Disabilities in Roman Antiquity

Disparate Bodies *A Capite ad Calcem*

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DISPARATE BODIES IN ANCIENT ARTEFACTS: THE FUNCTION OF CARICATURE AND PATHOLOGICAL GROTESQUES AMONG ROMAN TERRACOTTA FIGURINES*

Alexandre G. Mitchell

In archaeology the term "grotesques" covers an important class of objects (several thousand), generally small in size (height 10–20 cm) and ranging in artistic quality. They show caricatured faces and bodies, physical deformities and human diseases. They were found in various sites throughout the Mediterranean, but especially in Asia Minor and Egypt. The meaning of ancient grotesque terracotta has been debated since the time of Charcot and Régnault from the famous Parisian medical school *La Salpêtriere*, at the turn of the 20th century. They were the first to "diagnose" a pathological inspiration in the grotesquely deformed bodies of these terracotta statuettes.[1] But not all grotesque figurines are pathological, and both their typology and function as objects are difficult issues to tackle. There are three main types of grotesque figurines: stage actors, humorous caricatures and "portraits" of known pathologies. These categories are not air-tight, as the last two types often merge. I hope to present some standard ways of differentiating these various grotesque figurines and in the absence of *proper context* for most of these objects, some solutions regarding their various potential functions.

1. Preliminary Remarks

Coroplasts from archaic Greece down to the late Roman Empire period made a living from mass-producing clay figurines. Grotesque figurines were also small and cheap to produce and purchase, but are very difficult to date precisely as they were mostly found in the 19th century by collectors who were not concerned with their exact provenance. Thus, except when we have an archaeological context or the female figures are given typical 1st or 2nd

* This paper is based on an on-going research project on the function of caricature and pathological grotesque Roman terracotta figurines. I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Lorenzo Lorusso, clinical neurologist, Chiari, Italy and Dr. Celso Zappala, gynaecologist obstetrician, University of Torino, Italy for their time, friendship and medical expertise.

[1] See Régnault (1900).

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century CE Roman hairstyles or drilled pupils, we tend to give a very wide dating range (3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE). Although many were found in Egypt and in Alexandria,[2] in particular, this paper focuses on finds from Asia Minor, and especially from Smyrna (among many others found in Tarsus, Ephesus, Priene, Pergamon and Myrina).[3] A large number of figurines are missing their torso and legs. This is an added problem to the lack of context. Many such heads were found by peasants in Smyrna's surrounding countryside, and it would seem they believed that only the heads interested collectors so they probably discarded the torso and members. Even in Smyrna, where so many grotesques were brought to light in the 1890s we are unsure of their exact finding place. The objects are said to come from somewhere on Mount Pagos or other neighbouring hills, probably from tombs and in domestic contexts. Indeed, Rumscheid (2006) has recently shown at Priene that numerous grotesque figurines were found in domestic contexts.[4]

Even though the iconography of terracotta figurines over time and throughout the Mediterranean is vast and varied, most of the artists' stock consisted in idealized types, reproducing famous marble or bronze sculpture. For example, a statuette found in Smyrna (Fig. 1),[5] measuring 0.29 m and dating to the first century BC, is a small-scaled clay imitation of the famous *Diadoumenos* of Polykleitos, a youth tying a fillet around his head after a victory in an athletic context, in ca. 430 BCE. The life-size *Diadoumenos* (Fig. 2),[6] is 1.86 m in height. The Diadoumenos, was evidently still favoured by customers as it was being reproduced in terracotta series, i.e. in large numbers, four hundred years later. Numerous terracotta copies of famous sculptures by Polykleitos, Lysippos, etc. were found throughout the Mediterranean.

The obvious function of this smaller reproduction was decorative, probably for indoor domestic use. It was sold to clients who could not afford to purchase life-size expensive stone, marble or metal copies of famous sculptures. Not only was clay cheap but most of these figurines were not sculpted

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[2] See Bailey (2008); Fischer (1994), Himmelmann (1983). On the function of the objects see Dunand (2010) 13–15. See also Fjeldhagen (1995) 7–25, s.v. "Dating and Style".

