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I Sing the Body Magical:  
Baubo and Her Apotropaic Power

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by

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## ABSTRACT

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In the ancient Greek tale of Demeter and the loss of her daughter Persephone there is the character Baubo. In the mythological story, she is a side-character, a mortal being whose mention takes up no more than a few pages. Yet, Baubo is shown to hold the key to Demeter's depression through the magically apotropaic performance of *anasyrma*. *Anasyrma* – the female revealing of the genitals with the intention of asserting power or benefits upon a viewer – allows Baubo to become a strong, active female figure in antiquity which is then showcased in her material representation. Beyond textual accounts, the terracotta, bronze, and glass representations of Baubo from Greece, Asia Minor, Lebanon, and Northern Egypt provide us with an opportunity to glimpse at how the power of the female body was materialized, interacted with, and became conductors of magic strong enough to sway a goddess.

This work looks at Baubo and her artwork through the lenses of magic in antiquity and the theory of abjection and its linkage to witch portrayals in ancient art and literature. The act and use of *anasyrma* in antiquity is discussed in depth. Baubo is compared and contrasted to the aspects of abjection, allowing an associative discussion of the witch goddesses Hecate and Circe along with wise women in antiquity. Through this analysis, the

character of Baubo is shown to be one who wields magical abilities in a uniquely corporeal way. It is not the female herself, her identity, nor any authority she possesses that ascribe such magical force; rather it is her genitalia, materialized as a face inserted in the torso – the pubic slit acting as a clef chin – or as figures sitting in a squat position – their legs spread to exhibit their genitals. Through close examination of her figurines, I move away from traditional categorization of magic as an act involving tools such as wands, curse tablets, or herbs, as well as from the Roman literature conception of witches who eat flesh, practice necromancy, and dwell in graveyards. This work ultimately presents a reconsideration of magic as embodied by Baubo, an active agent with apotropaic magic activated through the use of her own body, specifically her genitals.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the past objects that now lie dormant in museums or collections were imbued with magical powers. What can be seen when stepping into the static and stale environment of a museum has been stripped of its significant meaning and active usage, its devotees long gone and the performances that were associated with each piece have been lost to time, leaving the objects immobile and, at times, lackluster. This leads us to the question: how can these magical objects be properly studied? The importance of art is therefore heightened because it is through this tactile medium of religious materials that we can physically observe the evolution of human beliefs. Germane to this exploration are the cults of Ancient Greece of which specific interest is the Cult of Demeter. This cult is composed of a complex arrangement of mythological characters from the Greek Pantheon, some of which are well known and others that are largely ignored in many academic fields. This paper focuses on one of the lesser known subjects – Baubo – whose feminine power uniquely demonstrates a representation of magical practice in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Baubo, a mysterious and largely understudied figure found in the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, is a character depicted remarkably in artwork and yet, I argue, not fully understood. Utilizing a mixture of analyses of classic literature, modern studies of the figure's iconography, ancient magic and the subsequent treatment of women as marginalized characters in antiquity, and visual analysis of the remaining objects, this study plans to fully embrace the very real power of these intriguing figures. Baubo's material representations display an exceptional magic and

<sup>1</sup> Antiquity is defined in this work as concerning Ancient Greek and Roman cultures and their reaches within the Mediterranean with a period ranging from approximately 7<sup>th</sup> c. BCE to 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE.



power that should no longer be ignored but fully embraced to create a more complete understanding of the female experience in antiquity through the lens of magic.

From governed bodies to abject characters, the female experience in antiquity is varied. It is within female cults, particularly that of the Cult of Demeter, that the agency of women is fostered and gained within the larger patriarchal society by means of religious and/or belief-driven practices. The story of Demeter and Persephone (alternatively known as Kore) begins with the kidnapping of Persephone by Hades, Lord of the Underworld. Once gone, Persephone's mother Demeter is in anguish over the loss of her daughter and falls into a deep depression. As Demeter is the goddess of the harvest, her depressed state causes her to neglect her duties and thrusts the earth and its inhabitants into a famine. From several ancient literature sources it is told that Baubo, a common woman who is given various titles depending on the source, cures Demeter's woes through the abrupt unveiling of her pubic area to the goddess, allowing Demeter to return to her regular mythological role as goddess of the harvest and ending the famine that has plagued the earth. Baubo's act of unveiling her pubic area, known as *anasyrma*, is a complex performance that holds key significance for the story of Demeter and ultimately the character of Baubo herself. Baubo's act of *anasyrma* is a performative act of witchcraft aligning her with other witch characters and magical practices in antiquity. In contrast, instead of the common tools of curse tablets, a magical wand, or herbs, Baubo's magical tool is her very body – specifically her genitals. Her display of her pubic area embeds her character with the power of the female body that is then harnessed for apotropaic benefits that are aimed at the goddess Demeter, and ultimately benefits all earth's inhabitants with the ending of the famine that Demeter's sorrow has caused. This analysis

will be demonstrated through ancient artworks which unabashedly showcase her genital display in many different forms.

## **Framework**

While the collection of Baubo figurines from Priene will be the primary focus of this study, other representations of her will come into play as well as supporting evidence showcasing her wide material representation throughout time and space. Coming from various areas of the Mediterranean including Greece, Asia Minor, Lebanon, and North Africa, these figures vary in their material and representation.<sup>2</sup> However, before exploring those objects in detail, a broader understanding of magic in antiquity and its related aspects must first be discussed along with a telling of who Baubo is. Further information to help analyze Baubo and her figures comes both from Sicily, as the Cult of Demeter was key to the establishment of the Sicilian culture, and from the Greek town of Eleusis, where Demeter's story and celebration were essential components of the Ancient Greek way of life through festivals such as the Thesmophoria and the Eleusinian Mysteries.<sup>3</sup> Within these objects, sites, and celebrations, the establishment of the melting pot that is magic, science, and religion in antiquity become illuminated. Theories of magic and its accompanying title of witchcraft allow for a rich exploration of Baubo's iconography. This paper takes magic, witches, witchcraft, and Baubo's story as a cohesive collection of thoughts from Ancient Greece up until late antiquity when the implementation of Christianity became the forefront of religious

<sup>2</sup> The material representations included in this study range from 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE to 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE.

<sup>3</sup> Caterina Greco, "The Cult of Demeter and Kore between Tradition and Innovation," in *Sicily: Art and Invention between Greece and Rome* (The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2013), 50.

practices. Before exploring the definition of magic, briefly we will question the relevancy of Baubo's artwork today and review her story and its variations.

### **Why is Baubo's Art Relevant?**

In the past, Baubo has been studied by the likes of Freud in his 1916 chapter "A Mythological Parallel to a Visual Obsession,"<sup>4</sup> later critiqued by Larissa Bonfante in "Freud and the Psychoanalytical Meaning of the Baubo Gesture in Ancient Art."<sup>5</sup> Bonfante's work was originally sparked by the 1904 report by German archaeologists Theodor Wiegand and Hans Schrader who excavated the Demeter temple in Priene, now a part of modern day Turkey. It is there that some of the most interesting Baubo figures within this study originate and they will be used as a starting point from which to jump into an exploration of her material representation. Wiegand and Schrader write about the Baubo figures they had unearthed, commenting, "Surely we are dealing with a creation from the context of the grotesque-obscene aspects of the Demeter cult."<sup>6</sup> Written a mere twelve years after Wiegand and Schrader's report, Freud's work tells of a patient who when viewing their father sees a face placed in the pubic area above the legs.<sup>7</sup> In her work, Bonfante rightly points out that

4 Sigmund Freud, "A Mythological Parallel to a Visual Obsession," in *Writings on Art and Literature* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 180-181.

5 Larissa Bonfante, "Freud and the Psychoanalytical Meaning of the Baubo Gesture in Ancient Art," *Notes in the History of Art* 27, no. 2/3 (2008): 2-9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23208130>; It is important to also note that Freud and Bonfante are the only scholars known in the depth of this research to have mentioned or studied Baubo's material culture in contemporary times beyond Rumscheid's extensive excavation report in the 2006 publication *Die Figürlichen Terrakotten Von Priene*, a notably non-art historical work. Other limited scholarship focuses instead on her literature, such as in Olender's "Aspects of Baubo," Suter's "The Anasryma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity," (which takes a strong stance against Baubo's material representations from Priene) and Tevebring's "Baubo and the Question of the Obscene." Olender's work does utilize images of the Baubo figures from Priene, but only makes brief mention of them at the beginning of this work and prioritizes ancient texts for an analysis of her character, also marks it as a non-art historical work.

6 Frederika Tevebring, "Baubo and the Question of the Obscene," Society for Classical Studies (Society for Classical Studies, 2019), <https://classicalstudies.org/annual-meeting/147/abstract/baubo-and-question-obscene>.

7 Freud, "A Mythological Parallel to a Visual Obsession," 180.

rather than analyzing the interpretation of this vision, Freud merely draws a visual comparison between this imagery and the Baubo figures found in the Demeter sanctuary of Priene, later identifying this patient as dealing with “anal erotism,” “genital erotism,” and a fear of their father as he “stood for debauchery,” as assumed possible root causes for this “visual obsession.”<sup>8</sup> Citing the “apotropaic power of laughter” that this act of *anasyrma* causes in Demeter, Bonfante references the temple figures describing them as “grotesque females,” an analysis that showcases the prejudices that these figures have had to endure through time, one which ultimately lacks a deeper investigation of their ancient reception or importance to an ancient cult powered by a marginalized group of female practitioners.<sup>9</sup> Further, it is not far-fetched to state that many female figures from before the period of Ancient Greek antiquity are also given the blanket term of “fertility figures”, as if the female body shown in its nude form can be nothing but fertile and/or disgusting, ignoring any alternative interpretations of the images, for example the well-known Upper Paleolithic Venus figurines with the most famous being *Venus of Willendorf* – the Venus figurines only in the 1990s began to be interpreted in alternative ways besides mere fertility figures<sup>10</sup> – as well as examples found in **Figure 1** and **2**, both of which demonstrate pubic detailing in the vertical vaginal slit, not unlike what will be shown in many of the Baubo figurines.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bonfante, “Freud and the Psychoanalytical Meaning of the Baubo Gesture in Ancient Art,” 2; Important to note that Bonfante’s use of “grotesque” may be alternatively more akin to “abnormal,” rather than “disgusting,” as such a negative connotation seems out of place within Bonfante’s scholarship.

<sup>10</sup> LeRoy McDermott, “Self-Representation in Upper Paleolithic Female Figures,” *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (1996): 227-75, [www.jstor.org/stable/2744349](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2744349).

<sup>11</sup> Figure 1’s description on The British Museum’s website states: “The function of the figurine is not clear. The very pronounced feminine attributes may suggest that the figure was intended to represent a fertility deity, or indeed as an expression of fertility and (re)birth, but it could also be a servant figure. The excavators, Brunton and Caton-Thompson, found two other figurines in their excavations (which were less accomplished than this example); they are not common, and remain enigmatic.” Figure 2’s description on The Metropolitan Museum’s website states: “The figure derives from ancient Near Eastern counterparts associated with fertility.”

Unfortunately, the field of archaeology and art history have often overlooked figures such as Baubo's – perhaps due to their “unattractive” features – and favored these blanket terms as a final conclusion on their study. Ultimately, the field of art history has prioritized other forms of material culture for its canon, such as architecture, large-scale sculpture, and “attractive” figurines. This then comes at the expense of the shelving of objects such as Baubo's. However, Baubo's figurines work against the boxable term of “fertility figure” and instead show a woman in power of her body and its magic.

### **Baubo's Story in Ancient Literature**

The biased and erroneous views of Baubo's figurines found in modern scholarship (as discussed above) can also be found in ancient literature.<sup>12</sup> Ancient literary references to Baubo and her story are found within Arnobius' *Adversus Nationes*, the work of Clement of Alexandria in both *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria* and *Exhortation to the Greeks*, as well as in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.<sup>13</sup> In all literary testimony, we find Baubo within the tale of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Both of Clement of Alexandria's works repeat a similar story. The tale begins with the kidnapping of Persephone - referred to as “the Maiden” in *Exhortation to the Greeks* and “Core” (an alternative spelling of the previously

<sup>12</sup> Exact dates for the ancient literature used in this study is unknown, however we can estimate the oldest coming from perhaps as early as 7<sup>th</sup> c. BCE and the newest at approximately 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE (see Table 1). It is also important to note that all literature may have been subsequently edited, which is beyond the scope of this research.

<sup>13</sup> In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* Baubo is given the alternative name of Iambe (Maurice Olender, “Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts,” in *Before Sexuality* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990], 83-113, p. 85), however when the name Iambe is used the character does not utilize the act of *anasyrma*. Instead, Iambe amuses the goddess with her sharp tongue, joking with Demeter and causing a pleasant demeanor that employs, once again, the apotropaic benefits of laughter. It is said that through Iambe the metric line used in English poetry iambic pentameter finds its genesis (Olender, “Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts,” 89); please see Table 1 for further exploration of these resources and their use of Baubo's story.

mentioned Kore) in *Exhortation to the Heathen*.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Arnobius' *Adversus Gentes* names Demeter as Ceres and her stolen daughter as Proserpine. Hades, Lord of the Underworld, rises from a chasm in the ground astride a chariot, kidnaps Persephone and returns to his domain with her. The goddess Hecate is said to have briefly witnessed this event. Hecate goes to Demeter's side and tells her what has befallen her daughter and Demeter thus begins her period of sorrow.

