1 Introduction: Fragments of History

> There was a temple filled with various ornaments, where the barbarians of the area used to make offerings and gorge themselves with meat and wine until they vomited; they adored idols there as if they were gods, and placed there wooden models of parts of the human body whenever some part of their body was touched by pain.[1]
>
> *Gregory of Tours*

> The typical forms of the ex-voto, such as the anatomical forms, have practically never evolved – neither in size, nor in the choice of materials, nor in the techniques of manufacture, nor even in the 'style' of figuration, which it would be better to qualify as a formal insensibility to any affirmation of style – from Greek, Etruscan or Roman Antiquity, to what we can still observe today in the Christian sanctuaries of Cyprus, Bavaria, Italy or the Iberian Peninsula.[2]
>
> *George Didi-Huberman*

On Easter Monday in 1450, in the small town of Sant'Anastasia near Naples, a young boy lost a ball-game and, in a fit of pique, hurled the ball at an image of the Madonna that was painted into a nearby roadside shrine.[3] These events would hardly have gone down in history, had not the image – to the amazement and horror of those gathered – begun to bleed profusely down its left cheek. In the years that followed, a sanctuary was built on the spot, which became, and remains, one of the most important sites of pilgrimage in the whole of Catholic Europe. The bleeding face was the first miracle of many. Over the centuries, countless numbers of the faithful have been saved from death and disaster by the Madonna dell'Arco: evidence of these events can be seen today in the huge accumulation of ex-votos displayed in the sanctuary and its adjoining museum, which was inaugurated in the Jubilee year 2000. While the dedications include many different kinds of objects (crutches, medical instruments, degree certificates, photographs, clothes,

[1] Gregory of Tours, *Vitae patrum* 6.2 *De sancto Gallo episcopo*. Translation James (1985), 53–4.
[2] Didi-Huberman (2007), 7.
[3] For an introduction to the history of the sanctuary and the miracles performed there, see Giardino and De Cristoforo (1996).

Figure 1.1 Ex-voto body parts on display in 2011 in the sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco, S. Anastasia, near Naples.

hair), two types of votive gift predominate: the painted wooden tablets, which depict the intercession of the Virgin in the varied disasters of life, and the metal body parts which represent the part of the body that has been (or hopefully will be) healed from illness. These latter line the walls of the sanctuary's corridors, elaborately arranged on panels for the visitor's contemplation (Figure 1.1). Almost every part of the body is represented, including eyes, ears, hands, mouths, hearts, legs and the 'dissected' torsos which plot the internal organs in relief on the surface of the chest and stomach.

These votive body parts are not unique to the Madonna dell'Arco sanctuary, nor even to the Catholic faith. They are found at sanctuaries of different creeds all over the world, from Orthodox churches in Greece to Hindu temples in southern India.[4] Moreover, the practice has deep historical roots: 'anatomical' votives are found at least as far back as classical antiquity, when model body parts in metal, marble, wood and terracotta were dedicated in the sanctuaries of the gods of Greece and Rome. Like the later Christian offerings, these ancient models often appear to have

[4] For examples of votives from a range of geographical and cultural contexts, see Francis (2007) and Weinryb (2016).

been dedicated in thanks or expectation of a bodily healing miracle: this, at least, is the reading suggested by the tiny handful of literary texts which mention the practice, as well as by the occasional inscriptions found on the objects themselves, their frequent archaeological findspots in sanctuaries of ancient healing deities, and comparison with similar objects from later periods such as the Catholic ex-votos from the sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco.[5] Other body parts were no doubt appropriated for other reasons besides healing, although in most cases it is impossible to reconstruct the stories behind their dedication. Crucially – following what Day has described as the 'dissolution of the link between offering and dedicant' – the vast majority of viewers in antiquity would also have been left to wonder at the narrative behind many of the votives that they saw in sanctuaries, thereby creating an intimate relationship between dedicant and deity from which all other viewers were excluded.[6]