[3] On Myrina, see Burr (1934); Kassab (1982); (1987); 1988.

[4] See however the interesting point made by Fjeldenhangen 1995: 24 concerning the context of Greco-Roman figurines in Egypt: "... there is no difference between the types of figurines found in tombs, houses or places of worship ... it was up to the owner to use this figurine as he thought fit". See also Stevenson (1975) 156–171 on context and chronology.

[5] Paris, Musée du Louvre, on loan from New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 32.11.2. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

[6] Diadoumenos of Polykleitos from Delos [Roman copy of an original ca. 430 BCE], Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 1826. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell. See Stewart (1993) 173, figs. 383–385.

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Fig. 1. Small terracotta copy of the diadoumenos.

Fig. 2. Life-size diadoumenos of Polykleitos from Delos.

by hand: they were produced from moulds. Thus we tend to be confronted with series, rather than one-off portraits. Our idealized youth in Fig. 1 was maybe produced from an old mould which was re-used as often as necessary ("surmoulage" in French), or on the other hand a new mould might have been produced for this purpose.

2. Actor Figurines

The first group of grotesque figurines consists in the representation of stage comedy actors.[7] Indeed, Old Comedy terracotta figurines were characterized by standardised caricatured faces, entire head-covering masks often large open mouths to shout one's lines, costume and tights, padded stomach, posterior and fake phallus. But New Comedy (plays by Menander, 330 BCE) actors represented for example by a terracotta figurine from Myrina dating

[7] Among the numerous publications on the subject, see Webster (1960); (1961); (1962); (1971); Bieber (1961); Nesserath (1990); Easterling (2002); Taplin (2007); Hart (2010); Brea (2002); Green (1985); (1995); Khodza (1984).

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Fig. 3. New Comedy actor figurine, from Myrina.

from the 1st century BC (Fig. 3),[8] are less exuberant, focusing rather on making the face more expressive. This figurine is the so-called "main slave with curly hair", wearing a cloth around the hips, a himation over the shoulder and arms folded over his bulging stomach. This figure was much appreciated by customers and was also produced on lamps and as attachments to furniture (bronze and clay). The face is caricatured into a stereotyped expression: a mask. It has a snub nose, grimacing large open mouth, furrowed brow, and a short beard. "We know that the features on an ancient Greek mask—as in Greek portraits—did not register fleeting emotions; rather, they conveyed the figure's essential nature, his or her unchanging character and social status".[9]

What was the use or function of grotesque terracotta figurines of stage comedy actors? It is quite likely these figurines amused their viewers but also served as mementos or souvenirs of plays they had either seen, or knew of.[10]

[8] New Comedy actor figurine, from Myrina, height. 17,5 cm Paris, Musée du Louvre, Myr 317. See also Bieber (1961) fig. 405; Mollard-Besques (1963) 141, 172; Hart (2010) 143 no. 81.

[9] Hart (2010) 44. See also Halliwell (1993) 195–196.

[10] This aesthetic impulse of the ancients may not have been the same in all periods. For the classical period see Green (1994) 72: "gave pleasure and in some way typify the comic stage, types one might buy as souvenirs"; and more recently Roselli (2011) 84.

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Fig. 4. Caricatured terracotta head.

3. Caricature and Visual Humour

The second category of grotesques consists in caricatured figurines, visual humour produced to amuse buyers.[11] These figurines are not pathological in nature. Gourevitch describes very aptly the different approaches to these caricatured figurines:[12] "For the historians of medicine, the figurine is a "jovial obese" or maybe "a hydropic"; for art historians the figurine is the caricatured portrait of a Roman magistrate, carrying with decorum an incense box in his left hand".