But grief yet more terrible and savage came into the heart of Demeter, and thereafter she was so angered with the dark-clouded Son of Cronos [Hades] that she avoided the gathering of the gods and high Olympus...<sup>15</sup>

Demeter, in the quest to find her daughter, wanders the land carrying a torch to light her way. While wandering, she comes to the Greek town of Eleusis. When there, she comes into contact with the Eleusinian "aborigines," among whom Clement includes Baubo.<sup>16</sup> Baubo receives Demeter "hospitably"<sup>17</sup> and offers her a drink, in *Exhortation to the Greeks* the drink is a "draught of wine and meal,"<sup>18</sup> in *Exhortation to the Heathen* it is a "refreshing draught,"<sup>19</sup> and in *Adversus Gentes* a "wine thickened with spelt."<sup>20</sup> In all instances, Demeter is too consumed with sadness to drink which displeases Baubo: "Baubo is deeply hurt,

<sup>14</sup> Use Table 1 for full story location within the sources.

<sup>15</sup> Hugh G. Evelyn-White, trans. "Homeric Hymns." (1914), 1-7, [https://www.platonic-philosophy.org/files/Homeric Hymns.pdf](https://www.platonic-philosophy.org/files/Homeric%20Hymns.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Clement of Alexandria. *Exhortation to the Greeks*. George William Butterworth, trans. 1919 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 41-7, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4928884&view=1up&seq=77>, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Clement of Alexandria. *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria* (version Internet Archive Library, University of Toronto), Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. William Wilson, trans. (Vol. I. Edinburgh, SCT: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 31, <https://archive.org/details/writingsofclemen01clem/page/n11>; Arnobius of Sicca. *The Seven Books of Arnobius Adversus Gentes* (version accessed on Internet Archive Library, University of Toronto), Hamilton Bryce and Hugh Campell, trans. (Vol. XIX. Edinburgh, SCT: T. & T. Clark, 1871), 249, <https://archive.org/details/thesevenbooksofa00arnouoft/page/n7>.

<sup>18</sup> Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Clement, *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Arnobius, *The Seven Books of Arnobius Adversus Gentes*, 249.

thinking she has been slighted, and thereupon uncovers her secret parts and exhibits them to the goddess.”<sup>21</sup> *Adversus Gentes* goes into further detail, stating:

Baubo changes her plans, and determines to make merry by strange jests her whom she could not win by earnestness. That part of the body by which women both bear children and obtain the name of mothers, this she frees from longer neglect: she makes it assume a purer appearance, and become smooth like a child, not yet hard and rough with hair. In this wise she returns to the sorrowing goddess; and while trying the common expedients by which it is usual to break the force of grief, and moderate it, she uncovers herself, and baring her groins, displays all the parts which decency hides; and then the goddess fixes her eyes upon these, and is pleased with the strange form of consolation. Then becoming more cheerful after laughing, she takes and drinks off the draught spurned [before], and the indecency of a shameless action forced that which Baubo’s modest conduct was long unable to win.<sup>22</sup>

Another variation of this event is told by Clement of Alexandria in *Exhortation to the Heathen*, in which he writes:

Having thus spoken, she drew aside her garments,  
And showed all the shape of the body which it is improper to name, the growth of  
puberty;  
And with her own hand Baubo stripped herself under the breasts.  
Blandly then the goddess laughed and laughed in her mind,  
And received the glancing cup in which was the draught.<sup>23</sup>

In both variations, Baubo’s power is, quite literally, on full display. This act of *anasyrma* is done for various reasons such as protection, fertility, healing, discomfort, and destruction; and its exact interpretation is seemingly dependent upon the viewer – when directed from a woman to another woman it appears to be beneficial, but when done from a woman to a man it is highly negative and controlling of the male figure.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, *anasyrma*, and

<sup>21</sup> Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Arnobius, *The Seven Books of Arnobius Adversus Gentes*, 249-50.

<sup>23</sup> Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Ann Suter, “The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity,” in *Ancient Obscenities: Their Nature and Use in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds*, 4th ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 21-43, p. 22.

specifically Baubo's usage of the act, possess a power that the male exposure does not. Concerning this difference, Maurice Olender writes, "Since male and female roles are not equivalent in the Greek world, the meaning of obscene words and gestures on the part of either sex cannot be expected to line up symmetrically."<sup>25</sup> Ann Suter, in her exploration of *anasyrma*, specifically exploring Baubo's employment of the act, writes that the performance has various functions as, "protection, fertility, healing, discomfiture, destruction."<sup>26</sup> The exploration of this act will be discussed in depth later in this study, for now it is important to remark that it is at this moment within our story that we find the power that Baubo possesses. Magical powers clearly come from Baubo's use of *anasyrma* and her genitalia. In order to fully understand why this act and Baubo's body can be classified as "magic," it is important to outline the parameters of magic in antiquity, the witches that utilize it, and the witchcraft they are said to practice.

## **SECTION 1: MAGIC**

### **Defining Magic in Antiquity and an Exploration of Abjection**

The lines between religion and magic in antiquity are thin at best. Oftentimes science was entwined with the two, as the ancients grasped at ways of understanding themselves and the world around them.<sup>27</sup> Witchcraft, a comparable word to magic within the realm of antiquity, was a branch of magic that is an extremely gendered term. Witchcraft is practiced

<sup>25</sup> Olender, "Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts," 103.

<sup>26</sup> Suter, "The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity," 22.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Maxwell-Stuart, "Magic in the Ancient World," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-28, p. 1.



by witches, which has since become defined as old crones, gnarled women working late into the night.<sup>28</sup> They are stereotypically told to be chanting the Shakespearean words, “Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and caldron bubble,” collecting toes of animals, and picking poisonous plants in the moonlight.<sup>29</sup> In antiquity, these female magic practitioners are said to lurk in graveyards, violate the dead, and eat children.<sup>30</sup> The gendering of the term “witchcraft” and “witch” (as opposed to “wizard”) began in antiquity with the stories woven in Greek mythology, Roman literature, as well as the occasional “wise woman” whose knowledge of the world was portrayed by ancient male writers as too high above her societal position as a woman. How then, may we define witchcraft and magic in antiquity? Peter Maxwell-Stuart, in the chapter “Magic in the Ancient World” within *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, defines magic as a, “Constellation of what are officially regarded as deviant ritualistic or ritualized ways of dealing with an individual’s immediate problems by achieving access to sacred power which demands or compels the assistance of non-human entities.” He further states that magic should be regarded as, “entirely rational within its frames of reference, and not to be equated with ‘superstition’ or ‘irrational or non-rational behaviour’.”<sup>31</sup> Maxwell-Stuart’s definition is firm within its relation to human usage of magic in which there is a societal determination of proper and improper behavior. To contrast with Maxwell-Stuart, Georg Luck in *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* states that magic cannot be separated from superstition as people

<sup>28</sup> Kimberly B. Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 152-180, p. 162.

<sup>29</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Plays of Shakespeare: The Tragedy of MacBeth*, ed. Frederick Henry Sykes (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 56.

<sup>30</sup> Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” 152.

<sup>31</sup> Maxwell-Stuart, “Magic in the Ancient World,” 1.

in antiquity often believed in magic, ghosts, and supernatural messages.<sup>32</sup> However, I would argue that our understanding of “superstition,” along with the spiritual world and magical practices, are firmly rooted in our modern-day understanding of the concepts. What we may categorize as “superstition” can be seen instead as the way in which those from antiquity came to learn and understand the world they inhabited. Magic was utilized as a means by which daily difficulties were faced and overcome. Barbetta Stanley Spaeth’s chapter “From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and the Roman Witch in Classical Literature” defines magic as: “The socially unsanctioned use of supernatural powers and tools to control nature and compel both humans and superhuman beings to do one’s will.”<sup>33</sup> It is clear that a full understanding of magic in antiquity involves an analysis of the individual and their own needs and challenges as they are what drives the turn towards the practice of magic. In contrast to a religion like late antiquity’s Christianity which often focuses on the group, pagan magic is employed for individualistic needs as is shown in many ancient texts, the best documentation to be found in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (in Latin *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, also abbreviated as PGM). The witches of ancient Greek and Roman literature inhabit this world with their narratives having been created by the male writers of the time in order to embolden the patriarchal orientation of society. This male driven environment is what birthed the abject witches of antiquity, or in other words women who held or were perceived to hold socially unacceptable power over others. What gives flight to these ideas are the characters that then personify them. By profiling a few key examples of witches in antiquity, Baubo’s

<sup>32</sup> Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Barbetta Stanley Spaeth, “From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and the Roman Witch in Classical Literature,” in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 42.

identity as a similar witch, yet very distinctly non-object figure, who employs her body as her magical tool, becomes illuminated.

Ultimately, within this framework it must be established that witchcraft – and the use of the term in academic studies – is an extremely gendered, and thus loaded, word. It is a classification of magic in which women are the active participants who hold power and what is seen as omnipotent authority over the autonomy of others that is ultimately entwined with highly negative connotations. In antiquity, the male members of society were often regarded within and without as holding inalienable authority that was wielded in daily activity over themselves and others. Yet, this “power” was presumably fragile as it was threatened by, as we shall see, the stories of witches, who ultimately became the scapegoat for the fear of a knowledgeable woman with resources. Kimberly B. Stratton’s chapter “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature” explores the social frailty of men in ancient Rome:

In ancient Rome elite male bodies were regarded as naturally endowed with superior characteristics that justified their social privilege... Their socially constructed identities and positions in the hierarchy depended on demonstrating inviolability and self-control. The fear, therefore, of losing control, of being subjected to corporal violation and social inversion... motivates many aspects of depictions of magic in Roman texts.<sup>34</sup>

In order to argue the title of “witch,” and thus “witchcraft,” as female gendered terms, Spaeth (cited above) writes: “When the literary sources represent witches carrying out certain procedures, but do not show their male counterparts, magicians or wizards... it may well say something about cultural concepts of the relationship between gender and magic.”<sup>35</sup> She then profiles iconic ancient witches such as Circe, Medea, Hecate, and Erichtho as embodiments

<sup>34</sup> Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” 153.

<sup>35</sup> Spaeth, “From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and the Roman Witch in Classical Literature,” 43.

of these “feared” women and thus evidence of this treatment of women in ancient literature. David Frankfurter in “The Social Context of Women’s Erotic Magic in Antiquity” supports this view of females in antiquity and works against the ancients’ preconceived beliefs of male autonomy in relation to erotic magic. He firmly stations erotic magic in the societal contexts of women in antiquity, showcasing that in that there was limited upward social movement and stabilization had to be grasped by whatever means possible. This need for social survival by women naturally made them keen to the use of magic that enabled some social stability in a world that often worked against them. Frankfurter writes:

Magic, in many ways, is fundamentally about agency, and the artifacts of magic reflect the agency – the creativity and self-determination – of historical individuals in trying to secure their lives, protect their property, extricate themselves from danger, or, in the cases we have been examining, negotiate the frustrations of the close-knit society. By emphasizing agency we see the subject or initiator of the spell as one who takes expressive action on her own behalf and who negotiates creatively between immediate circumstances, authentic sentiments, and various modes of authority (gods, names, myths, phrase), usually with the help of a ritual expert.<sup>36</sup>

By taking Stratton’s proposition that fear of “corporal violation and social inversion” is the ultimate motivator for depiction of female magic in Roman texts as well as Frankfurter’s proposal that magic is about gaining agency, we can identify this magic as highly gendered and thus easily associable to female acts that are done in self-interest.<sup>37</sup> With a power that can violate the autonomy of others, we see the birthing of the abject witches who inhabit Roman literature. A key example of the abject female figure is the horrific Erichtho. Believed to be inspired by the legends of Thessalian witches, she is referenced by the Roman poet Ovid in the poem *Heroides XV*, primarily found in the poet Lucan’s civil war epic

<sup>36</sup> David Frankfurter, “The Social Context of Women’s Erotic Magic in Antiquity,” in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 319-339, p. 325.

<sup>37</sup> Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” 153.

*Pharsalia*.<sup>38</sup> Erichtho is a reject of society who, “verges on the monstrous by cutting an unborn infant from the womb to make an infernal sacrifice and by slicing off the faces of men still caught in the throes of death.”<sup>39</sup> She practices necromantic rites, lives in tombs, and is the personification of the fear that lives on today when witchcraft is discussed in serious dialogue.<sup>40</sup> Comparable is the Roman witch Canidia from Horace’s fifth and seventeenth epodes who is yet another repulsive and terrifying hag that embodies the Roman (male) fear of witches and the witchcraft that they practice. However, it is important to note that abjection is the extreme of female magic and witchcraft in antiquity, yet the leap between what is passively acceptable magic practiced by women and these monstrous characters does not appear to be difficultly made.

Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* discusses the theory of abjection through abstract ideas of improper/unclean and the primal reactions we as humans have to abject ideas and materials (“filth, waste, or dung”), the unconscious as suggested by Freud’s work, one who inhabits the abject categorization (the “deject”), and abjection as an indicator of the limits of our own universe.<sup>41</sup> In the chapter “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” Kimberly B. Stratton explores Kristeva’s concept of abject pointing out that the theory of abjection reigns true with “ancient corporal ideology, which both conceived elite bodies to be innately superior and inviolable.”<sup>42</sup> These “elite bodies” are none other than the societal perception of male Romans who were believed to hold these innate

<sup>38</sup> Lucan Wilson Joyce, *Lucan: Pharsalia*, trans. Jane Wilson Joyce (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 157-64.

<sup>39</sup> Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” 152.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-31.