This book aims to track how and why the anatomical votive cult developed and spread in classical antiquity, and to shed light on some of the varied meanings that these objects held for their ancient users and viewers. It is structured around four case-studies of anatomical votives from different chronological and geographical contexts – four discrete snapshots, which are then woven together to construct a 'moving picture' of the anatomical votive cult in the ancient world. Chapter 2 looks at the early anatomical votive cult in fifth- and fourth-century BC Greece, exploring how these objects might be tied to emergent views of the body in the Classical period. Chapter 3 then moves across the Mediterranean to examine votive body parts in the sanctuaries of Republican central Italy, focusing on how and why these clay models differ from the votives studied in the previous chapter. After this, Chapters 4 and 5 use the examples of Roman Gaul and Asia Minor to investigate how the anatomical votive cult developed away from the classical 'centre', in each case again considering how these manifestations of the ritual relate to the material discussed in earlier chapters. This comparative approach leads to an understanding of the votive cult that is flexible and mutating: in this sense, it differs from the picture painted in the work of earlier scholars (including Didi-Huberman, cited above), who

[5] For a discussion of the evidence relating votives to healing, see Schultz (2006), 100–9. Most literary texts mentioning anatomical votives are Christian and later in date than the practices they describe. In addition to the passage from Gregory of Tours (above, n. 1), see Theoderet *Graecarum affectionem curatio* 8.64; Augustine *De civitate Dei* 6.9 (on parts of the body dedicated in temples of Liber and Libera for the hope of successful ejaculation); 1 Samuel 5.6–6.12 (on anatomical votives dedicated by the Philistines – see further discussion below).

[6] Day (1994), 40.

have preferred to see the longevity of the anatomical votive cult as evidence of a long and unbroken continuity in bodily beliefs and practices.

Anatomical votives are challenging objects to work with, partly on account of the difficulties involved in counting and dating them accurately (the contextual archaeological evidence is often frustratingly scant), but also because they challenge some of our most deep-rooted modern beliefs and ideas about how the body was represented and perceived in classical antiquity. It is important to state at the outset that this book does *not* attempt to present an exhaustive account of all the extant archaeological evidence for anatomical votives across the ancient world. The goal, instead, is to focus on a relatively small number of deposits, as well as on individual objects from within those deposits, and to start thinking about how this material might be interpreted in the light of the shifting social and cultural background against which the votives were dedicated. 'Interpretation' here often means looking beyond the original, often irretrievable intention of the dedicant, to consider instead what these objects might reveal about the more tacit beliefs held by those who used and viewed them. In part, this involves looking closely at which body parts were represented in particular contexts, and also at *how* these parts were represented. My approach also involves acknowledging that anatomical votives do much more than simply indicate sick parts of an individual's body, as has normally been assumed.[7] In fact, another central theme of the book is that of fragmentation, and over the pages that follow I will demonstrate how, in the material forms of these votives, physical suffering became intertwined with other ideas and images centred on the broken or 'rebuilt' body – from sickness and sacrifice to human-animal hybridity and the creation of the ancient 'body politic'.

Scholarship on Votive Offerings

Until recently, anatomical votives have remained on the margins of classical scholarship. Model body parts do not generally appear in standard textbooks on ancient art, nor in books about the representation of the classical body, and for most of the last century the discussion of anatomical votives was dominated by historians of medicine and religion. One of the earliest

[7] To give one typical example: in his publication of the votives from Corinth, Carl Roebuck notes that the votives 'should probably […] be regarded as thank offerings for the cure of some ailment of which the general nature or location is indicated by the part represented'. Roebuck (1951), 117. Other publications acknowledge the fact that anatomical votives may have been dedicated *before* healing, as a request for a future miracle, but the underlying assumption is still the same: the form of the votive, which isolates the body part from the context of the whole body, serves (only) to illustrate the part of the body that was (or had recently been) malfunctioning.