A clear distinction exists between a pathological grotesque and a caricature: a caricature consists in the *intentional exaggeration* of someone's most characteristic features to produce a comic effect, whereas a pathological grotesque is an *intentional realism* towards the actual representation of a phenomenon: in other words, a portrait. Artists do not follow rules and principles, so number of caricatured aspects co-exist with realistic mimetic pathologies. Indeed, if, as we will show, grotesque imagery was often used for prophylactic reasons, some further caricatured aspects (ears, lips) could only help towards the same goal: apotropaic laughter. A caricatured head from Smyrna (Fig. 4),[13] shows an intentional exaggeration of physical defects such as a very small cranium, a huge and crooked nose, large rubbery lips and jug ears.

[11] On the subject of caricatures and terracotta, see De Francesco (1984); Nachtergael (1990); Boutantin (1999); Bonacasa (2003); La Rosa (2005); Khodza (2006); Laugier (2009). On caricature in Greek vase painting, see Mitchell (2009) 34, 235–279. On theoretical aspects of visual humour see Mitchell (2009) 1–35.

[12] Gourevitch (1987) 357.

[13] Terracotta figurine, height 5.50 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Myr769. 100 BCE–100 CE. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

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Fig. 5. Parody of a boxer, terracotta figurine.

Fig. 6. "Thermae boxer", bronze athlete resting after a boxing match.

Unfortunately we only possess this figurine's head: had we had its entire body an unequivocal humorous interpretation might have been possible. The situation is quite different with another figurine (Fig. 5).[14] It is an excellent parody of a boxer. The famous bronze sculpture of a resting boxer in Rome (Fig. 6),[15] shows the athlete's muscular body but also the typical long-term injuries from being repeatedly hit typical in this sport: broken nose, swollen eyes ("mouse under the eye") and "cauliflower ears" (the boxer's *othematoma* or according to Tertullian: *aurium fungi* "mushroom ears").[16] In contrast, the small terracotta in Paris dating to the 3rd century CE (Fig. 5), shows a scrawny, caricatured boxer, recognizable from his typical gloves made of leather straps that encircled the hands, wrists and forearm, but there ends

[14] Terracotta figurine, Paris, Musée du Louvre, CA 1608, Ht. 16 cm. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

[15] So-called "Thermae boxer": athlete resting after a boxing match. Bronze, Greek artwork of the Hellenistic era, 3rd–2nd centuries BC. Rome, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Inv. 1055. Height 1.20 m Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

[16] On this injury, see Gourevitch (1987) 160; Grmek, Gourevitch (1998) 79; see an excellent survey of medical injuries linked to boxing: Unterharnscheidt (2003) 150–151. For ancient artefacts, see also Benedum (1968).

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the comparison. This 'boxer' lacks the muscular and athletic body of a boxer and not only are his ears undamaged, they are detached and their cartilage clearly defined. This is a straightforward caricature, and an ancient joke. One should not be surprised to find a few humorous caricatures among the many copies of a famous statue:[17] Humour in Greek and Roman art is now well-attested.[18] This style of caricature is also found in ancient Egyptian art,[19] which might explain the origin for the numerous Hellenistic caricatures found in Alexandria (dwarfs, hunchbacks, phallic grotesque figures), Memphis and the Fayoum. A number of scholars have also postulated that there may have been a further cross-cultural exchange which would explain the many grotesques found in Asia Minor.[20] Yet, we found caricature in vase-paintings and terracotta figurines already in the 5th century BCE in mainland Greece, and the Alexandrian origin cannot explain the pathological vein in Smyrna.