<sup>42</sup> Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” 155.

characteristics of manhood. Spaeth writes, in an unintentional agreement of this negative casting of witches in antiquity, stating: “Witches, then, represent the ultimate fear of the loss of all human, or more specifically male, control over the world and of the chaos that will result from that loss of control.”<sup>43</sup> Witches, or better yet women with improper “power” over others, inhabit a societal position that is once again in contrast to what is perceived as proper male and female roles. In sum, there is a clear reason why in our contemporary lore we imagine old, gnarled women as witches as it has far distant roots in the history of civilization.

Ultimately, the breakdown of abjection in antiquity holds firm to very strict guidelines, those being: (1) the threatening of the autonomy of others, (2) violation of the social/standardized gender norms, and thus (3) the disturbance of societal hierarchy. Let us look at Baubo with these three standards in mind in order to explore whether or not she is an abject figure.

### **Abjection in Relation to Baubo**

#### *Threat to the autonomy of others*

Baubo’s *anasyrma* violates the autonomy of the viewer, which in the story’s narrative is the goddess Demeter. However, if we consider the moment of uncertainty after the unveiling of her genitalia and before Demeter’s reaction of either approval or disapproval, we find a unique moment in time in which Baubo teeters in uncertainty. Will the goddess find Baubo’s performance of *anasyrma* comical? Will she be enraged? This moment creates the dichotomy of obscene and sacred, not unlike the treatment of other witches and Kristeva’s

<sup>43</sup> Spaeth, “From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and the Roman Witch in Classical Literature,” 46.

discussion of improper/unclean, and further an exploration of mortal verses god. Part of the binary existence of the witch characters in ancient literature and myth are their existence between life and death, ultimately a position that is plagued with uncertainty. Seneca's witch character Medea, niece of the witch Circe, mutilates her own body. Blood itself is abject and causes revulsion in the viewer because when it escapes the body it is symbolic of life escaping the body. Thus, Medea's self-mutilation illustrates her existence between the life and death duality that causes abject reactions.<sup>44</sup> Other stories tell of Medea intentionally or accidentally murdering one or more of her children. Children are the embodiment of untainted life and therefore Medea's murder is a huge violation to not only the corporal existence of another, but to the pure existence of a child. Erichto is similar to Medea when she cuts an unborn child from its mother's womb. Medea and Erichto violate what women are: producers of life. The murdering of children and infants in their stories are the personified antonym to a woman's life-giving ability. Therefore, when women become abject figures who hold the power of death, they are threatening to all, not just to the ancient male and his perceived notion of ultimate autonomy. In contrast, Baubo does not inhabit this parallel world of life and death. Instead, she is a pure giver of life because of her apotropaic magic over Demeter. Demeter is a powerful goddess in Greek mythology, holding sway over the seasons, agricultural growth, and thus human life. In her sorrow, Demeter has caused the ending of the seasons and consequently a world-wide famine, and yet it is Baubo's *anasyrma* that cures this. Through this gesture, Baubo has brought life and benefits to Demeter and to the entire human population of earth through the ending of the famine, not unlike the magic and power of a mother-figure, and ultimately a magic that should not go unnoticed. It is clear

<sup>44</sup> Stratton, "Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature," 160.

that while Baubo is not an extreme abject figure like other witches from ancient Roman literature, she demonstrates a position of a woman who exists on the opposite side of the life/death, obscene/sacred dichotomies.

*Violation of the social and standardized gender norms*

As previously stated, there were clear definitions in ancient life of what men and women's roles were and how they lived in society.<sup>45</sup> Women were often sequestered to what was deemed appropriate. Magical practices, or the rejected forms of religion, were a field already outside of what was considered appropriate and therefore those who practiced these unsanctioned beliefs were subject to much judgement. In the chapter "Drunken Hags with Amulets and Prostitutes with Erotic Spells: The *Re-Feminization of Magic in Late Antique Christian Homilies*," Dayna S. Kalleres presents a preconceived idea, highly encouraged through Roman literature, that has thus trickled through to contemporary time: women were the heralds of erotic magic. Kalleres writes, "By the early imperial period, Greco-Roman literature had constructed a deeply chiseled portrait of the witch – a harrowing image of a powerful, sexually voracious, female magical practitioner."<sup>46</sup> Citing Horace's *Canidia*, Ovid's and Seneca's *Medea*, and Apuleius' *Pamphile*, Kalleres states that this image has gone unchallenged until recently.<sup>47</sup> Stratton has confronted this belief to unveil the truth that women were often the victims of "male magical predation" instead of the image of a

<sup>45</sup> Important to note that this study takes a blend of Greek and Roman views when it comes to male and female societal roles due to the influence of Greek culture upon Roman life. In future work it would be beneficial to explore the precise differentiation between the two in more earnest depth.

<sup>46</sup>Dayna S. Kalleres, "Drunken Hags with Amulets and Prostitutes with Erotic Spells: The *Re-Feminization of Magic in Late Antique Christian Homilies*," in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 219-251, p. 219.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



prostitute attempting to ensnare a man to satisfy her insatiable lust through erotic magic.<sup>48</sup> For the late antique period (approximately 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE), in the face of the Christian authority presenting their own practices against the old ways of ritual magic, Kalleres argues that women would chose the practice they saw as most practical for their needs: “Women chose amulets, incantations, old wives’ tales (*graudeis mythous*) and spells (*grammata*) before they considered the sign of the cross for healing.”<sup>49</sup> In opposition to this, John Chrysostom’s *Ad Illum cat. 2* categorized traditional remedies as “device(s) of Satan,”<sup>50</sup> due to their outlying nature. Such a statement as this was made in order to widen the gap distancing what was appropriate and inappropriate religious activity in which the unacceptable had a female head front, the crosshairs firmly stationed.

The season of witch hunting was thus in place. Female practitioners of magic for personal benefit were systematically ostracized pushing their work into the dark corners of society. In reality, the female practitioners were already established long before late antiquity, such as in the Greek mythological stories of Hecate or Circe, who promoted a world in which the magical practitioners of *pharmaka* (medicine, drugs, and poisons) utilized their knowledge for the good of themselves and others. However, with this patriarchal society in mind, it is easy to pinpoint the root cause of concern for the benefit of the male society members. A woman who is in possession of what is deemed to be too much power or knowledge according to society becomes categorized as something other and thus an alienated member of society. It is with this power that she then gains a stronger foothold

<sup>48</sup> Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, & Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 108.

<sup>49</sup> Kalleres, “Drunken Hags with Amulets and Prostitutes with Erotic Spells: The Re-Feminization of Magic in Late Antique Christian Homilies,” 232.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 233.

upon her autonomy as well as the preconceived notion of the inalienable autonomy of men. The woman becomes an active body, rather than the preconceived passive receptor to the wants and needs of the male.

The understanding of sexual activities in relation to their gendered performers in antiquity relies heavily upon an analysis of passive and active performances. Proper sex in antiquity did not depend upon whether or not the members were male or female, but rather who was the active and the passive participants within the acts. This categorization of the acts becomes even more relevant in the understanding of the ancient male and his fear of corporeal violation which deviates from the understanding that his gender holds.

Both moderate and strong social constructionists have tended to agree that gender roles – masculine or feminine, active or passive – were more important than object choice in the ancient world, although they disagree on whether this means that the Greeks and Romans had sexualities very different from ours or that their classifications were based on gender roles *rather than* (not as a part of) sexuality. Key to this distinction of gender roles was the concept that men are active and women passive, or that men are penetrators and women penetrated. Thus anyone who is penetrated (or is in other ways passive) is gendered feminine, and anyone who penetrates is masculine... Women who penetrate (with dildos or large clitorises) and men who are penetrated are seen not primarily as sexual deviants but as gender transgressors.<sup>51</sup>

“Sexual deviants” thus have their actions aligned with an upset to the social and gender norms of the time. But ultimately, where does Baubo stand in this account? Baubo’s *anasyrma* performance, while not completely unique, is not a common action. It is a strong, forceful measure that enables herself to become, as previously stated, an active figure rather than a passive recipient to the needs or desires of others. Baubo perceives a slight against herself and makes a conscious decision with self-interest in mind to take action. In this sense then Baubo somewhat exhibits abject actions. *Anasyrma*, while resulting in different

51 Ruth Mazo Karras, “Active/Passive, Acts/Passions: Greek and Roman Sexualities,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 4 (October 2000): 1250-1265, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2651412>, p. 1255-6.

responses based on the viewer, is not a passive act. It is one that exposes the genitalia with either a negative or positive result and can thus be interpreted as a mild to moderate form of abject action.<sup>52</sup>

### *The disturbance of social hierarchy*

Ancient Greek and Roman societies were dependent upon the hierarchy that was put into place for the patriarchal empowerment. Elite males demonstrated their higher social standing through their sense of inviolability, dominance, and overall self-domination and dominion. A Roman or Greek man performed his role in society by being regarded as an impenetrable figure, fully in control over himself and those beneath him in the rungs of social hierarchy – his employed workers, his slaves, his daughters, and his wife – ultimately women in general. For while women could act outside of what was seen as their gendered roles, they would not then be seen as male equivalents, instead they were understood as “gender transgressors,” to use Karras’ term quoted above, and they were people who violated their socially established roles. These gender positions were stabilized through the everyday workings of society in which women could not be given familial heritage, own land, or vote.<sup>53</sup> The discrepancies between the sexes began at young ages for women. Ann Carson in her chapter “Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire” explores this idea by writing:

The ancient Greeks seem to have been even more sensitive than we are to such transgressions and to the crucial importance of boundaries, both personal and extrapersonal, as guarantors of human order... In such a society, individuals who are

<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that the reception of *anasyrma* depends on the sex of the viewer. When the viewer is female, it produces magical, apotropaic benefits upon her through the use of laughter. When the viewer is male, as will be shown, the results are resoundingly negative, producing fear, terror, or the *anasyrma* performer’s control over her male viewer.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Cartwright, “Women in Ancient Greece,” Ancient History Encyclopedia, July 27, 2016, <https://www.ancient.eu/article/927/women-in-ancient-greece/>.

regarded as especially lacking in control of their own boundaries, or as possessing special talents and opportunities for confounding the boundaries of others, evoke fear and controlling action from the rest of society. Women are so regarded by men in ancient Greek society... the threat which women pose is not only greater in degree than that presented by other transgressors of boundaries; it is different in kind... When we focus on Greek attitudes to and treatment of the female, we see anxiety about boundaries..."<sup>54</sup>

However, the patriarchal society has ways to deal with these diversities. As Allison Glazebrook and Kelly Olson illustrate in "Greek and Roman Marriage," a woman has one main virtue to be found: sexual devotion to her husband. Marriage was seen as a catch-all solvent for these preconceived difficulties of boundaries.<sup>55</sup> Social hierarchy is further enforced through the institution of marriage which becomes a standard which is set for the female sex:

Marriage followed by childbirth, not menarche, marked the essential rite of passage from *parthenos* to *gunē* (this is, from girlhood to womanhood)... Marriage, more generally, was also seen as the most effective way to contain women and their sexuality.<sup>56</sup>

Within these marriages then we find once again the domination of women. As she is seen as the one in need of an authority figure, the male member of society furthers his high ground. With these social handicaps, women were placed in positions deemed appropriate for their sex and thus furthering the binary existence of good or bad in which women were either proper ladies of society or the outliers who socially devalued themselves through sex work and/or performance of roles deemed unfeminine. Activities such as wool working become symbolic of a righteous woman, canonized by Penelope, wife of Odysseus,<sup>57</sup> and Lucretia,

<sup>54</sup> Anne Carson, "Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 135-169, p.135.

<sup>55</sup> Allison Glazebrook and Kelly Olson, "Greek and Roman Marriage," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2014), 69-82, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>57</sup> While Penelope waits for Odysseus' return, she has many suitors, one of which she promises to remarry once she has finished weaving a funeral shroud for her father-in-law. To avoid remarrying she works on the shroud

wife of L. Tarquinius Collatinus.<sup>58</sup> A loyal, idyllic, and gender normative wife was seen as, “important for a stable society and how its defilement was seen as violence against the entire community.”<sup>59</sup> The societal disturbance of women therefore forced them into the fringes of society. As previously touched upon, women within these communities were driven to use what was available to them in order to boost and/or maintain what social standing they inhabited. While the vast majority of “ritual manuals, binding tablets, and inscribed magical objects in which actual spells were designed and deployed for use” from the 5th century BCE until late antiquity were for men seeking sexual relationships with women, there is evidence of magic utilized by women.<sup>60</sup> Women were using, once again, the resources available to them, which included potions, ointments, and charms, items that were *philia* (“affection magic”) in order to “*maintain* marital bonds and sexual devotion” by wives and other “spells, amulets, and magical gestures” used for the “protection of travelers, pregnancy and children, health, home animals, and the like.”<sup>61</sup> While these are the realities, the literature at the time illustrates a different characterization.

The common picture in Greco-Roman literature of a lascivious older woman who uses barbaric utterances and nocturnal rites to bind some unwitting youth reflected... not a real social type but rather the folklore of the night-witch - *strix*, *gello*, or *lilith* -

during the day, but at night she unravels her work, extremely prolonging the process. A. T. Murray translates Homer’s work, writing, “Then day by day she would weave at the great web, but by night would unravel it, when she had let place torches by her. Thus for three years she by her craft kept the Achaeans from knowing, and beguiled them; but when the fourth year came as the seasons rolled on, even then one of her women who knew all told us, and we caught her unravelling the splendid web. So she finished it against her will, perforce.” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, vol. 1 [London, UK: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919], 45.)

