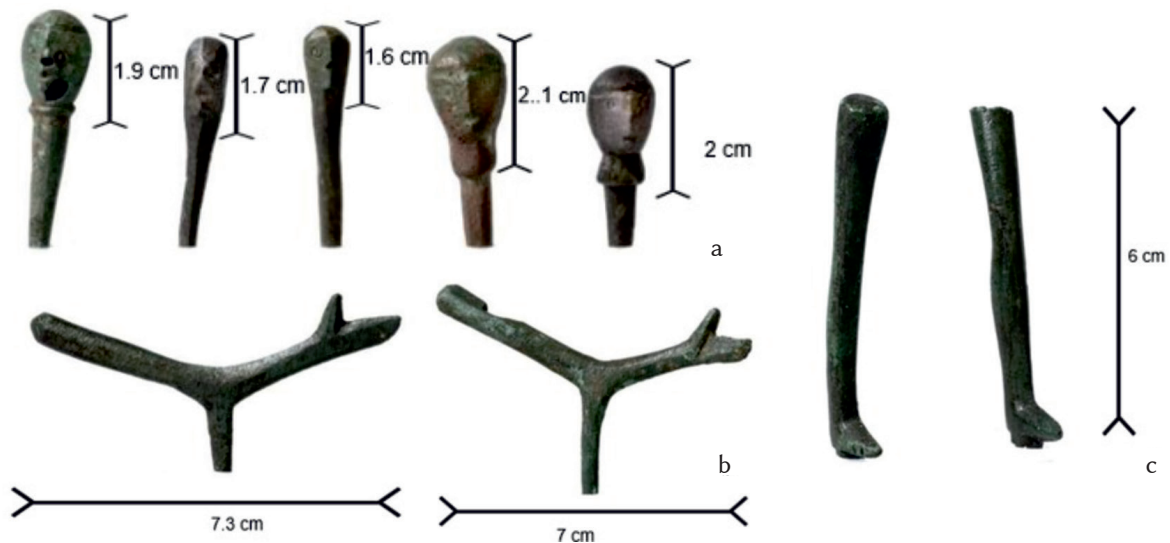


Fig. 20. a – Bronze heads from Monte S. Pancrazio (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), b – Bronze arms from Monte S. Pancrazio (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), c – Bronze legs from Monte S. Pancrazio (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria).

Grotta Bella

The cave site is on the northeastern slope of Monte L’Aiola (756 m above sea level) in southern Umbria. This mountain is the easternmost extension of the Monti Amerini chain, between Monte Castellari to the south and Monte Pianicel Grande to the north. It now makes up the territory of Avigliano Umbro, eight kilometers from the town of Amelia (ancient Ameria) and some two kilometers east of the village of Santa Restituta. Excavations carried out between 1970 and 1974 revealed the presence of a deep stratigraphic sequence, which allowed for the identification of the cultic use of the cave between the 6th century BC and the 4th century AD.⁵⁴

53 CIOTTI 1964, 111. See also: BONOMI PONZI 1989, 48.

54 In Neolithic times and during the Late Bronze Age the cave appears to have been used for habitation and burial. For an overview, see the discussion in GUERRESCHI et al. 1992 and ZAPPELLONI – LARocca 2023, with an updated analysis of the cave layout and usage throughout time.