Caricature and visual humour in terracotta figurines may have served various functions, but mostly they would have been produced to amuse or bringing people closer together by mocking certain faults or differences.[21]

4. Pathological Grotesques

The third category of grotesque figurines and the main focus of this paper are the so-called pathological grotesque figurines, i.e. images that show severe pathologies that border on the grotesque. This is a field where art history, archaeology and medicine come together to analyse the objects, in an attempt to understand, among other things, their function. The union of medicine and archaeology is far from being a new one. The first "pathological" terracotta from Asia Minor collected by Mr Paul Gaudin at the end of the 19th century came rapidly to the attention of the medical team of the Salpêtrière in Paris. This included such eminent medical doctors as Jean-Martin Charcot, Henry Meige and Felix Régnault (who was also an amateur

[17] Compare also a caricature of the famous sculpture of the late Hellenistic age, *Lo spinario*, a bronze sculpture which shows a young idealised boy pulling out a thorn from the sole of his foot. The caricature (Terracotta Figurine, height. 17 cm, from Priene, house 33, 2nd century BCE. Berlin, Altes Museum, TC8626) is striking: to mock the Greek facial traits and body type of the original, the boy on the left is given the traits of a caricatured African slave boy.

[18] Greek art: see Mitchell (2009); Roman art: Clarke (2007).

[19] Note for example the numerous grotesque figurines of dwarfs and Bes in particular (see Lunsingh (1987)). For an overall look at visual humour in ancient Egypt, see Houlihan (2001).

[20] See Dunand (1990) 211–212, 267–276; Ashton (2008) 109–111.

[21] On humour as a means to achieve social cohesion, see Mitchell (2009) 300–315.

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Fig. 7. Realistic portrait of old age, terracotta figurine.

prehistorian).[22] Stevenson (1975) was the first to study a large corpus of pathological grotesques and his methodologies and insights are invaluable to understand the importance of these objects. The interdisciplinary team of the classicist D. Gourevitch and medical doctor/historian of medicine M. Grmek published widely on paleopathology and *iconodiagnosis*.[23] Both Stevenson and Gourevitch warn us against the dangers of pseudo-pathology, the danger of reading too much into ancient art: "The interpretation of ancient pathologies is not only extremely complex but fraught with hazards such as provable errors in diagnosis. Even when dealing with organic remains such as mummies or skeletal matters ..."[24] Yet, taking in account the obvious shortcomings of *iconodiagnosis*, and the fact that the principles of modern medicines and its working concepts are utterly different from those in antiquity, it is still indispensable to consult medical doctors when analysing pathological grotesques.

Before we can properly understand the function of pathological grotesques, one must first delve into the art of social realism: a terracotta figurine (Fig. 7),[25] originally from Smyrna shows an elderly woman. The old woman's torso is bent forwards. She seems to have a pot-belly, which is striking in con-

[22] See Martinez (2009) 14–19, 100–103; Régnault (1900); (1909a); (1909b); (1909c). Charcot was also a decent caricaturist who used caricature as a method of clinical evaluation: through the exaggeration of certain specific details, one can identify the mechanisms of a neurological disorder.

[23] See for example Gourevitch (1987); Grmek, Gourevitch (1998).

[24] Stevenson (1975) 104.

[25] Terracotta figurine, Musée du Louvre, CA 768, Ht. 6.5 cm. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell. See Besques 1972: pl. 233.d.

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trast to her bony chest and sagging breasts, but in reality, at such a great age, her muscle mass and particularly her abdominal muscles would have greatly diminished; thus, there is hardly anything but her skin to keep her internal organs in place. She is sitting, in the nude; her wide-open vulva is visible. There are traces of red paint and gold leaf on the figurine. This is an accurate representation of advanced old age, without any pathology, nor caricature. If we had at our disposal her head, arms and legs, further signs may have helped us interpret this object definitively. Maybe the added red paint (apotropaic colour) and obscene wide-open vulva (such as Baubo and other fertility amulets) point to an apotropaic function, but this cannot be ascertained.

Why show a social realistic portrait? Why show the bodily decrepitude of advanced old age? The aesthetic impulse of the ancients was not only focused on rational idealisations of perfection, but also on a morbid curiosity for the unnatural and the grotesque.[26]

What is important to note is that most of the representations described as pathological grotesques are not fully caricatures but portraits of the result of real diseases with some added caricature at times; all of which clearly demonstrates a distinct interest in showing diseases: chondrodystrophy, rickets, Pott's disease, spinal sternum deformities, goitre, obesity, hermaphrodites, pituitary pathologies (acromegaly, gigantism), hydrocele, and many more are clearly portrayed in terracotta figurines.