<sup>58</sup> Before the famous and horrendous rape of Lucretia, there is a tale of a bet between Tarquinius’ sons and Brutus and Collatinus. They fight over whose wife best exemplifies *sophrosyne*, the ancient Greek concept of an ideal character with sound mind which ultimately creates a fully balanced individual. Upon returning home, the men find their wives socializing, drinking, and in conversation with one another. Yet, when they find Lucretia, she is at home, alone, working on her wool in silence. James George Frazer’s translation of Ovid’s writing states, “Thence they galloped to Lucretia: she was spinning: before her bed were baskets of soft wool.” (Ovid, *Ovid's Fasti*, trans. James George Frazer [London, UK: William Heinemann LTD, 1931], 111.)

<sup>59</sup> Glazebrook and Olson, “Greek and Roman Marriage,” 69.

<sup>60</sup> Frankfurter, “The Social Context of Women's Erotic Magic in Antiquity,” 319-20.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 320 and 324.

who eats children and drains men's potency.<sup>62</sup>

This image, which is reminiscent of our previous exploration of the witch Erichtho, enhances the hierarchy inherent within society, demonizing the active woman who not only is a “gender transgressor,” to once again use Karras’ term, but also a danger to those around them as an abject figure. Once again, we return to Baubo with this new aspect in mind. Does she exhibit a disturbance to social hierarchy? I propose that she does as she claims dominance, through the performance of *anasyrma*, to a goddess – ultimately a figure so far advanced when compared to the mortal existence of Baubo. However, she is not exhibiting a disturbance to the hierarchy in which male figures have superiority over female as we have previously explored. She is not directing her genital exposure to a male figure. Rather, if we were to claim she was doing anything similar, she is revealing herself to Demeter; this act then may be interpreted as unfeminine and thus a gender transgressor. However, I hesitate to read into her performance that deeply. As previously stated, *anasyrma*, while not an everyday occurrence, was a performance set in place and used for leverage over the viewer either maliciously or apotropaically. Baubo’s act is the latter, making her alignment with the abject theme of disturbing the societal hierarchy somewhat ambiguous.

### *Anasyrma*

While the abject witches of antiquity are the extreme example of witchcraft profiling, they ultimately personify the underlying reason of why women are so often associated with magic, despite the evidence that we have previously discussed stating otherwise. This reason is simple: women are the “other” to the Roman male. Erichtho is said to have performed

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 323.

abject actions in order to distance the female magical practitioner from the male, once again widening the gap between male and female behavior. “Any challenge to male authority constituted rebellion, which was the origin of witchcraft,” states Stratton in a strong claim that illustrates this female profiling.<sup>63</sup> Witches are thus the female performers and witchcraft is their enacted performance. With this in mind we once again turn to the performance of *anasyrma* and Baubo. Looking at Baubo and other female figures as distinctly other can help us characterize further this act of revealing. Specific to the act of *anasyrma* is its spontaneity, as shown in Baubo’s narrative, as well as it being a temporary action that is deliberately aimed at a known target.<sup>64</sup> As previously mentioned, the functions of this female performance can be for various reasons, but Baubo’s performance towards Demeter is very distinctly done for apotropaic benefits. Baubo believes that her gift of drink to Demeter has been turned down and she becomes greatly displeased by this. By utilizing *anasyrma* Baubo is thus acting in self-interest by bestowing an apotropaic benefit upon the goddess. As previously discussed in exploring the definition of magic, we classified singular motivation as being characteristic of magical practices. If we view Baubo’s act as being done for the benefit of herself, to alter that which is causing her disturbance, then we can easily classify it as a magical action. Her genital revealing is done against a goddess no less, making Baubo’s success even more noteworthy and awe inspiring. Demeter, the goddess of the seasons, cured through laughing when viewing Baubo’s genitalia, restores the cycles of the seasons and

<sup>63</sup> Kimberly B. Stratton, “Interrogating the Magic-Gender Connection,” in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-37, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Suter, “The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity,” 23; Further on in this work you will see that in another telling of Baubo’s story she is said to have left Demeter, shaved her pubic hair off completely, and then returned to perform *anasyrma*, which can alternatively be read as no longer fully spontaneous.

ultimately the earth's food supply. We can then draw a line between Baubo's *anasyrma*, done in self-interest, the controlling of a goddess, and the production of food on earth.

As we have previously explored, Baubo utilized the magical abilities of her body for apotropaic benefits. Directed at Demeter, Baubo's genital revealing is a unique usage of *anasyrma* because Baubo's identity is clearly that of a mortal/non-deity while Demeter is very much the more dominant figure of the two. Baubo's identity varies depending on the writers of the tale: Iambe in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, an "Eleusis aborigine" in Clement of Alexandria's *Exhortation to the Greeks* as well as Arnobius' *Adversus Gentes*, and an "indigenous inhabitant" of Eleusis in Clement's *Exhortation to the Heathen*.<sup>65</sup> The act's many usages throughout ancient literature vary in their eventual outcome and comparing those to Baubo's we can find a further subdivision to categorize it under.

Clement of Alexandria tells of the well-known Eleusinian Mysteries from the ancient Greek town Eleusis. Held in honor of Demeter and Persephone, it is one of the most highly speculated upon secret cult practices of antiquity within modern scholarship. Clement of Alexandria tells of the famous "password of the mysteries of Eleusis," concluding that they are, "Fine spectacles worthy of a goddess!"<sup>66</sup> Based on our breakdown of the act of *anasyrma*, we can thus theorize that the "password" for the mysteries to be none other than a revealing act of *anasyrma*, which in this instance would be done for communal acceptance into a secret group and/or cult. An individual's performance of *anasyrma* as the "password" may have been seen as a necessary act to be repeated or done for initiation within the group. However it was done, ultimately it indicated group acceptance. As discussed

<sup>65</sup> See Table 1 for further information.

<sup>66</sup> Olender, "Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts," 88.



previously, acceptance into this group would endow women with some realm of personal agency within the group, at times even allowing women to rise up to priest figures, one of which can be seen in **Figure 3**. Found at the sanctuary to Demeter in Priene, this priest statue indicates that female agency was held within the group, enough so that a statue was made in honor of one of the priests.

Returning once again to Olender's analysis of Baubo and the incomparability of the acts of male and female genital revealing, he states that the female act is shameful (*aiskhynē*) and ultimately, terrifying.<sup>67</sup> Another comparable performance of *anasyrma* is done during a festival for Artemis in Egypt, which is believed to be reminiscent of the Thesmophoria, which is yet another Greek religious festival held in honor of Demeter and Persephone.<sup>68</sup> It is also said that the Egyptian goddess Heqet (alternatively spelled Heqt) confronted the goddess Isis with her own performance of *anasyrma* after the disappearance of Osiris, illustrating that when the act is performed toward another female figure, the results are beneficial, further characterized as apotropaic and empowering.<sup>69</sup> Another Egyptian tale of *anasyrma* is about the goddess Hathor, ultimately a similar story to that of Heqet and Isis in which Hathor exposes herself to the god Ra, who similar to Demeter was also in need of an emotional boost after a perceived slight by the god Babi. Hathor exposes herself through the act of *anasyrma* and Ra laughs, allowing him to return to the performance of his own duties.<sup>70</sup> *Anasyrma* is also found in other characters, such as the famous gorgeoneions (**Figure 4**) – the most

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 103. Olender here is referencing opinions put forth by Plutarch in *Virtus of Women* (see bibliography for the text under Plutarch) and J. Moreau's 1951 work "Les guerriers et les femmes impudiques."

<sup>68</sup> Suter, "The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity," 23.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>70</sup> E. F. Morris, "Sacred and Obscene Laughter in *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*, in Egyptian Inversions of Everyday Life, and in the Context of Cultic Competition," in *Egyptian Stories: A British Egyptological Tribute to Alan B. Lloyd on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. Thomas Scheider and Kasia Szpakowska (Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), 197-224, p. 198-99.

infamous being Medusa – or the Sheela na gig figures (**Figure 5**) found carved upon cathedrals and castles throughout Europe.<sup>71</sup> These other examples across time and space exhibit the powers of *anasyrma* through health and defense, encouragement of fertility and community flourishing, and even the protection of the public against military attack or natural disaster.<sup>72</sup> Suter writes of a story told by Plutarch in which the Persians under Cyrus revolt from the Medes under King Astyages. Told originally in Plutarch’s *Bravery of Women*, he writes:

As the Persians were fleeing to the city, with the enemy not far from forcing their way in along with the Persians, the women ran out to meet them before the city, and, lifting up their garments, said, “Whither are you rushing so fast, you biggest cowards in the whole world? Surely you cannot, in your flight, slink in here whence you came forth.” The Persians, mortified at the sight and the words, chiding themselves for cowards, rallied and, engaging the enemy afresh, put them to rout.<sup>73</sup>

This is an act of *anasyrma* that fully illustrates its power: not only can the act have apotropaic benefits upon a viewer, but it also has the capacity to intimidate a whole army of men back into battle because of the shame it instills within them. Plutarch in the same text also writes about a great wave sent by Bellerophon in a quest to avenge his “ill-treatment” by Iobates<sup>74</sup>:

Bellerophon also drove out the Amazons, but met with no just treatment; in fact, Iobates was most unjust with him. Because of this, Bellerophon waded into the sea, and prayed to Poseidon that, as a requital against Iobates, the land might become sterile and unprofitable. Thereupon he went back after his prayer, and a wave arose and inundated the land. It was a fearful sight as the sea, following him, rose high in air and covered up the plain. The men besought Bellerophon to check it, but when they could not prevail on him, the women, pulling up their garments, came to meet him; and when we, for shame, retreated towards the sea again, the wave also, it is said, went back with him.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> For more information please see Starr Goode’s *Sheela na gig: The Dark Goddess of Sacred Power* (2016).

<sup>72</sup> Suter, “The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity,” 21-34.

<sup>73</sup> Plutarch, *Bravery of Women*, 246 (Loeb).

<sup>74</sup> Suter, “The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity,” 25.

<sup>75</sup> Plutarch, *Bravery of Women*, 248 (Loeb).

In response to this story, Suter rightly points out that “Plutarch makes no effort, however, to explain away the effect of the *anasyrma* on Bellerophon, which the historian apparently accepted as realistic.”<sup>76</sup> It is clear that the magic and ultimate power of female *anasyrma* should not and cannot be overlooked as a mere inconsequential action. In this story, the act holds strong power over Bellerophon and its ultimate “effect.”

I have argued that *anasyrma* is a performance with strong consequences dependent upon its viewer and overall intention of the performer; but we can push its understanding even further into the realm of magic. We can visualize Baubo’s utilization of *anasyrma* as symbolic for her own capabilities.

Magic generally operates with symbols rather than with concepts. Symbols help people to associate, to remember, to think. They often serve as a kind of shorthand for concepts that are too complicated to be put into words, and by their very nature they seem to offer a key to reality. No matter how abstruse the drawings in the magical papyri may seem to us, they are symbols for some type of reality and preserve, as ‘psychograms,’ certain kinds of experience.<sup>77</sup>

Magic in antiquity clearly takes many forms, but none so powerful and in need of contemplation as Baubo’s *anasyrma*. Her usage of the act has previously been put into contrast with the theory of abjection and to a slight degree aligns in particular ways with that theory. However, Baubo is a character more in line with magic in a positive sense. As the witches mentioned thus far have been in comparison with abjection it is important to also note that there are also witches who exist that do not tread a line between life and death, but between the powerful and positive realms of knowledge and wisdom. Compared to wise women, these witches are akin to Baubo and her choices.

<sup>76</sup> Suter, “The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity,” 26.

<sup>77</sup> Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, 4-5.

## Hecate

Of the several witches in Greek mythology, the more infamous are Hecate and her daughter Circe. Hecate, alternatively spelled Hekate, appears in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as well as Hesiod's *Theogony*. Her name comes from the Greek word *hekatos* meaning "worker from afar" indicating her approximation to magical practices and, if we can push further, the practice of *anasyrma* which is also a non-tactile performance with results just as magical. In artwork, she is often shown as a figure composed of three females, symbolic of her position of a goddess that inhabits crossroads, known as the maiden, the mother, and the crone, symbolizing three stages of womanhood. If we recall, it was said that Hecate first witnessed Persephone's kidnapping by Hades. The *Homeric Hymn* then tells of Hecate visiting Demeter to tell her what has happened to her daughter and when she does this she is told to be carrying torches, objects that become closely associated with her as seen in artwork (see the central figure identified as Hecate in **Figure 6** who is shown carrying two torches that lead Persephone, shown on the left, out from the Underworld and to her mother Demeter who is awaiting her on the right). Demeter herself then becomes associated with the torch as it is said that when she began her wanderings in search for Persephone she navigated the lands with one in hand. With torches in the hands of two well-known and powerful goddesses, the importance of the object becomes heightened. As objects that carry fire, a torch is also symbolic of the knowledge/magic stolen from the gods by Prometheus and given to humans to enable the progress of civilization. In cults to Demeter in Sicily, she becomes even more so associated with torches.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> The origin story of Sicily begins with the creation of civilization thanks to the wandering of Demeter upon the land. In her quest to find Persephone she subsequently bestows knowledge for a "civilized" society upon the people of Sicily, establishing order out of the chaos of nature by teaching the people how to tame the land, with

## Circe

Whereas Hecate was a goddess imbued with the knowledge and power to command the crossroads and more, Circe, her daughter, is known for her knowledge of potions and herbs, making her a wise woman of mythology empowered with magical lore. She employs *pharmakeia* and *mageia*, once again a combination of the spheres of magic, religion, and science intertwined. *Pharmakeia* is a word used to convey the usage of “herbs and other substances in the manufacture of such things as curative medicines, love potions, and poisons, although the word did later broaden its range considerably to include binding spells which did not involve herbs at all.”<sup>79</sup> *Mageia* is a term then used by the Greeks in association with the *magoi* (specifically Persian/Iranian) who were priests in a “non-Greek religious system and we may therefore initially understand *mageia* as meaning a collection of unacceptable religious practices.”<sup>80</sup> This definition then, once again, places *mageia* within the definitive “other” of what is deemed acceptable in ancient society. Circe’s powers of *pharmakeia* and *mageia* are on full display when in she turns Odysseus’ men into, amongst other animals, pigs in Homer’s *Odyssey* (a depiction of which is shown on the kylix seen in **Figure 7**), aligning another characteristic of Baubo – her association with pigs – with yet another famous witch. In “Demeter, Myth, and the Polyvalence of Festivals” Sarah Iles Johnston writes that, “when Hades seized Persephone, the chasm that opened up in the earth to receive his chariot accidentally swallowed up some pigs that happened to be nearby as well. Thus, the pigs literally suffered the same fate as Persephone did.”<sup>81</sup> The Greek word for

her torch being the key symbol of that knowledge. It is this that firmly establishes the Cult of Demeter within the origins of Sicilian culture (Greco, “The Cult of Demeter and Kore between Tradition and Innovation,” 50).