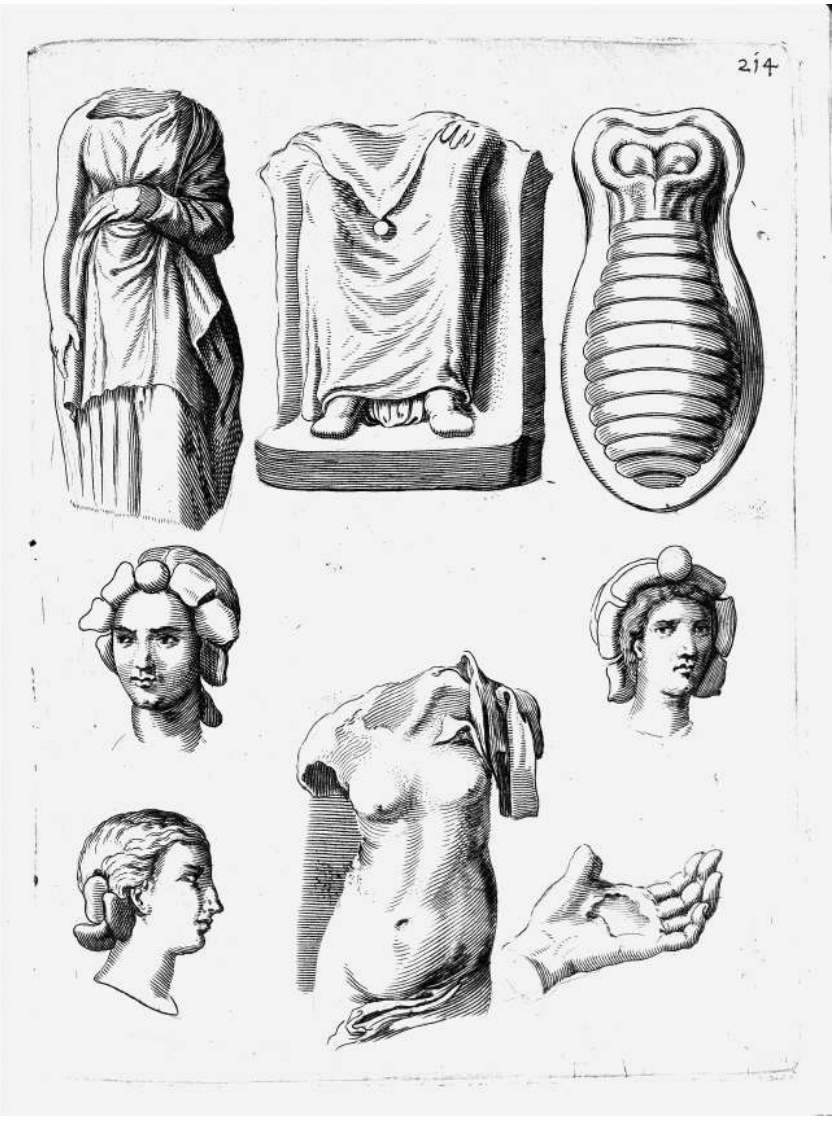

Figure 1.2 Plate from Tomasini *De donariis ac tabellis votivis liber singularis* (1639).

attested discussions of anatomical votives appears in a 1639 text by the Paduan bishop and intellectual Giacomo Filippo Tomasini, *De donariis ac tabellis votivis liber singularis* ('A monograph on votive offerings and votive tablets'), which was dedicated to the cardinal Francesco Barberini.[8] Tomasini was interested in all different types of ancient votive offerings, including anatomical models, and he briefly discussed and illustrated these objects in his discussion of the sanctuary of Diana at Nemi in central Italy (Figure 1.2).

[8] Tomasini (1639).

His book was then cited in one of the earliest studies devoted entirely to the anatomical votives: the 1746 thesis by Johann Jakob Frey titled *Disquisitio de more diis simulacra membrorum consecrandi: ad illustrandum cap. VI prioris libri Samuelis* ('A thesis on the custom of dedicating images of limbs to the gods: to illustrate Chapter VI of the first book of Samuel').[9] Frey's subtitle referred to the Old Testament story in which the Philistines dedicate golden models of their anuses (or, according to some interpretations, their buttocks) after they had been punished by God with a plague, following the theft of the sacred Ark of the Covenant.[10] This biblical narrative is analysed in the final chapter of Frey's text, where he focuses on diagnosing the disease suffered by the Philistines.[11] The rest of his book ostensibly fills in some of the background to this story by discussing the origins and various aspects of the anatomical votive ritual in pagan and early Christian antiquity, from the role of body parts in the cults of Asklepios, Minerva and Diana, to the continued use of such objects by the Franks and Germans.[12] Notably, one of the passages discussed by Frey would prove extremely useful to later scholars who wished to argue that anatomical votives worked to 'substitute' the real body of the dedicant: this was a section of Aelius Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi* (*Sacred Tales*) which describes how the god Asklepios appeared to the sick Aristides in a dream, instructing him to dedicate a (real) finger as a *pars pro toto* offering on behalf of his whole body; when Aristides complained that this was too great a demand, he was allowed to dedicate a ring instead.[13] We will return to consider this passage in Chapter 5 of this book.