A male figurine in the Louvre (Fig. 8),[27] displays a number of deformities. At first glance we have a hunchback dwarf with his head dug in between the shoulders. His ribs are pushed forward, and his hips deformed. He is bald, his nose is large and hooked. His lips are very swollen. There have been various interpretations of this figurine, but they tend to see the figurine as suffering from acromegaly,[28] an uncommon chronic metabolic disorder in which there is too much growth hormone and the body tissues gradually enlarge, on top of the other deformities. Yet there are a few problems with this interpretation. First, his head is anatomically placed where his neck should be, at the level of the clavicle, the insertion of the neck's trapezius muscle. Secondly, the age represented in the face, is far older than the muscular upper body. A man with such deformed hips and weak legs, could not have carried the weight of his upper body and still reached an old age. Thirdly, even if we imagine that

[26] Still today, museums like the Hunterian Museum in London both repulses and intrigues its non-medical visitors, with its collection of anatomical specimens assembled by 18th century surgeon John Hunter (pickled embryos, diseased organs in jars, etc.).

[27] Terracotta figurine, height. 8 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, MNC266 100 BC–100 AD. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell. See also Besques 1972: D1176, pl. 235.e.

[28] Grmek, Gourevitch (1998) 200.

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Fig. 8. Hunchback dwarf, terracotta figurine.

Fig. 9. Cleft lip, terracotta head.

his lips are swollen because of an allergic reaction, why is the line joining them missing? This figurine is a mixture of closely observed pathologies and unrealistic aspects.

A small head from Smyrna (Fig. 9),[29] shows a man who may be suffering from a cleft lip. This congenital deformity caused by abnormal facial development during gestation is well described by T. Skoog discussing a small terracotta head in the museum in Corinth.[30] As far as the head from Smyrna is concerned, there may also be a lop-sided right side of the face which might be explained by a form of paralysis (Bell's palsy, etc.), often noticeable by a drooping eyelid,[31] but the arch over the eye of the figurine is not muscle but bone, thus an ictus is unlikely to have occurred.

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[29] Terracotta head, Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, M370. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell (courtesy of Dr. Natacha Massar).

[30] Terracotta head, Corinth, Archaeological museum, T91. Skoog (1969).

[31] On a representation of a rare neurological condition called *hemifacial spasm* (with a different mechanism than paralysis) in an ancient terracotta head, see Devoize 2011.

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Fig. 10. Hunchback dwarf, terracotta figurine.

Above the "furrowed brow" there seems to be a scar which is a useful marker to compare the cranium to the maxillofacial area. In a human the maxillofacial area, composed of the mouth, jaw, face, is smaller than the cranium. But in an ape, the two zones are almost identical in size. We have here a human face elongated into that of an ape's. Once again, we have a mixture of various potential pathologies and unrealistic deformities.

The next figurine, also from Smyrna (Fig. 10),[32] shows a crowned dwarf with a hump on his back, a gaping mouth and a prominent rib cage. This deformity may be caused by Pott's disease.[33] His gaping mouth reminds the viewer of the Roman "Stupidus" theatrical character. Three important details make this "pathological" grotesque something more than a medical showcase: his enormous phallus, the suspension hole in his back and traces of red paint. Traces of red paint have been found on many pathological grotesques and is the apotropaic colour *par excellence* throughout antiquity and to this day in many parts of the world.[34] As far as the large phallus is concerned, it was "talismanic in itself".[35] And, to quote Gourevitch:[36] "the frequency of hunchbacks in ancient art is not as much caused by the real frequency of

[32] Terracotta figurine, from Smyrna, Ht. 7.5 cm, Musée du Louvre, CA5190. 2nd century BCE. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell. See Besques (1972) D1183, pl. 236.a.

[33] On Pott's disease, see Grmek, Gourevitch (1998) 217–219.