<sup>79</sup> Maxwell-Stuart, “Magic in the Ancient World,” 19.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>81</sup> Sarah Iles Johnston, “Demeter, Myths, and the Polyvalence of Festivals,” *History of Religions* 52, no. 4 (May 2013): 370-401, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/669646>, p. 378.

piglet is *khoiros* which also served as slang for female genitals, once again evoking Baubo's *anasyrma* act to Demeter, the tale of Demeter and Persephone, and the artwork created for its devotees (example of this pig association with the cult of Demeter and thus Baubo can be seen in **Figure 26** which shows a squatting Baubo figure astride a pig, as well as the small pig votive figures found in the Shrine to Demeter in Priene which can be seen in the lower right of **Figure 8**).<sup>82</sup>

### **Wise Women**

As stated previously, these depictions of magical female characters also align with the images of wise women as, after all, a magical practitioner is one who holds much knowledge just as a wise woman does. Briefly, let us also explore their presence in antiquity and their comparisons to Baubo. It is important to mention wise women alongside female magic practitioners as both the wise woman and witches held powers that were societally perceived to be unreachable by the everyday person. Nicola Denzey Lewis in "Living Images of the Divine: Female Theurgists in Late Antiquity," notes a prominent woman named Sosipatra who was a teacher of philosophy during the end of the 4th century. Known from Eunapius of Sardis' *Vitae philosophorum* or the *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* (ca. 405 CE), she is notably never mentioned as a magician, sorceress, witch, or the like, which Denzey Lewis believes to be deliberate on the part of the ancient author.<sup>83</sup> In agreement with Stratton's original definition of magic as the alterity of personification and practice, we can align a

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 377.

<sup>83</sup> Nicola Denzey Lewis, "Living Images of the Divine: Female Theurgists in Late Antiquity," in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 274-297, p. 275.

character such as Sosipatra with witches because of their uncommonness and because they hold wisdom. The idea of a theurgist in antiquity also fits Stratton's definition as well as with wise woman as theurgy's practice is intended for the utilization of divine powers and the ultimate connection of individual humans with higher cosmic forces. Through their work, female theurgists invoked powers of the divine for their own needs, just as magic in antiquity is said to have done. Historian Garth Fowden claims that there is little difference between theurgy and magic, stating: "After all, theurgy and magic depended for their success on the manipulation of the same network of universal sympathy; and many theurgical techniques are closely paralleled in the magical papyri."<sup>84</sup> Yet, Eunapius, again in perhaps a deliberate way to distance Sosipatra from the negative connotation of magical discourse writes that she, "produces her visions of the future *spontaneously* as a gifted seer, rather than as a practitioner of magic who needs a combination of preparatory techniques and material objects to conjure up a vision."<sup>85</sup> By successfully distancing Sosipatra from the association with what we can interpret, as the primal-type figure of a witch which has to resort to the usage of materials, he stations Sosipatra as a sophisticated character that needs only her very body and mind to channel mystical powers. However, Sosipatra's usage of theurgy is not unlike the use of non-tactile magic as well as the corporal usage of Baubo, once again referencing Baubo's use of the apotropaic magic of *anasyrma*. Baubo too refrains from using any specific tools, instead she utilized what is innately built within her body, her genitalia, for the magic power it holds.

We can see the true magic that is held within the female body. The female genitalia is remarkably strong, not only physically as the area of the female body that makes and

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 281.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 282.

produces life but also in a mental capacity where the mere viewing of it can include, but are not limited to, the results of curing depression (Demeter), intimidating men (Plutarch's stories), and signaling acceptance into a selective group (Eleusinian Mysteries). The beliefs in magic are no less than the terror or apotropaic powers that *anasyrma* instill within their viewers. What is essential is the mindset of the viewer.



## SECTION 2: THE ART

### The Priene Sanctuary

With the established frameworks of magic in antiquity, the performance of *anasyrma*, Baubo's narrative, and her comparison to witches and wise women in place, we are now able to discuss her manifestations through material culture. The goal of this exploration is to visually analyze the objects that exhibit Baubo's *anasyrma* performance and thus her alignment with our previous explorations of magic in antiquity. These examples will therefore illustrate an evolution of sorts with which Baubo's representation undertakes throughout time. Illustrative of the connection between the Mediterranean cultures, Baubo's imagery changes based on the needs of the people she serves. Of first and primary importance is the collection of artifacts found in the Sanctuary of Demeter from the Ancient Greek city Priene, which today can be found in Turkey. As mentioned at the start of this thesis, German archaeologists Theodor Wiegand and Hans Schrader were the first to excavate the sanctuary at the end of the 19th century. The 1904 publication of their findings left a permanent impression upon the analysis of Baubo and her figures – including the characterization of her figures as “grotesque-obscene” that was then explored in more depth by the later work of Bonfante in an exploration of Baubo as discussed by Sigmund Freud.<sup>86</sup> Of the figures found within the Sanctuary of Demeter, the Baubo figures only constitute a small portion of the whole assemblage, as seen in **Figure 8**.<sup>87</sup> Out of the over 200 terracotta figures found within the shrine during the 1898 excavation by Wiegand and Schrader, they

<sup>86</sup> Tevebring, “Baubo and the Question of the Obscene”; Bonfante, “Freud and the Psychoanalytical Meaning of the Baubo Gesture in Ancient Art”.

<sup>87</sup> The Baubo figurines in Figure 8 are shown in the upper left, a close up is shown in Figure 9.

considered twenty to be representations of Baubo – identified through her genital display. In 2001, new excavations were carried out in which two new Baubo figures were discovered along with one directly east of the sanctuary.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, photo documentation of these figures are limited, however the photos available showcase Baubo in remarkable ways.

**Figure 8** shows some of the finds from the 1898 excavation, however **Figures 10** and **11** show color photographs taken by a visitor to the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Antikensammlung where the Baubo figures are on display. These images allow for a better comparison of the variations in their coloring as all the original photos were done in black and white. The “simplest”<sup>89</sup> of these figures can be seen in **Figure 12** (also seen in **Figure 11** as the figure on the far left as well as amongst the Baubo figures seen in **Figure 8** and **9**), also the only museum quality photograph in color of a single figure.

This Baubo exemplifies *anasyrma* within a static votive object. Measuring at 5.71” (14.5 cm) in height, she presumably originally had a platform on which she was able to stand independently, perhaps comparable to the one seen on the Baubo in **Figure 13**. Due to not only their relatively small sizes and find location within the sanctuary, they have been interpreted as votive figures.<sup>90</sup> Anatomical or related votives often are relatively small objects that can possibly fit within the palm of your hand, such as these Baubo figures, thus

<sup>88</sup> Frank Rumscheid, *Die Figürlichen Terrakotten Von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie Und Funktion in Wohnhäusern Und Heiligtümern Im Licht Antiker Parallelbefunde* (Berlin, Germany: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 2006), 132.

<sup>89</sup> I use the term “simple” because she exhibits the same characteristics that all have (face in torso, hair swept back and tied in two knots at the crown of the head) but does not have any added attributes such as arms, items, or extravagant hair as some of the others have.

<sup>90</sup> Many of the museums which house the Baubo figures categorize them as such, however the largest and strongest documentation of such classification can be found in the previously cited *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde* (2006) by Frank Rumscheid.

allowing a sanctuary to be filled with these figures during its height.<sup>91</sup> We can then speculate that these objects were given as votives to the goddess Demeter for various reasons, possibly a method for devotees to amuse the goddess, as Baubo did. **Figure 12** – titled by the Berlin Museum as *Greek terracotta Baubo figure* – allows for a close visual reading of her fine details. This Baubo is estimated to come from the 4th to 2nd c. BCE. The sanctuary to Demeter itself is believed to have been founded in the middle of the 4th c. BCE and in operation until approximately the 2nd c. BCE.<sup>92</sup> *Greek terracotta Baubo figure* stands with her legs together, her face, just like the others from the sanctuary in Priene, is inserted into her torso. Her lips are softly curled upward, almost impish in her amusement at her exposure, with the vaginal slit acting as a sort of cleft chin, perhaps supplying further delight and humor. The hair is swept back, framing the face and reminds the viewers of the dress that Baubo lifts to unveil her genitalia to the goddess in her mythological tale. Her hair is detailed fairly well for such a small figure that was presumably one of many mold-made terracottas. The hair, with a band that runs the diameter of the head, culminates at the crown of the head in two rounded knots. A figure such as this illustrates the magical performance of *anasyrma* through the swept back hair, giving this small, stationary figure motion. Suter has proposed that the figures from the sanctuary in Priene are votives offered for fertility. A statement such as Suter’s should be acknowledged as blanket terminology that should be avoided as it discourages any further analysis of the art from any other angle, ultimately suppressing the study of female autonomy and representation within antiquity.<sup>93</sup> Instead, Suter furthers her

<sup>91</sup> Emma-Jayne Graham and Jane Draycott, “Introduction: Debating the Anatomical Votive,” in *Bodies of Evidence: Ancient Anatomical Votives Past, Present and Future* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 1-19.

<sup>92</sup> Rumscheid, *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde*, 64.

<sup>93</sup> Suter, “The Anasyrma: Baubo, Medusa, and the Gendering of Obscenity,” 22.

claim upon the figures by stating that they do not exhibit *anasyrma* because of their static nature.<sup>94</sup> This erroneous claim should be disregarded as one needs only to contemplate the most famous pose of classical artwork that has had a continuous run throughout artwork of many different periods: the *contrapposto*, exhibited first by the *Kritios Boy*, and famously by Polykleitos' *Doryphoros*, along with many more, to find movement in stationary forms.<sup>95</sup>

It is important to also remark upon *Greek terracotta Baubo figure*'s lack of a head and, in this case, arms as well, with some speculation on the facial placement. The face's insertion into the torso may be done in reference to Baubo's alternative title of Iambe. As previously stated, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Baubo is given the alternative name of Iambe and instead of amusing Demeter with her genitalia, she entrances the goddess with her words, presumably some form of comical poetry.<sup>96</sup> The combined character of Baubo and Iambe – who are in fact one and the same – is a possible explanation for the typology of the votive objects from the Priene sanctuary. Often, Baubo, Iambe, and Demeter are seen as a triad compilation of the maiden, the mother, and the crone – a common characteristic of the previously discussed goddess witch Hecate as well – with Baubo inhabiting the crone position, Iambe the maiden, and Demeter the obvious mother. Another interpretation can be found when contemplating the nature of laughter and sorrow. Demeter's story of her journey in vain to find her daughter Persephone ends with her arrival to Eleusis. Her eventual encounter with Baubo, and the ending of her depression. Grief over the loss of someone is a deeply personal emotion, one that seems to exist from within the body itself. Loss is felt deep

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Though beyond the current scope of this work, examining the Baubo figures through the lens of object agency would be one way to explore their active quality, ultimately arguing against the fallacious claim that they are static and thus not examples of *anasyrma* and its apotropaic magic.

<sup>96</sup> This is previously mentioned in footnote 13.

within the body, which in a way forces us to turn inward on ourselves as a means of protecting both our physical and mental state during such a challenging time. Can we then interpret Baubo's facial placement to mimic the inward emotion of sorrow? Such a proposition leads one toward a possible better understanding of her fascinating composition in the artworks found in the Sanctuary of Demeter in Priene.