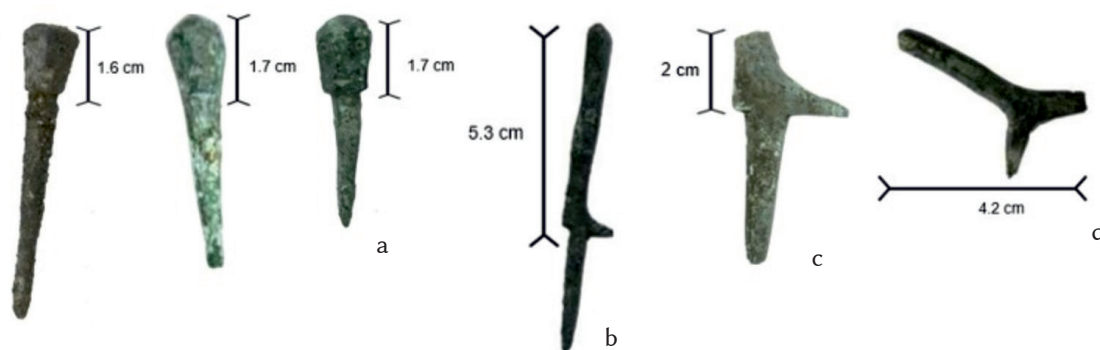


Fig. 21. a – Bronze heads from Grotta Bella (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), b – Bronze leg from Grotta Bella (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), c – Bronze foot from Grotta Bella (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria), d – Bronze arm from Grotta Bella (Photo by Arianna Zapelloni Pavia by permission of the Soprintendenza ABAP dell’Umbria).

Votive objects that attest to the ritual use of the cave in the 6th and 5th century BC consists of pieces of *aes rude* and two hundred and eighty-nine figurines mostly made out of bronze (worshippers, warriors, animals, and body parts) and a few of lead (warriors, female figures, and shields).⁵⁵ Three of the seven anatomical votives represent heads; one a leg, one a foot, and one an arm (Fig. 21.a–d). These were found in disturbed soil layers during the excavation of the cave’s main hall, mixed with earlier and later objects.

Discussion

The evidence presented here allows us to address the opening research questions regarding the meaning of the deposition of votive body parts and the role of bronze anatomical votives in the discussion on ‘religious romanization’ posed at the beginning of this study. Twenty-four pre-Roman deposits of bronze anatomical votives/sanctuary sites have been identified, with varying degrees of detail.⁵⁶ Nine are located on a high plain or mountain (Magione, Monte Acuto, Monte Torre Maggione, Monte S. Pancrazio, Cancelli, La Rocca, Monte Moro, Colforito), five near lakes—either in a direct connection with a lake (Lagole, S. Pietro Montagnon, Lake of the Idols) or near one (Albagino)—, two near rivers (Lova and Este), two near a fountain (Fontile Sanctuary in Marzabotto and Fonte Veneziana),⁵⁷ and one inside a cave (Grotta Bella) (Fig. 22).⁵⁸

The location of these sanctuaries falls in line with that of most Italian sanctuaries, close to the prominent natural features of the local environment and exploiting the power of nature to inspire reverence and awe. Hilltops and mountaintops offered scenic views, and the elevated position contributed to the transition between the profane and the sacred or served specific rituals such as oracular or au-

55 The figurines are discussed by MONACCHI 1988 and, more recently, by ZAPPELLONI PAVIA 2020 and ZAPPELLONI PAVIA – LAROCCA 2023.

56 Especially in the case of old excavations, there is no certainty about the original number of votive objects and their exact distribution within the sacred space. For example, at Fiesole the archaeological data has been poorly recorded and at Monte S. Pancrazio and Monte Santo, for example, it has not been recorded.

57 It is worth pointing out that, however, it is not proven that a fountain existed already in the 5th century BC at Fonte Veneziana.

58 This count excludes the votives found in secondary deposition and not in connection with a sacred area (Villa di Villa, Acropolis of Marzabotto, and Monte Santo) or those whose findspot is not known (Bettona and Arna).

gury activities. Caves, with their liminal quality of spaces of transition—between outside and inside, above and below, sacred and profane, light and darkness—lent themselves to ritualized activities that involved communications between two worlds. Bodies or sources of water had the twofold function of embodying divine power and serving as sources for rituals. In addition, thermal and mineral water was revered for its therapeutic affordances, spanning from anti-inflammatory/antiseptic properties to active relief against gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, and respiratory problems.⁵⁹



Fig. 22. Location of cult sites that yielded bronze anatomical votives.

When we consider the different settings in which bronze anatomical votives were dedicated, it does not seem that the natural environment determined the presence of this type of votive offering. Instead, anatomical votives could be dedicated in any pre-Roman sanctuary, independently from the specificities of the local geography. What does this suggest about the function of their deposition? As mentioned above, most scholars agree with attributing a healing function to these objects and see the presence of water as confirmation of their curative role. The settings of sanctuary sites and the multiple functions of water in sanctuaries, however, allow for a reconsideration of this often-positied view.