[34] Dundee (1981) (red paint) 61, 63; (red string/thread/ribbons/bows) 110, 126–128, 135, 141, 146, 149, 153, 176, 197, 216; ("anything red") 128, 136, 175, 213, 218.

[35] Stevenson (1975) 47.

[36] Grmek, Gourevitch (1998) 214.

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Fig. 11. (Former) Ex-voto collection, Archaeological museum of Corinth.

this pathological state than the magical meaning that is attributed to them … to reinforce this apotropaic effect, hunchbacks in good-luck artefacts were often given a huge phallus." A suspension hole implies that the figurine was designed to be hung from a hook on a wall for example, like an amulette.

Of course one could argue there was an aetiological reason for finding so many deformities in art: "vitamin deficiency, lack of sanitation, pollution and communicable diseases which are cumulative in their effects and may be considered the causal factors for deforming diseases."[37] Besides the ridiculous dancing dwarfs found at banquets, we know that dwarfs also served at times as pet companions to rich masters. This may have been a fashion statement on their part, or the presence of the deformed being at their side may have been an example of their publicised self-affirmation of luxury and wealth.[38] But the objects may also have been produced as protective amulets against such diseases.

Maybe so many pathological grotesques were found in Smyrna because of its famous ancient school of medicine. Was there a medical or therapeutic function for these representations? We find many anatomical ex-voto (gifts) to the god Asklepios to thank or pray for a medical recovery in his santuaries.[39]

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[37] Stevenson (1975) 113.

[38] See Giuliani (1987). See also Laes (2011).

[39] See Charlier (2008); Decoufle (1964); Fenelli (1975); (1992); Girardon (1993), Potter (1985); Turfa (1986); 1994 and Baggieri (1996) on anatomical votives, and especially Baggieri (1996) 34–35 on how to read anatomical votives (dedicating ear/eye/mouth to the god so that he can hear/see/speak with the sufferer).

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Fig. 12. Nineteenth century wax model of a woman, Torino.

The photograph (Fig. 11) of the former presentation of anatomical ex-voto from the Asklepeion of Corinth in the archaeological museum of Corinth, shows brain, legs, feet, ears, breasts, hands, eyes, penises, etc. Yet, as Stevenson reminds us "none of the extent and well-published examples show any pathological deformities".[40] Furthermore, no pathological grotesque terracotta figurines were found in the context of healing sanctuaries where the great medical schools were also established in antiquity (Kos, Epidaurus, Corinth, Alexandria, Pergamon, Cnidus, Ephesus or Smyrna).

Some scholars have wondered whether the grotesques were used as teaching material, to show young students the anatomy of deformities, modelling in clay real patients suffering from these various deformities,[41] like the wax models of the recent past (Fig. 12).[42]

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[40] Stevenson (1975) 100. There may be a couple of rare exceptions, such as a hand with a lump in the Corinth Museum. See C. Roebuck, *The Asklepieion and Lerna, Corinth* XIV (1951) pl. 40, no. 63.

[41] Laumonier (1946) 318; Uhlenbrock (1990) 110.

[42] Wax model of a woman by Francesco Calenzoli, 1830–1831, Torino, Il Museo di Anatomia Umana Luigi Rolando dell'Università di Torino. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell (courtesy of Prof. G. Giacobini).

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Fig. 13. Suffocating man, terracotta figurine.

Fig. 14. Suffocating man, copper alloy figurine.

But it would seem that there was no ancient equivalent to modern anatomy classes nor to the special role of wax model specialists who were often versed in the study of medicine themselves, if not anatomy specialists themselves. Smyrna had a famous and advanced Erasistratian school founded by Hikesios in the 2nd century BCE but its teachings had none of the systematic aspects which we know of today when using such models.[43] Were they medical memento similar in nature to the terracotta reproductions of famous idealised sculpture or of actors of stage comedy? Were they part of a personal medical 'cabinet of curiosities' or a reminder of a physician's medical speciality? Until new excavations with proper contextual evidence enlighten the subject, these last questions will remain unanswered.