**Figure 13** has given Baubo her arms, which are both wrapped around tall objects (the one in her right arm still intact while the left appears to be damaged). Once again, this Baubo has a fair amount of detail still visible, her hair is intricately done and swept back in her standardized method, mimicking the dress that Baubo lifts during her performance of *anasyrma* just as we saw in *Greek terracotta Baubo figure (Figure 12)*. The hair culminates once again in two knots. Her face inserted into her torso has a slightly stronger smile upon her lips this time, while her vaginal slit has just barely survived, however it is still notably present. Her legs appear natural and realistic as they stand strongly upon her rectangular base giving her a height of 6.14" (15.6 cm). In order to better understand what she is holding, **Figure 14 – Ten marble fragments of the Great Eleusinian Relief** – might give us a clue. To the left is Demeter holding a scepter, in the center is a boy who is believed to be Triptolemos – the boy Demeter taught how to cultivate grain who in turn then taught the men of earth – and on the right is Persephone holding the tall, slender object that has on its top end a shape that is rounded and comes to a tapered tip, similar to **Figure 14's** object. While curators at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where this object is currently in residence, do not identify the object Persephone is holding is exactly, we can speculate that she holds perhaps a torch (which Demeter is associated with during her wanderings), a form of wheat (as Demeter is the goddess of the harvest and is often depicted with wheat in different forms), or a corn

plant topped by a single ear of corn (again, as Demeter is the goddess of this harvest, this would remain in character). However, when we compare this image to the previously referenced **Figure 6** – *Terracotta Bell-Krater* that is attributed to the Persephone Painter – it becomes more likely that **Figure 13** and **14** show Persephone and Baubo both holding torches, which as we have previously explored are objects closely associated with the witch Hecate and Demeter herself. For further comparison, return again to **Figure 6**'s bell-krater in which we can see Hecate in the center, leading Persephone, shown on the far left rising from the underworld out of a rocky outcrop, while her mother Demeter, on the far right, waits to greet her for her period of time on earth. Hecate is shown holding two long items, which have a similar tapered tip to the ones in **Figure 13**. It can thus be concluded that Baubo is indeed holding torches, used once again to lead Persephone to her mother when she returns annually to spend time on earth, bringing with her the spring and summer seasons. **Figure 13**'s Baubo can therefore be considerably aligned with the mythological story of Demeter: she exhibits her genitalia and becomes heavily associated in various ways with Demeter. The reverse of this figure also shows a large hole, common of votive objects in antiquity, and can be taken as evidence that this was an object made from a mold.<sup>97</sup> Many votive objects were crafted with holes on the reverse in order to allow them to be hung upon a wall within a sanctuary as well as a possible indication of the object being one votive made from a mold that produced many.<sup>98</sup> However, it is likely this object would have been placed on a surface

<sup>97</sup> Steven M. Oberhelman, "Anatomical Votive Reliefs as Evidence for Specialization at Healing Sanctuaries in the Ancient Mediterranean World," *Athens Journal of Health* 1, no. 1 (March 2014): 47-62, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30958/ajh.1-4>.

<sup>98</sup> St James Ancient Art, "The Making of Terracotta Statuettes in Antiquity," St James Ancient Art, October 11, 2019, <https://www.ancient-art.co.uk/the-making-of-terracotta-statuettes-in-antiquity/>.

rather than hung as she comes upon a base, making the large hole a likely result of the mold-making process.

Returning to our variations from the Priene Sanctuary, we come to **Figure 15**. This figure has unfortunately lost her base; however she exhibits our standard characterizations of our previous Baubo figures – face within the torso, hair parted in the middle, swept back, and detailed with two knots on the crown of the head. Yet, this Baubo’s smile seems slightly diminished in comparison to our “simple” *Greek terracotta Baubo figure (Figure 12)*, and her vaginal slit/cleft chin appears to have disappeared. Most notably however is the addition of an object on her left side. In her left arm she holds a *cithara*, identified by Rumscheid as an ancient Greek musical instrument.<sup>99</sup> Exhibited in numerous mediums of art, most notably in Ancient Greek red-figure pottery, the *cithara* was a professional instrument popular throughout most of Greek antiquity.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, I have not found any ancient literature that tells of Baubo playing any instrument; however, that does not lessen its value with these Baubo figurines (for another example of Baubo shown with a *cithara* see **Figure 26**). The *cithara* was played by a skilled professional, requiring much education and practice in its use for entertainment at drinking parties, banquets, and other gatherings.<sup>101</sup> If we recall the variations of the story of Demeter, all have her arriving at a house in Eleusis and either being offered a drink or attempting to be placated by her receivers. The addition of the *cithara* to these Baubo figurines aligns the character of Baubo once again with her overall mission in the tale of Demeter, that being to amuse and entertain the goddess. In **Figure 15** Baubo can

<sup>99</sup> Rumscheid, *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde*, 65.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Pringle. “The Ancient Greek Kithara”. YouTube video, 09:03. Posted [October 2015]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6adj7Xoo9Us>.

<sup>101</sup> Colette Hemingway, “The Kithara in Ancient Greece,” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2002), [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/kith/hd\\_kith.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/kith/hd_kith.htm).

be seen to not only engage Demeter with her genitalia but also through music. These representations of Baubo holding a *cithara* may not have been true to the mythological story but find some explanation in ancient Greek culture. Entertainment was undoubtedly a key aspect of welcoming someone to one's home in Ancient Greek society. Because the *cithara* was a heavily utilized object, the usage of it within these votive objects can be interpreted as a devotee to the female cult of Demeter not only wishing to please the goddess through the use of *anasyrma* visualized through the votive objects but also through the auditory senses with musical tones.

With this now multisensory experience being presented to Demeter, we must briefly bring attention to the performative aspects of this cult along with the material objects that represent the faith of the ancients. The possible usage of *anasyrma* by devotees during the placement of these objects within the shrine is an idea that while ultimately beyond the exploration of this work, is certainly a fascinating possibility. Was one expected to perform *anasyrma* at the beginning of a Thesmophoria or Eleusinian Mysteries festival? Or perhaps before a votive of Baubo was placed within the sanctuary? Was it the previously discussed "secret password" of sorts for acceptance into this cult-oriented site? Did the usage of a *cithara* demonstrate a further devotion to the goddess and her cult, ultimately allowing some followers to be seen as "more" dedicated in their faith when in comparison to others? It is important to note that while we may study these objects in very displaced scenarios of museums, images in a book, or archeological reports, their usage in antiquity was undoubtedly a very active and therefore charged situation creating a multivalent ritual. If Demeter's zealots did have a performative aspect linked to the sanctuary and the placing of these Baubo figures, how then might we analyze their importance? Without a doubt our



analysis would be much broader and have to utilize a myriad of disciplines that include but are not limited to fields of art, performance art, multi-media, theurgy, history, and much more. Again, unfortunately that information is beyond the reach of the study of these objects at this time, nevertheless it is important to ponder such performative possibilities in association with the objects; such a performance would add to the layers of magic, religion, and cult-communal relationships.

Turning to **Figure 16** we have another variation of Baubo in which she carries an item, this time upon her head, measuring at 5.59” (14.2 cm). In this example, Baubo raises her right arm and in what appears to be a cheerful greeting to her viewers. Once again, her legs are closed and realistic, as her delicate feet stand strongly atop her rectangular base. Baubo’s face here is slightly worn, but her coy smile still remains, and her vaginal slit/cleft chin is marked in fine detail. Her hair is again swept back from the torso/face, but instead of the standard two knots at the crown, she has a circular object resting on her head, believed to be a bowl with fruit.<sup>102</sup> Votive objects commonly depict food offerings dedicated to the deity at their shrines, sanctuaries, or altars.<sup>103</sup> In this instance, Baubo’s usage of a bowl of fruit can be taken as even further evidence that these objects were offered as votives to Demeter. While it is uncertain what exact fruits are being represented, one proposition is a pomegranate as it is an object that is heavily associated with Persephone (**Figure 17**).<sup>104</sup> The pomegranate’s presence here may have been done as a solemn reminder to the goddesses

<sup>102</sup> Rumscheid, *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde*, 65

<sup>103</sup> For an example please see Figure 17.

<sup>104</sup> Just before being released from her kidnapping by Hades, Persephone is tricked by the Lord of the Underworld into eating pomegranate seeds, which thus guarantees her return every year. This is the explanation for the changes of the seasons here on earth. Fall and winter are the periods when Persephone is the queen of the underworld and her mother Demeter is in sorrow, while Spring and Summer have her returning to her mother’s side, bringing Demeter joy and allowing her to perform her duties as goddess of the harvest.

Demeter that her time with her daughter is forever temporary as she must always return to the underworld and thus bring forth the fall and winter seasons to earth when Demeter returns to sorrow.

A smaller comparison to **Figure 16** is **Figure 18**, which stands at 3.62” (9.2 cm). This smaller Baubo still wonderfully retains both her arms, which reach up to hold the basket atop her head. **Figure 18**’s arms give a slightly more comical appearance to Baubo as they are clearly out of proportion, jutting out from her hips and yet they hold on strongly to the basket. Were these thick arms given as symbolic representations of Baubo’s unabashed character? This is only of course a speculation; however, we can find many interpretations that we may suggest that should at least be considered when viewing her material representation. What remains true is that these figures are highly charged with the active power of *anasyrma*. Baubo’s genital exposure shows us that while not in need of outside tools, like the potions or wands of previously explored examples of witches such as Circe, Baubo has the only tool she needs – her very own body. Magical in execution, her apotropaic power is shown in the material representation of her *anasyrma* performance, allowing cult followers to embolden themselves in their own day to day life.

The Baubo figures from the sanctuary to Demeter in Priene are undoubtedly remarkable, not only for their unique and arguably extraordinary representation of a character from Greek mythology, but also because they are the only such representations of Baubo. To this day, no similar objects from antiquity that showcase Baubo as a headless figure have been found, her face inserted into the torso, hair cascading to the side to mimic the performance of *anasyrma*.<sup>105</sup> Moving forward in time we see a change in her visual

<sup>105</sup> At least so far as this author’s investigation has determined.

representation. From the headless figures from Priene we move forward in time to the next form Baubo's representation has taken, that of the squatting female figure. Once again with these figures we often encounter the widespread usage of key words such as "fertility" or "pregnant" to describe the objects, however many of the figures that will be presented here have also been given the proposed title of "Baubo figures" by the various museums that house them. Their variation in style, medium, and usage are remarkable, yet the magical power of *anasyrma* remains true throughout time. She has not lost her potency as an active character, but rather has evolved into different representations that may be indicative of the location and culture that they originate from, which varies from the Mediterranean areas of Greece, Asia Minor, Lebanon, and North Africa. Let us now explore these objects.

### **Baubo as the Squatting Female Figure**

As previously stated, Baubo should not be considered purely a fertility figure, and such characterizations are a gross under-categorization of her true potential as a character in mythology and material culture. **Figure 19** and **Figure 20**, both given the un-descriptive title of *Figure* by the British Museum, allow us to see other more full-bodied representation of Baubo beyond the votives from Priene. Still we see what might be fruit in both of the objects' raised left palm. The British Museum claims that the objects may alternatively be small pots, an ornament that the female figure carries and presents to its viewer, most likely as dedicative to the deity this votive is intended for. The right arms, like **Figure 16**, are bent upward at the elbow, the palms facing out almost in greeting to her viewers. Both **Figures 19** and **20** date to the 3rd to 2nd c. BCE from the Ancient Egyptian town of Naukratis,

excavated from the terracotta workshop at the eastern edge of the city.<sup>106</sup> Both faces have, unfortunately, seen some heavy damage: **Figure 19**'s has almost no detail and **Figure 20**'s has a large hole where the face once was, revealing the interior of the molded figure. Yet, upon both we still have a halo of hair, reminiscent of the Priene sanctuary Baubos' swept back hair, and once again her hair comes together at the crown in two large knots. Yet, both descriptions from the British Museum state similar claims: "Her face is largely broken away, and her hair is parted in the centre, falling in locks onto her shoulders. She wears a large tightly woven and bound wreath, with lotus buds with phallic appearance rising on top."<sup>107</sup> Categorization of the hair knots atop both figures' heads as phallic representations continues to perpetuate the analysis of these materials as *solely* existing within the realm of fertility due to this male genital reference. While I do not necessarily disagree with such a characterization, I do believe that such a statement ends any further analysis of a female figure *beyond* her ability to procreate and therefore, unfortunately, discourages further studies of female figures. Baubo's position in the tale of Demeter stands more for the everyday woman who exists not only as procreator but as a woman, a person who hurts when slighted by another, a person to grasp at whatever methods they find available to solve their problems, and a person who has the mental capacity to find solutions to difficult issues.

Understandably, these figures, unlike the Priene figures, sit in a crouched position, apt for child birthing, and yet they are not fully realistic. The wide out splaying of the legs within

<sup>106</sup> British Museum, "Figure (Museum Number: 1965,0930.974)," British Museum (Trustees of the British Museum), accessed August 8, 2019, [https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=420034&page=61&partId=1&searchText=Naukratis](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=420034&page=61&partId=1&searchText=Naukratis).

<sup>107</sup> British Museum, "Figure (Museum Number: 1886,0401.1452)," British Museum (Trustees of the British Museum), accessed August 8, 2019, [https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?assetId=1006391001&objectId=420787&partId=1](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=1006391001&objectId=420787&partId=1).

both figures are extreme, but we can instead accept this artistic choice to be enacted so that the genitalia at the bottom (somewhat viewable in **Figure 19** as a slight inward curve of the figure's pubic area) and the anus (seen in **Figures 19** and **20s'** reverse) become more noticeable because those were "pierced in areas marked with raised edges."<sup>108</sup> As she does not have a base on which she sits, she instead has been given, as is seen in the reverse images, a circular hole allowing them to act as a hung votive objects. If mounted on a wall, objects could further be attached from the pierced vagina and anus, as the British Museum suggests in their descriptions, and while the evidence of such further adornment to these pieces exist, the items themselves are no longer extant.<sup>109</sup> **Figure 19's** categorization by the British Museum mark it as a possible representation of Baubo and while it strangely does not do the same for **Figure 20**, they are extremely similar and should be analyzed as such. Likely made from the same and/or homogeneous molds, these two figures show the newly adapted representation of Baubo in Ancient Egypt. They are both made at approximately the same time period as our previously mentioned *Statue of the priestess Nikeso* (**Figure 3**) from the sanctuary in Priene and not long after our originally discussed Baubo figures from the same sanctuary (**Figures 8-13, 15, 16, and 18**). Comparative in mythological story to the previously mentioned lore of Hathor and Ra and Heqet and Isis, **Figures 19** and **20** are therefore showcasing the fact that the visual representation of *anasyrma* continues in Ancient Egypt in many different forms.<sup>110</sup> Powerful in its representation, magical in its usage, the *anasyrma* represented in **Figures 19** and **20** is confrontational to its viewer. The agency of

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> For a similar example please see the British Museum's Roman bronze *Tintinabulum*, 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE (Museum number 1856,1226.1086). "Tintinabulum" means "little bell" in Latin and the British Museum's *Tintinabulum* showcases a winged lion-phallus that is intended to be hung with attaching small bells to act as an apotropaic wind chime.