First, it became clear that water was not a necessary factor for the ritual of dedicating body parts, especially when we consider that most of the sanctuary sites that yielded anatomical bronzes are located on mountains/hills and not in the proximity of bodies of water. Furthermore, the survey presented above has shown that in only two of the nine cases in which votives were found in association with mineral-thermal waters there seems to be a clear association between the ritual of dedication

59 In general, on ritual practices and architectural environments in ancient Italy: GRIFFITH 2013. On the ritual power of caves: MOYES 2012.

votive offerings and the presence of water: at Lake of the Idols, where votives were in all likelihood thrown directly into the lake, and at S. Pietro Montagnon and Lova, where they were displayed on the shores of a thermal lake. In all other of the other seven cases, the shrines lay near a body of water—springs or rivers—but their connection with it remains unclear. It is, therefore, reasonable to surmise that the act of dedicating anatomical votives did not have the same meaning at every site. Instead, understanding their purpose requires contextualization to the specific case study.

Second, although the curative agency of water cannot be ruled out altogether, it is important to remember that the presence of water at a sanctuary site could have had several functions other than curative *stricto sensu*. As Ehrenheim and de Cazanove aptly pointed out,⁶⁰ water at the sanctuary site served various ritual and utilitarian functions such as drinking, cooking, cleaning, and cleansing. In rural sanctuaries, which depended on external water supply, creating a water source would have been deemed necessary to carry out a wide range of activities.

As Glinister and Recke have argued regarding the anatomicals of the Roman period, the meaning of their deposition is more likely to have been a more general request of wellness rather than healing in a medical sense, which in some cases may have a more subtle connotation: hands and arms may represent a prayer, feet, and legs the difficulty of a pilgrimage, and so on. While in specific contexts such as Lake of the Idols, Lova, and Montegrotto, legs, feet, and arms found in the mud of the thermal basin or on the shores of a thermal lake may have a healing significance, the same objects dedicated at a high-peak sanctuary such Monte Acuto, Monte S. Pancrazio, Colfiorito or in a cave (Grotta Bella) may have embodied the hardship of the worshippers' access to the sacred place (feet, legs) or their devotion in front of the gods (hands, arms). It also seems possible, as discussed by Grahm for some anatomical terracottas,⁶¹ that some of the isolated body parts in the Italic votive assemblages were intended to act as an extension of the whole human body, a sort of *pars pro toto* for the supplicant. This hypothesis appears even more plausible in the case of votive heads, which could have served as a solid reminder to the divine of the dedicator's request for well-being. Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact meanings of the dedication of anatomical votives, the variety of body parts seems to suggest that forms were an essential factor in the worshippers' decision to make a vow and were likely influenced by geographical as well as cultural factors.

A second question that this study aimed to answer was whether bronze anatomical votives could be used to reassess the traditional religious romanization view. Given the above evidence of bronze body parts, can we still view anatomical terracottas as a sign of the spread of Roman culture? It is evident that the practice of dedicating anatomicals and heads did not suddenly sweep through the region starting with Roman expansion. Rather it was a widespread and established tradition in Northern and Central Italy as early as the 6th century BC and the offerings of the Roman period most likely held the same ritual meaning. In this regard, it is also significant that recent work carried out at the sanctuaries at Bagno Grande and Doccia della Testa in San Casciano brought to light anatomical votives in bronze from the Roman period. At Bagno Grande, three ears and one finger are dated to the 2nd century BC; at Doccia della Testa, a bronze ear is dated to the 3rd–2nd century BC and a bronze breast to the 1st AD.⁶² Together with the 2nd century BC bronze anatomicals from Ara della Regina,⁶³ dedicated alongside anatomicals in terracotta, these findings illustrate

60 EHRENHHEIM et al. 2019; DE CAZANOVE 2015b, 189. De Cazanove warns against the scholarly tendency to attribute healing connotations to waters and disregard the possible other function that water may have had at cult sites.

61 GRAHM 2016, 51.

62 IOZZO 2013, 27–30 (Doccia della Testa); MARIOTTI – TABOLLI 2021, 230–233 (Bagno Grande). The recent excavation (2022) of the basin at the Sanctuary of Bagno Grande has revealed the presence of dozens of bronze legs, arms, ears, livers, uteruses, and penises. Their study is ongoing.