We come now to some of a key series which has been under scrutiny since their discovery. A figurine in Paris (Fig. 13),[44] shows a naked man holding his hands to his throat, in a gesture of suffocation. His large phallus was

[43] See Verbanck-Piérard (1998) 202.

[44] Terracotta figurine, Paris, Musée du Louvre, CA5131. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell. See Besques 1972: D1211, pl. 242.b. See on the subject: Grmek, Gourevitch (1998) 159–160.

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Fig. 15. Suffocating man, terracotta figurine.

removable. Two similar figurines are also of interest, a copper alloy figurine in Athens (Fig. 14),[45] and a terracotta figurine in Brussels (Fig. 15).[46] Some scholars imagined he suffered from tuberculosis, others that the ingestion of a foreign object had blocked his breathing. One could even imagine a form of autoerotic asphyxiation, as it is a known fact that strangulation increases the sense of pleasure and possibly explains the enlarged penis. Yet, the penis is too large to be in proportion with the rest of the body, and it is not in erection in these figures, whereas asphyxiation by hanging provokes the so-called "death erection". These figures are found in large quantities, and not only in terracotta.[47] Many have a suspension hole in the back like Fig. 14,[48] and some have visible traces of red paint.

[45] Copper alloy figurine, Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 447. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

[46] Terracotta Figurine, Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, A1502. Photograph © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

[47] See Grmek, Gourevitch (1998) 159–160 for references to different versions of this personification in a variety of materials, including gold amulettes.

[48] E.g. Musée du Louvre, CA 4848 (Mollard-Besques (1972) D884, pl. 163.a). Louvre, MNC 267, MYR707 (Mollard-Besques (1972) D1180, pl. 235d). Louvre, CA5135 (Mollard-Besques (1972) D1181, pl. 235g).

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Fig. 16. Suffocating personification of envy, Roman mosaic

This series should be compared to a similar figurine from Smyrna, now in Leiden.[49] It is janiform and painted entirely in red: one side shows a man suffocating and the other a female figure with long sagging breasts, opening her chest, just like a figure in the Louvre.[50] Clearly they are related and show that this is not a scene of surgery: it is apotropaic in nature.

In the late 1950s a mosaic floor was uncovered in a Roman villa in Skala on the island of Cephalonia (Fig. 16).[51] It shows a young man suffocating in the same stereotypical way as the figurines, and attacked by leopards. The figure is identified in the inscription below as a personification of Envy (*Phthonos*). Clearly the figure is suffocating with jealousy.[52] This was the key image that unlocked the meaning of the many terracotta figurines showing the same personage. Our terracotta figurines must be interpreted as personifications

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[49] National Museum of Antiquities, LKA 1176, Leyenaar-Plaisier (1979) no. 355, pl. 55.

[50] Female terracotta figurine, Musée du Louvre, CA5160. See Grmek, Gourevitch (1998) 191.

[51] Photograph © Roy Stead seen on (http://www.flickr.com/photos/that_james/4765997848/). On this mosaic and the personification of Phthonos, see Dunbabin (1983).

[52] According to Slane (1993) 495: "The envious man was thought to choke or burst with his suppressed and frustrated rage."

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Fig. 17. Suffocating man, terracotta moldmade vessel.

of the Evil eye. The notion of the evil eye is based on envy (Greek: "phthonos", Latin: "invidia"), and envying is to covet by looking.[53] The figurines probably hung near house thresholds as an apotropaic symbols.

Most scholars agree on the talismanic properties of the phallus,[54] of fertility and prosperity and a protection against the evil eye and evil spirits. Phallic amulets are ubiquitous in the Roman world, from good luck charms such as the terracotta plaque on a bakery in Pompeii that reads *hic habitat felicitas* ("Here resides happiness"), to the numerous tiny (4–6 cm) bronze phallic amulets tied around the necks of babies and infants.[55] Noise was also a powerful charm. The dual magical power of the phallus and noise is seen in Roman bronze phallic amulets with little bells, called *tintinnabula*.[56]

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53 See Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales* 664; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 7, 16–17. On the evil eye and its representation on Greek vases, see Mitchell (2009) 38–40: See also Engemann (1975); Clarence (1976); Dickie (1991). See Konstan (2006) on emotions in antiquity.