<sup>110</sup> See Figure 21 for a similar object from Ancient Egypt utilizing *anasyrma*.

these objects is demonstrated within this very construction. The holes on the reverse, done during the mold-making process, also support the demand for the objects to be hung and in their hanging position it is not difficult to speculate that the figures would have been striking – and maybe even confrontational – to their viewers.<sup>111</sup> Would the hanging adornments be decorated in some eye-catching way? Would they carry herbs or potpourri to entice a further sense beyond visual? Perhaps adorned with small chiming bells that would create an auditory experience when caught by the wind? Not only are these Baubo figures' legs spread widely, as previously remarked, but the figure is endowed with large breasts and a plump belly. Both were constructed out of brown Nile silt with “abundant fine gold mica and white inclusions.”<sup>112</sup> As both figures were excavated at a terracotta workshop in Naukratis, these figures themselves may not have ever been actively employed, however as they are clearly made from molds and undoubtedly they would have been two examples of many that were utilized in homes or personal or public sanctuaries. A possible representation of a fecundity figure, whatever the ultimate meaning was behind these figures we cannot deny its unabashed deployment of the female genitalia through the performative act of *anasyrma* and the apotropaic benefits it bestows upon its users and/or viewers.

Dated to the same time period we have **Figure 22** coming from Cyrenaica, Libya which illustrates the transportation of the visual representations of *anasyrma* throughout Mediterranean antiquity not only into Egypt but further in Northern Africa. At 2.4” (6.1 cm) **Figure 22** is small and pear-shaped with softened edges, enabling it to be easily held in the hand; and while her defining facial features have been lost to time, her hands clearly reach

<sup>111</sup> Christine Morris and Alan Peatfield, “Health and Healing on Cretan Bronze Age Peak Sanctuaries,” in *Medicine and Healing in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books, 2014), 54-63, p.61.

<sup>112</sup> British Museum, “Figure (Museum Number: 1886,0401.1452)”; British Museum, “Figure (Museum Number: 1965,0930.974”.

down towards her pubic area, as if to pull aside the pubic flesh to reveal the genitals that are marked in an obvious incised vagina slit definition. As the average woman's hand is slightly less than 3" in width, it is possible that this object was often held as a personal totem of sorts bringing spiritual and perhaps emotional relief to its user. This sort of interaction with the object would undoubtedly result in an eventual smoothing out and eventual loss of details in the face and body, ultimately creating the soft outline of the figure. Like the previously explored **Figures 19** and **20**, **Figure 22** has been given rounded breasts and a plump belly and yet this version seems to have given Baubo a rounded face but once again she has her characteristic top-knotted hair, yet notably with a single knot. The British Museum has proposed that she is, "masturbating with her right hand," which if true allows for an even deeper analysis of the performance of *anasyrma*. If compounded by a displaying of public masturbating, would the apotropaic and magical benefits of the act be doubled if she is indeed masturbating? Or would it lessen the power of the performance? While in the classical mythological narrative Baubo is never noted to have masturbated in front of Demeter, there is a unique telling of the events to be found in Arnobius' *Adversus Nationes* as Baubo is noted for having done an editing of sorts to her genitalia. Arnobius writes:

But when this was done several times and her fixed purpose could not be worn out by any attentions, Baubo changes her plans, and determines to make merry by strange jests her whom she could not win by earnestness. That part of the body by which women both bear children and obtain the name of mothers, this she frees from longer neglect: she makes it assume a purer appearance, and become smooth like a child, not yet hard and rough with hair. In this wise she returns to the sorrowing goddess; and while trying the common expedients by which it is usual to break the force of grief, and moderate it, she uncovers herself, and baring her groins, displays all the parts which decency hides; and then the goddess fixes her eyes upon these, and is pleased with the strange form of consolation. Then becoming more cheerful after laughing, she takes and drinks off the draught spurned [before], and the indecency of a shameless action forced that which Baubo's modest conduct was long unable to win.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Arnobius, *The Seven Books of Arnobius Adversus Gentes*, 249-50.

**Figure 22**'s Baubo then may not be representative of masturbation, but instead be showcasing this version of the mythological tale in which Baubo removes her pubic hair before acting out *anasyrma* to Demeter by drawing even more attention to the genitals with the hands. Whatever the ultimate reason for placing the hand so close to the genitalia, she still demonstrates the same *anasyrma* endowed with apotropaic power that aligns itself with magic that we originally saw in *Greek terracotta Baubo figure* (**Figure 12**) and even more-so in **Figure 16** in which the vaginal slit is finely defined as a deep incision making the genitalia stand out to the viewer, just as we see here in **Figure 22**. While we continue to explore the evolution of Baubo's material representation through time, there comes a new shift in her functionality.

### **Portable Baubo**

No longer is Baubo's existence limited to the confines of a sanctuary or a personal home-bound shrine. Moving south of Egypt and Libya we find *Baubo squatting female* (**Figure 23**) made of vivid blue glass from Sudan. Evolving from our previous plump Baubos in **Figures 19** and **20**, *Baubo squatting female* showcases an elongated figure whose usage has once again changed. Atop her head is a suspension ring, indicating that this Baubo was hung in some sort of way. Perhaps as a necklace, or even a bracelet – considering her extremely small size of 15/16" (2.39 cm) – *Baubo squatting female* is remarkable for her detail.<sup>114</sup> Once again, we can see her outwardly splayed legs, placing her pubic area in full view. Her right hand reaches down towards her genitalia, similar to the gesture in **Figure 22**,

<sup>114</sup> Due to her extremely small size I propose that she was not hung as decoration.



while her left appears to be gently lifting the flesh of her rounded belly. In this instance, Baubo is represented in a fairly to-scale, with her body's proportions appearing to be accurate, her belly is curved but does not appear to be pregnant, her breasts are an average size, and her legs, while spread widely, do appear to be positioned in a physically possible way. If the original production of *Baubo squatting female* included any facial detailing, that detailing has been lost, however that does not deter from the amazing definition that does survive on such a minute figure. The usage of this object may have dictated this particular form. While it is believed that all Baubo figures from the sanctuary to Demeter in Priene were used as votive objects and similarly **Figures 19** and **20** were as well, **Figure 22** presents us with our first instance of Baubo in a more intimate manner – perhaps handheld, a “Baubo to use on the go”-type for when you are in need of your own apotropaic protection; this would allow her user/wearer to enact magic daily instead of in special and specific circumstances as might be the case in Priene. *Baubo squatting female*'s suspension ring makes her travel possibilities increased as she is no longer fixed to a religious site. This may be indicative of a change in religious practices that once again align even more so with our proposed theory of ancient magic. Practitioners engaged in magic with particular individual's needs in mind. If one encountered a difficult situation – like Baubo did with Demeter's slight – then through magical practices that error could be amended. *Baubo squatting female* showcases the fact that women would now be utilizing her on a likely daily basis, the object quite literally asking to be used, worn, and traveled with by its owner and user. This is notably now placing Baubo at a distance from her association with Demeter which makes her a strong, independent character on her own.

Both **Figures 24** and **25** are given the un-descriptive title of *Pendant* by the British Museum yet demonstrate this new transformation of Baubo. Coming from the ancient civilization of Phoenicia in Lebanon between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE, these Baubos once again show the evidence of trading and cultural exchange throughout the areas of Northern Africa. Like *Baubo squatting female* all of these figures have been given a suspension loop at the crown of the head. Unfortunately, because the photos are in black and white, we cannot observe just how grand these small figures must be in their light green (**Figure 24**) and deep dark blue (**Figure 25**) glass. However, **Figure 24** shows us just how detailed these pendants would have been. Showcasing the exact same position as *Baubo squatting female*, **Figure 24** has wonderful definition in the genitalia with a definitive incision representing the vagina slit, her stomach folds are crisply rendered, and it appears as if the figure has been, for the first time, given nipple definition. While her facial representation has once again been blurred due to aging, as all are in **Figure 25**, she still retains her splayed legs and her hands reach down once again to her genitalia and stomach, softly lifting away the flesh to expose herself even further. The question then arises, after viewing so many Baubo's with splayed legs as to why such a specific representation of her was chosen? Clearly her squatting position with legs spread allows her genitalia to become easily viewable and draws the viewer's eye to this detailing, however there may be a deeper reason.

In the ancient text *Orphica Hymn 42* describes Baubo's various associations. This rendering not only declares Baubo to have mothered a daughter named Mise, but she becomes "a nocturnal Baubo," a further associated with magic. Olender tells of this ancient rendering of Baubo writing that she is:

"Elongated" (*epimēkēs*) and "dark" (*skiōdēs*) like the chthonic powers that hate the light (*misophaes*), love cavernous places (*ta koila*), and whisper to humans sinister

murmurings and unclear words. Associated with Hekaate, the great mistress of multiple combinations, and omnipresent in the magical papyri, Baubo is identified with everything that detests the race of men and women, and in particular with a female toad (*phrounē*).

This toad is Baubo's familiar and shows up as well in the annals of this grim family. Baubo's grandson – Misme's son – Askalabos was transformed into a gecko. He started to laugh when he saw the thirsty Demeter drink down a single gulp the entire cup prepared by his mother. Eternal hatred fell upon him and he ended up a sort of lizard with a speckled body. The ugliness of amphibians – and of the toad in particular – qualifies these upsetting creatures to perform many services in ancient magic.<sup>115</sup>

This version of Baubo aligns her not only with magic, but with a sinister and dark magic that pushes the previously explored boundaries of abjection in antiquity. Yet this is a singular representation. In general, as we have previously explored, Baubo is distanced from the classifications of abject female magical figures in antiquity. However, in this instance she is given the duality of not only this nocturnal creature, but also as a mother, an extremely positive association in antiquity. Once again inhabiting the binary position of good and bad, she is then associated with a toad, particularly a female toad who is said to be her familiar. The idea of a familiar is closely associated with interpretations of witches and witchcraft, with the female magical practitioner utilizing spiritual or supernatural beings that assist the witch in her practice who is given the title of “familiar.” If, as the *Orphic* text leads us to believe, there is some cultural association of Baubo with a toad familiar, this may explain in part at least the position Baubo is now taking in art (as we have seen in **Figures 19, 20, 23, 24, 25**). Baubo's usage as a personal pendant therefore would be empowering to her wearer/user. They would not only be able to claim her apotropaic power, but perhaps be in possession of a figure emblematic of their magical practice, identifying themselves to others in the same fellowship. While this does not present a definitive answer as to why Baubo's

<sup>115</sup> Olender, “Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts,” 101.

body has transformed into this particular representation, these are all ideas that must be explored and at least acknowledged in order to contemplate her character, art, and meaning to the best of our abilities.

### **Comedic Expanding**

Pushing the squatting Baubo position further, we come to an extremely unique representation of Baubo in *Baubo auf Schwein sitzen* (*Baubo sitting on pig*) (**Figure 26**). Once again, we have Baubo, her legs splayed open showcasing her fine genital detail, her plump stomach, large breasts, and a return of her characteristic smirk from the headless figures from the sanctuary in Priene. As we also saw in a figure from Priene (**Figure 15**), she has again been given a *cithara*. However, she strangely is now stationed in her squatting position while atop a large pig, which are comparable in representation to the two small pig figures in  *Finds from the Demeter Shrine* (**Figure 8**, lower right). As previously mentioned, Johnston notes that in the tale of Demeter and Persephone, pigs were said to have met the same fate as Persephone, perishing in the chasm that Hades created in the ground while riding his chariot to kidnap Persephone.<sup>116</sup> The presence of the pig in this figure allows the viewers to her identify her as Baubo and mark her known association with Demeter and Persephone. Our explorations of the varied versions of Baubo’s story, her character, and ultimately her iconographic associations (swept back hair, *cithara*, smirk face, two knots at the crown of the head, pigs, squatting position, etc.) allow us now to easily identify her

<sup>116</sup> In the same text, Johnston also remarks on the sacrifice of pigs during the festival of Thesmophoria. She writes, “But what seems to have been the highlight of the festival is said by our ancient sources to be directed toward agricultural fertility: at some point, piglets were thrown into deep pits, either alive or dead. Later, the piglets’ rotted remains were bailed up by women specifically chosen for the task. The remains were mixed together on an altar with some of the seed corn for the year, an act that was understood to guarantee the harvest” (Johnston, “Demeter, Myths, and the Polyvalence of Festivals,” 377).

figures. While larger in size than the previous explored pendants, the figure of *Baubo sitting on pig* is still relatively small. The pig stands upon a base, perhaps indicating that this figure was, once again like the Priene figures, a votive object meant to be placed in a public or private shrine likely dedicated to Demeter, Persephone, or even Baubo herself (though we have no archaeologically attested shrines to Baubo). Baubo's *anasyrma* in this object becomes humorously heightened due to the fact that she sits atop a comedically large pig, in comparison to Baubo herself, which allows the votive object to amuse her viewers, including the goddess Demeter. This much more humorous aspect allows the magical association to be heightened, as *anasyrma* cures through its apotropaic power of laughter.<sup>117</sup>

Our final visual exploration of Baubo is simply labeled *Dice* by the British Museum (**Figure 27**) in which we once again have a squatting female character, her legs splayed outward exhibiting her *anasyrma* performance for her viewers. This die is unlike any previously explored object in that she is one of four figures that compose a group of dice constructed out of bronze. Unfortunately, there is no known provenance beyond that the dice are "Roman," however this is the first instance of a possible Baubo figure associated with a male counterpart and two children, which admittedly may have been done to facilitate whatever game these pieces were used for. What is most notable about this Baubo figure is the presence, once again, of her fine genital detailing in a vagina slit, as well as her overall definition to be found in her face, hair, and the die's pips. The usage of this object is unlike any that has previously been discussed because this has moved away from personal magical practices into the realm of gaming. Active in a different environment than what has previously been explored, these figures would have been often handled, possibly in rough

<sup>117</sup> John R. Clarke, *Looking at Laughter: Humor, Power, and Transgression in Roman Visual Culture, 100 B.C.- A.D. 250* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

ways as they were meant to be tossed and dropped during the extent of gaming. Yet, the apotropaic benefits that Baubo carries with her *anasyrma* performance still reigns true. If in the middle of a high stakes game a player could utilize the power of Baubo for their benefits, bring laughter to her viewers, it could give the game a lighter air than it may have previously held. Baubo then in this sense has become a highly active figure, not only embedding herself and her gaming users with the magical apotropaic benefits of her *anasyrma*, but as a character that no longer exists in the spiritual realm. Her magic is heightened once again as her powers meet the needs of the magical practitioner who utilizes and seeks it.