The next significant study of anatomical votives was a 1902 monograph written by Cambridge schoolteacher, W. H. D. Rouse, *Greek Votive Offerings: An Essay in the History of Greek Religion*.[14] Rouse classified ancient votive offerings according to the motives for which they appeared

[9] Cf. Pezold (1710), another early dissertation on 'human body parts consecrated to gods'.

[10] 1 Samuel 5.6–6.12.

[11] Later discussions of this passage would also focus on retrospective diagnosis. The disease suffered by the Philistines has variously been interpreted as dysentry, bubonic plague and bacillary dysentry, which can lead to piles. See Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 6.3, Harris (1921), Shrewsbury (1949), Lust (1990), Freemon (2005). For more on this passage see Schultz (2006), 187 n. 37 and Aejmelaeus (2007), 250–2: Schultz notes that 'The Masoretic commentary on the Hebrew text of Samuel (written perhaps as early as the eighth century AD and designed to promote stability of the Hebrew text) indicates that *ofolim* ought to be replaced with *tchorim*, "hemorrhoids").' Aejmelaeus suggests that the Greek εἰς τὰς ἕδρας is a 'euphemistic circumlocation' according to which buttocks were made to stand for emerods. Aejmelaeus (2007), 250–2; see also Lust (1990). For votive representations of buttock regions see e.g. Forsén (1996), plates 20, 21, 31, 62.

[12] Frey (1746), 12.

[13] Aelius Aristides *Hieroi Logoi* 48.27.

[14] Rouse (1902).

to have been dedicated, which ranged from 'war' and 'domestic life' to 'memorials of honour and office' and 'disease and calamity'. This last category was then subdivided into 'images of the deliverer', 'person delivered', 'act or process' and 'miscellaneous'. Like other scholars before and after him, Rouse took it for granted that the anatomical votives portrayed the body of the mortal worshipper rather than the deity, and placed them alongside other images of the 'person delivered' which took the form of 'whole body' reliefs and portrait statues.[15] He enumerated the types of body part found in Greek sanctuaries, and briefly considered how these might reflect ancient epidemiology. For instance, in relation to the body parts mentioned in the inventory inscriptions from the Asklepieion at Athens, Rouse commented that: 'The favourite disease in Athens during the fourth century seems to have been bad eyes: votive eyes, in ones and twos, make up two-fifths of the whole number. Next to the eyes come the trunk: this may betoken internal pains, or it may include various segments of the body which would tell different tales if we could see them.'[16] Rouse also indicated how the votives might fit into a Winckelmannian paradigm of classical art history as a history of decline, remarking that 'this custom [of dedicating body parts] shows how low the artistic tastes of the Greeks had already fallen'.[17]

Rouse was certainly not alone amongst his contemporaries in seeing the votive body parts as objects of historical interest rather than aesthetic appeal, and other studies from around the turn of the century focused on how the votives might be used as diagnostic tools for ancient illnesses. Studies of this kind were often written by physicians who had an interest in the history of their discipline, and were published in journals of medicine whose readership consisted primarily of other doctors. In 1895, for example, Dr Luigi Sambon published a two-part illustrated article in the *British Medical Journal* titled 'Donaria of Medical Interest in the Oppenheimer Collection of Etruscan and Roman Antiquities', which described and illustrated a series of 'instruments of surgery, pharmaceutical appliances, and painted tablets with miraculous healing', as well as 'the most interesting and least known of the *donaria*', models of the limbs and viscera.[18] Sambon picked out a handful of votives which he saw as reflecting ancient knowledge of human anatomy and pathology, including the models of phalli suffering from phimosis

[15] Cf. Recke (2013), 1074: 'The most important basis, from which all interpretive approaches proceed, is the recognition that the anatomical votives, as well as the relevant statues and heads, do not depict the deity revered, but rather mortal men.'

[16] Rouse (1902), 212. On these inscriptions, see the discussion in Chapter 2 of this book.

[17] Rouse (1902), 210–11. On Winckelmann and classical art history see Potts (1994); Harloe (2013).

[18] Sambon (1895); cf. Rouquette (1911).