54 Laumonier (1956) 253: "The main use of these objects were to avert the Evil Eye. This is why they are found in the tombs, the houses and sometimes also in sanctuaries." Slane (1993) 486: "both the phallus and the motif of self-strangulation or choking are used to avert the Evil Eye of Envy."

55 See Dasen (2003).

56 Some terracotta figurines had a small stone that moved freely inside them which made noise and according to Laumonier (1956) 11 may be a further proof of apotropaic *crepitaculum*. See also Delatte (1954) and Herzog-Hauser, G., RE VIA, cols. 1406–1410 (*Tintinnabulum*).

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Fig. 18. Evil eye under attack, Roman mosaic, Antioch.

Fig. 19. Lucky hunchback, bronze statuette.

The apotropaic function of the choking figures was unequivocally confirmed by a terracotta mouldmade vessel in Corinth (Fig. 17).[57] "Below the mouth of the vessel are a human head and torso. The bottom consists of a phallus and wings … The left arm and hand of the figure stretch up to clutch at the throat slightly to the right of the chin … The face is rendered in some detail; the features are distorted and grotesque."[58]

Dwarfs,[59] large phalluses and hunchbacks were not the only ways of fighting the evil eye as witnessed on a mosaic from the so-called House of the Evil Eye at Antioch-on-the-Oronte (Fig. 18).[60] A large eye is being attacked and pierced by a trident, a glavius, a scorpion, a bird, a leopard and a dog. A hunchback has turned its back on the evil eye as if to avoid it harmful gaze (he wears a mask) but, more likely to show it his hump. Because he faces forward, his gigantic phallus twists backwards to point at the evil eye.

And, it is only thanks to the last mosaic that we can understand the meaning of this final pathological grotesque (Fig. 19),[61] a so-called "dancing" hunchback. He was identified as a dancing hunchback because of the movements he seems to be making and the fact that his phallus is flying backwards. In reality the phallus is twisted backwards to follow the same

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[57] Terracotta moldmade vessel, Knidian fabric, L. 23.8 cm. Corinth, Archaeological Museum, C-27–37. Photograph after Slane (1993) pl. 85.

[58] Slane (1993) 484–485.

[59] See also Dasen 2009 on the apotropaic aspects of pygmies.

[60] Roman mosaic, Antioch, House of the Evil Eye, 2nd century CE. See Levi (1947) 28–34, pl. 4.

[61] Bronze statuette, 2nd century BCE. Phoenix gallery, Geneva. See their catalogue *Exotics of the Classical World. L'exotisme dans le monde classique* (Geneva, 2009).

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"line of sight" as the hump on his back. This good luck charm was in fact probably placed in a household, facing a wall, with its back turned to the visitors, and potentially, in the direction of the evil eye.

Thus, grotesque terracotta figurines have had a number of functions: as a memento of stage comedy actors or as comic relief, as caricatures. Pathological grotesques may have titillated the morbid curiosity of the mob, as portraits of the grotesque realities of mother nature but they probably had a more 'serious' function as amulets offering protection against the evil eye; just like today's traditional good luck charms with various deformities such as hunchbacks (Napolitan Gobbo key rings and wax figurines of Nano, Lebbroso, Storpio, Guercio).

But the representations are often medically accurate, and whatever their intended function, they offer a wealth of knowledge to modern doctors as well as to historians of medicine. Hippocrates famously said "Life is short, [the medical] art long, opportunity fleeting, experiment treacherous, judgment difficult."[62] One could add, "so is archaeology", in its slow process of gathering and analysing the remains of ancient human activity in order to understand better where we come from.

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