63 COMELLA 1982, 159.

that the practice of offering body parts in bronze was still in place well after the Romans expanded their influence into Latin and Etruscan territory. In addition, as the new and groundbreaking data from Bagno Grande reveals, it appears that, in some instances, bronze anatomicals were preferred to the more widespread custom of the Middle and Late Republican period of dedicating anatomical votives in terracotta.⁶⁴ This evidence highlights the longevity of traditional Italic beliefs and ritual practices and further corroborates that this anatomical votive phenomenon was not connected with Roman expansion.⁶⁵

Once we abandon the idea that the presence of votive offerings representing body parts and heads is connected to Roman influence, there is no reason to believe their dedication indicates a new ritual practice. Conversely, the evidence suggests that the same ritual practice of dedicating anatomical votives and heads was connected to a general and highly subjective well-being ritual, which began in the archaic period and continued in the Hellenistic period. The only change in this practice from the Archaic to the Roman period was the medium. One may wonder why, starting with the 3rd century BC, most anatomical votives began to be produced in terracotta instead of bronze. We can think of a few possible explanations. First, this technology was more convenient. Anatomical votives and heads were stock production and relatively easy to produce. This may have made them more suitable for artisans and the customer, given their overall low cost.⁶⁶ Second, they followed the aesthetic trends of the time. The sheer quantity of anatomicals in terracotta in Italy and Greece in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC suggests that this class of material was seen as desirable and in line with the latest demands and preferences for votive objects that swept across the whole central Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period.⁶⁷ It is important to stress that fashionable does not imply Romanesque, even more so since Rome itself was not the findspot of the earliest anatomical terracotta. While adapting to the new trends of the time and profiting from a more economical material, Italic communities largely retained their traditional beliefs and practices, which likely became increasingly relevant during the changing centuries of Roman expansion.

Conclusions

This survey of Italic bronze body parts sheds some overall considerations on the function of anatomical votives and the alleged role of Rome in spreading this practice. Since waters did not necessarily have a curative function, it is possible that the dedication of Italic votive body parts had meanings other than healing. Within a more general ritual of well-being, the geographical location of a sanctuary and the very personal religious rapport between worshippers and gods may have impacted the type of anatomical dedication.

The fact that the practice of dedicating body parts before the Roman period was not an isolated phenomenon, as some authors have argued, but rather an expected religious behavior throughout the peninsula helps to reassess Rome's role in the diffusion of anatomical votives in ancient Italy. Rather than representing a new practice thoroughly shaped by the Roman conquest, new and old

64 De Lucia Brolli (in [MARIOTTI – TABOLLI 2021](#), 229) suggests the possibility that these bronze votives belong to an earlier phase of the sanctuary and be reused in the Hellenistic period, perhaps after the interception of an earlier deposit during the restoration of the area. The partial reuse of older votive offerings has been recognized in sacred areas of southern Italy, as well as in Sicily and at the Faliscan sanctuary of Monte Li Santi-Rote at Narce and can be related to the practitioners' desire to keep alive through the centuries the essence of a cult: [DE LUCIA BROLLI 2018](#), 65 with previous bibliography.

65 [IOZZO 2013](#), 27.

66 [SCOPACASA 2015](#), 7.

67 On the spread of Hellenistic culture in Italy and Rome and the resulting material culture adopted at the time of the expansion see: [WALLACE-HADRILL 2008](#), 100–101; [STEK 2013](#), 345–346; [TERRENATO 2013](#), 55.

data from northern and central Italian cult places shows that the tradition of dedicating body parts was ingrained in the ritual custom of pre-Roman peoples. This practice continued with the use of clay in the mid-centuries of the Republic, a practice guided by the convenience and popularity of using clay instead of bronze. While adapting to the new trends of the time and profiting from a more economical material, Italic communities largely retained their traditional beliefs and practices, which likely became increasingly relevant during the changing centuries of Roman expansion. As is the case for other characterizing aspects of the Hellenistic period, such as architectural forms and techniques,⁶⁸ Rome had little to no influence on this practice though it is possible that the new road network crossing the peninsula may indeed have created the preconditions for the spread of the new material into colonial and non-colonial areas.

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68 On this topic see the latest contribution by Nicola Terrenato in: [TERRENATO 2021](#).

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