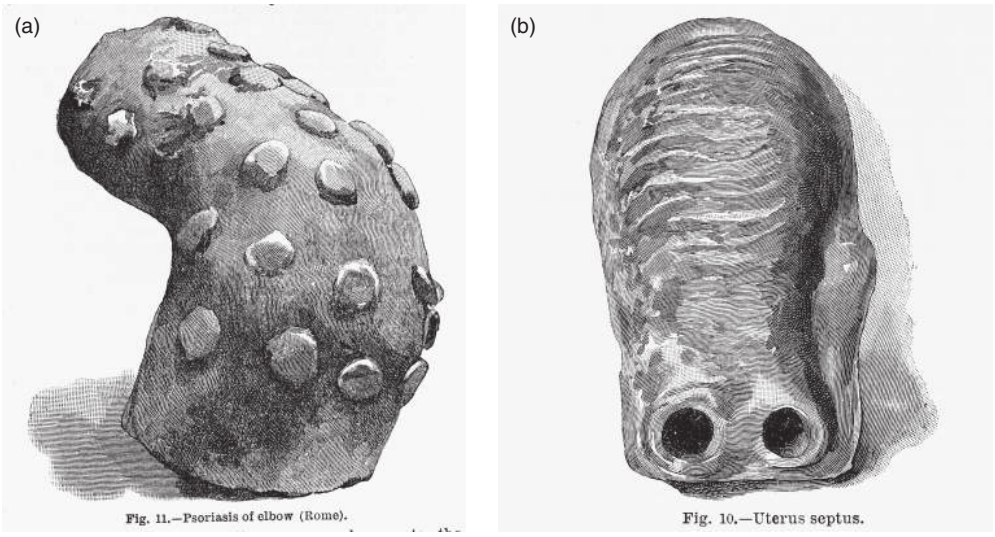

Figure 1.3 Two 'diagnostic' images of votives, from the 1895 edition of the *British Medical Journal* (Sambon 1895). Left: 'elbow with psoriasis'; right: 'uterus septus'.

(a condition related to venereal disease), an elbow afflicted with psoriasis, and the model uteri with double openings (Figure 1.3). These last Sambon regarded as evidence of *uterus septus*, a congenital malformation in which the uterus opening is divided by a longitudinal wall, which he suggested may have been seen as associated with twin pregnancies.[19]

Medical history approaches would continue to dominate scholarship on anatomical offerings for the rest of the century, and normally involved scholars analysing the votives for visual signs of illnesses. Anatomical votives appeared in the context of more general studies of art and medicine, such as Höllander's 1912 study of *Plastik und Medizin*, and Grmek and Gourevitch's 1998 book on *Les maladies dans l'art antique*, as well as in later archaeological publications of particular sites, which sometimes included sections on votives and retrospective diagnosis. Miranda Green's 1994 publication of archaeological material from the sanctuary of Dea Sequana near Dijon (on which see Chapter 4 below) uses the anatomical votives to diagnose a series of illnesses suffered by pilgrims to the site, including goitre, trachoma, arrested hydrocephalus, Paget's disease, Bell's Palsy, ulcers, infective osteitis of the skull, neuralgia, tuberculosis, leprosy, rickets, diabetes, osteomyelitis, poliomyelitis, post-traumatic Achilles tendinitis, Marfan's syndrome, gout, and a small umbilical hernia.[20] Others have taken a slightly

[19] Phimosis: Sambon (1895), 148. Elbow: Sambon (1895), 217. Uteri: Sambon (1895), 150.
[20] Green (1999), 35–53 (chapter on 'Anatomy and Pathology' co-authored with Richard Newell).

different approach, counting numbers of model body parts from a particular site and then using these figures as evidence for illnesses commonly suffered by people in that area. For example, in a study of terracotta votives from Etruria, Tim Potter took the large number of genitals in urban centres of Italy as evidence for a correspondingly high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, and the high numbers of limbs in rural areas as reflecting the greater risk of accidents in an agricultural environment.[21]

One refreshing deviation from these medical-historical studies appeared in 1935, when an Italian historian of religion named Adalberto Pazzini wrote a paper on 'Il significato degli "ex voto" ed il concetto della divinità guaritrice'. Pazzini's work reflected the contemporary anthropological interest in subaltern cultures, and he drew comparisons between the ancient anatomicals and the modern Italian Catholic uses of ex-votos, which he attributed with a commemorative ('pro memoria') function. Unlike his history of medicine colleagues who focused on identifying the symptoms suffered by individual dedicants, Pazzini was interested the broader 'mechanics' of ancient votive religion – that is, how and why the original users thought that these objects worked to heal the body. Drawing on contemporary anthropological theory, and in particular on the notions of sacrificial substitution and sympathetic magic, Pazzini constructed a complex argument which can be summarised as follows: in antiquity, bodily illness was perceived as punishment sent by the gods; a person suffering sickness realised that they needed to expiate their transgression in order to appease the god and cure the disease; for this reason they dedicated a votive offering, which functioned as a 'substitute' offering for the real limb (which would otherwise have continued to suffer or waste away). Pazzini drew heavily on the Philistines passage from the Book of Samuel already singled out by Frey, which wove the anatomical votives into precisely this pattern of transgression and expiation. The aforementioned passage from Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi* was also useful to Pazzini, since it showed the logics of substitution

[21] Potter and Wells (1985). For other examples of this approach see Roebuck (1951), 114–15 (cited above, on the high numbers of eye votives found in the Asklepieion at Athens); Bernard and Vassal (1958); Marinatos (1960), 30; Chaviara-Karahalio (1990); Chaniotis (1995). A critique of this approach is Kuriyama (2000), who points out that similar morphologies are produced by a variety of diseases, while the tastes and the disproportionate interests of consumers in certain pathologies will have led to them being over-represented by ancient artists (the popular figure of the 'hunchback' is one good example). Furthermore, as Tim Potter has warned, features that appear pathological to modern viewers may not, in fact, have been recognised as such in antiquity, but may have been used instead as a means of personalising otherwise anonymous offerings through reference to the dedicant's distinctive but healthy bodily features. Potter and Wells (1985). He suggests comparing the evidence from skeletal remains to build up a more accurate picture of ancient illness.

(in this case, a ring being accepted instead of a real finger) at work in the ancient healing sanctuary.

A number of book chapters and articles on votives have appeared over the years since Pazzini's study was published, and interest in the topic has intensified over the past two decades.[22] This is in part due to the systematic excavation and publication of new material, particularly from sites in central Italy, but also because these objects dovetail neatly with broader intellectual trends such as the rise in interest in gender and 'the body' as fields of analysis and, more recently, the development of the discipline of 'material religion'.[23] Alongside the continuing healthy interest in retrospective diagnosis, the recent scholarship has also produced more oblique and creative perspectives on the relationship between the votives and the human body. Two contributions need singling out here, since they have certain themes and approaches in common with the current study. The first is Nicholas Rynearson's 2003 article 'The Construction and Deconstruction of the Body in the Cult of Asklepios', and the second is Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis' work on Asklepios and Aelius Aristides. Both these scholars have suggested that the visual form of the votive might have other functions besides that of simply indicating the location of illness and/or cure. Focusing on votives from Classical Greek Asklepiea, Rynearson has perceptively argued that the fragmented form of the anatomical votive served to contain as well as localise the illness, and that it contrasted with the whole, healed body of the dedicant.[24] He suggests that this was a specifically 'Asklepian' form of representation, which finds parallels in inscriptional evidence from healing sanctuaries, namely the *iamata* inscriptions from Epidauros (see Chapter 2 below for further discussion). Petsalis-Diomidis has also engaged with the notion of fragmentation, suggesting that by classifying the body in parts the patient regained control over the sick body; her work also shifts focus away from the individual dedicant and onto later visitors to the sanctuary, exploring

[22] An excellent sample of recent work in English can now be found in the collection of papers edited by Jane Draycott and Emma-Jayne Graham, *Bodies of Evidence: Ancient Anatomical Votives Past, Present and Future*, which had its genesis in a 2012 conference at the British School at Rome. I am very grateful to the editors and individual contributors for allowing me to read drafts of these chapters whilst I was preparing the final version of this book. The introductory chapter by Graham and Draycott gives further background on the study of anatomical votives and new approaches. Graham and Draycott (2017), 1–19.

[23] For an overview of the vast fields of body and gender studies, see Harris and Robb (2013), with futher bibliography. For examples of the 'material turn' in religious studies, good starting points are *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* and the *Material Religions* blog <http://materialreligions.blogspot.co.uk>. See also Morgan (2005) and (2008); Paine (2000) and (2013); Plate (2014).

[24] Rynearson (2003).