## CONCLUSION

To judge merely on the basis of her small role in Demeter's story, the character of Baubo seems unremarkable: She is a mortal being set as an extremely small marginal figure within the wider Greek pantheon. Modern scholarship has either passed her over or seen her as crude, vulgar, and ultimately unfeminine. Her material representations are objects that scholars have often misunderstood or wrongly categorized as "fertility figures." In this thesis, I have argued for a new interpretation of the figure of Baubo and her portrayal in art. Remarkably, Baubo and her genitalia are the solution to the sorrow of a goddess. Through the use of *anasyrma*, Baubo activates a magical power of women-to-women performative magic. Baubo's *anasyrma* act bestows an apotropaic benevolence upon Demeter and gives her the antidote to her sadness: laughter. Thus, not only is Baubo's act magical, but it is medically beneficial, a power that is ultimately showcased in the objects which demonstrate this genital reveal.

The theory of magic can be applied to the Baubo figurines as her performance aligns with the previously established markers of magic in antiquity. Magic is utilized by those without other means to solve personal problems, and when Baubo believes she has been slighted by Demeter she decides to utilize *anasyrma* to alter her own reality. Magic is an act that happens from a distance with no physical contact, and Baubo's *anasyrma*, while obviously a confrontational act, does not require any physical contact with the viewer. Magic does not need to be enacted by outside resources; it can alternatively be performative through the utilization of one's very own body as we have seen through the analysis of *anasyrma* in antiquity. It has the power to instill fear in men and laughter in women, being the secret password for entrance into female cults where a woman could find her own agency. Powerful and apotropaic at the same time, the act of *anasyrma* allowed an average, mortal woman of

Eleusis to change the mind of a goddess. Through the study of Baubo and her representation in artwork, a Mediterranean-wide occurrence that transgresses cultural, geographic, and chronological boundaries, emerges a new way of understanding ancient magic. Baubo is indicative of the fact that conceptions of magic are nonbinary, an idea that scholars of magic may be familiar with and yet not fully embraced. Magic in antiquity is clearly difficult to define and the underlying reason is the fact that the practice of magic relied heavily on the practitioner. Who were they? Why were they choosing to turn to magic? What ways did they enact magic in their everyday lives? These aspects must be considered if we are to bring due diligence to the artwork of antiquity that has been previously misconstrued, such as Baubo.

We have explored Baubo's usage and representation in depth, a query that allows us to look at future studies of other female magical practitioners in a new light. The everyday woman in antiquity would encounter many challenges that she would need to find answers to, and magic may have been the deciding factor. In magical cults, devotion to female goddesses and a fellowship of likeminded women created an atmosphere that fostered female agency, a likely enticing aspect of membership and association. The Baubo figures that we find throughout antiquity then ultimately reflect this female desire for communal inclusion. A knowing glance from another woman wearing a Baubo pendant, spotting a votive Baubo at a shrine dedicated by a woman, or seeing a squatting Baubo figure hanging at the home of a friend, were all ways that this communal relationship was fostered and nourished. The character of Baubo then stands as a representative of apotropaic magic, her female cult association, and at length the agency that such inclusion gave its members. Baubo was a witch in her own way, defining magic within her body.



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Table 1

Source	Notes on the Author and/or Work	Notable Characters	Location	How is Demeter's depression cured?	Bibliography & Link
<i>Homeric Hymn to Demeter</i> (dates unknown but possibly as old as 7 <sup>th</sup> c. BCE)	Collection of 33 anonymous ancient Greek hymns. They are titled as "Homeric" due to the use of dactylic hexameter, just as the <i>Odyssey</i> and <i>Iliad</i> do, and were therefore originally attributed to Homer. Each hymn is dedicated to a corresponding god or goddess.	Demeter, Aidoneus (Hades), Hecate, Helios, Persephone, Iambe, Demophoon, Iris, Hermes, Calypso, Styx, Pallas, Artemis	Eleusis	"A long time she sat upon the stool without speaking because of her sorrow, and greeted no one by word or by sign, but rested, never smiling, and tasting neither food nor drinks because she pined with longing for her deep-bosomed daughter, until careful Iambe - who pleased her moods in aftertime also - moved the holy lady with many a quip and jest to smile and laugh and cheer her heart." (4)	See: Hugh G. Evelyn-White <a href="https://bit.ly/2rIrlUse">https://bit.ly/2rIrlUse</a>
<i>Exhortation to the Greeks</i> by Clement of Alexandria (~2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE)	Clement of Alexandria, also known as Titus Flavius Clemens, was a Greek Christian theologian that was heavily influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. Born c. 150. Died c. 215.	Baubo, Demeter	N/A	"Baubo is deeply hurt, thinking she has been slighted, and thereupon uncovers her secret parts and exhibits them to the goddess. Demeter is pleased at the sight, and now at last receives the draught, - delighted with the spectacle!" (43)	See: Clement of Alexandria's <i>Exhortation to the Greeks</i> , translated by George William Butterworth <a href="https://bit.ly/2spOtT3">https://bit.ly/2spOtT3</a>
<i>Exhortation to the Heathen</i> by Clement of Alexandria (~2 <sup>nd</sup> c. CE)		Demeter, Core, Baubo, Dusaules, Triptolemus, Eumolpus, Eubouleus	Eleusis	"...Baubo having become annoyed, thinking herself slighted, uncovered her secret parts, and exhibited them to the goddess. Demeter is delighted at the sight, and takes, though with difficulty, the draught - pleased, I repeat, at the spectacle." (31)	See: Clement of Alexandria's <i>The Writings of Clement of Alexandria</i> , translated by William Wilson <a href="https://bit.ly/2SKT5h9">https://bit.ly/2SKT5h9</a>
<i>Adversus Gentes</i> by Arnobius (~3 <sup>rd</sup> c. CE)	Arnobius of Sicca was an early Christian apologist during the	Baubo, Triptolemus, Eubuleus, Eumolpus, Dysaules,	Eleusis	"Ceres remains utterly immoveable, and tenaciously maintains an invincible austerity. But when this was done	See: Arnobius of Sicca's <i>The Seven Books of Arnobius Adversus</i>

	<p>reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian. Jerome of Stridon, a Latin priest, titles Arnobius' work <i>Adversus Gentes</i>, however it is alternatively called <i>Adversus Nationes</i> (it is titled this in the only manuscript that has survived which comes from the 9<sup>th</sup> c.). Died c. 330.</p>	<p>Ceres (Roman name for Demeter)</p>		<p>several times, and her fixed purpose could not be worn out by any attentions, Baubo changes her plans, and determines to make merry by strange jests her whom she could not win by earnestness. That part of the body by which women both bear children and obtain the name of mothers, this she frees from longer neglect: she makes it assume a purer appearance, and become smooth like a child, not yet hard and rough with hair. In this wise she returns to the sorrowing goddess; and while drying the common expedients by which it is usual to break the force of grief, and moderate it, she uncovers herself, and baring her groins, displays all the parts which decency hides; and then the goddess fixes her eyes upon these, and is pleased with the strange form of consolation. Then becoming more cheerful after laughing, she takes and drinks off the draught spurned [before], and the indecency of a shameless action forced that which Baubo's modest conduct was long unable to win." (249-50)</p>	<p><i>Gentes</i>, translated by Hamilton Bryce and Hugh Campbell <a href="https://bit.ly/2rHS0vq">https://bit.ly/2rHS0vq</a></p>
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## Figures

Figure 1

*Figure.* Hippopotamus ivory, excavated at El-Badari, Upper Egypt, 4400 BCE – 4000 BCE. The British Museum, EA59648.

Figure 1

*Terracotta statuette of a nude woman.* Terracotta; mold-made, Cypriot, Cypro-Archaic II (ca. 600-480 BCE). H. 7" (17.8 cm). Met Museum, 74.51.1552.

Figure 2

*Statue der Priesterin Nikeso (Hegeso) auf in situ gefundener Basis mit Inschrift (Statue of the priestess Nikeso [Hegeso] on base found in situ with inscription)*. Marble, fine-grained yellowish-white; reddish brown to yellow wash patina; base is marble, large crystalline gray, first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE. 22.23 x 37.01 x 33.46" (56.5 x 94 x 85 cm) (base). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Antikensammlung, SK 1928.

Figure 4  
*Terracotta antefix with the head of Medusa.*  
Terracotta, paint, Archaic period (6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE),  
Etruscan. 5 ½" x 5 7/8" (13.97 x 14.93 cm). Met  
Museum, 27.122.14.

Figure 5  
*Kilpeck Sheela*, Church of St. Mary and St. David,  
Herefordshire, England, 12<sup>th</sup> c. In *Sheela na gig: The  
Dark Goddess of Sacred Power* by Starr Goode  
(2016).



Figure 3  
*Terracotta bell-krater* (attributed to the Persephone Painter). Terracotta, red-figure, Classical (ca. 440 BCE), Attic. 16 1/8", 17 7/8" (40.94, 45.42 cm) (diameter of mouth). Met Museum, 28.57.23.

Figure 4

*Drinking cup (kylix) depicting scenes from the Odyssey* (attributed to the Painter of the Boston Polyphemos). Ceramic, black figure, Archaic Period (550 – 525 BCE), Attica, Athens. Height: 5 3/16", diameter: 8 9/16" (Height: 13.18, diameter: 21.74 cm). Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 99.518.

Notes from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: "Circe and the companions of Odysseus, eight figures. Circe appears in center mixing her potion for Odysseus' men. The men have animal heads and arms, but retain their human lower bodies. Eurylochus escapes the scene at far right and Odysseus enters at far left."

Figure 5  
*Funde aus dem Demeterheiligtum (Finds from the Demeter Shrine)*. Terracotta molds, 350-300 BCE, Priene, Ancient Greece (modern day Turkey). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Antikensammlung, FV 990230.

Figure 6  
Detail of Baubo figures from Figure 8

Figure 10 (above)

Evelyn Aschenbrenner, *Baubo votives, take 2*, June 15, 2014 Flickr accessed February 3, 2020  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/detroit\\_import/14313708397](https://www.flickr.com/photos/detroit_import/14313708397).

Figure 11 (below)

Evelyn Aschenbrenner, *Baubo votives*, June 15, 2014 Flickr accessed February 3, 2020  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/detroit\\_import/14520276313](https://www.flickr.com/photos/detroit_import/14520276313).

Figure 12

*Griechische Terrakotte: Baubo-Figur (Greek terracotta Baubo figure)*. Terracotta mold, 4<sup>th</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE, Priene, Ancient Greece (modern day Turkey). Approx. 3.54" (9 cm). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Antikensammlung, TC 8616.

Figure 13

"Kat.-Nr. 73," in *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde*, by Frank Rumscheid (Kohlbeck: Reichert Verlag, 2006, black and white photograph, Tafel 30.

Figure 14

*Ten marble fragments of the Great Eleusinian Relief.* Marble, Early Imperial, Augustan (ca. 27 BCE – 14 CE), Roman. Height: 89 3/8" (227 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 14.130.9.

Notes from the Met: "Demeter, the goddess of agricultural abundance, stands at the left, clad in a peplos and himation (cloak) and holding a scepter. At the right is Persephone, her daughter and the wife of Hades, the god of the underworld. She is dressed in a chiton and himation. Each goddess extends her right hand toward a nude youth, but it is no longer possible to determine what they held. The boy is thought to be Triptolemos, who was sent by Demeter to teach men how to cultivate grain. On contemporary Athenian vases, he is usually shown as a bearded adult seated in a winged chariot about to set out on his civilizing mission. The original marble relief was found at the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis, the site of the Eleusinian mysteries, a secret cult that was famous throughout antiquity."

Figure 15  
"Kat.-Nr. 74," in *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde*, by Frank Rumscheid (Kohlbeck: Reichert Verlag, 2006, black and white photograph, Tafel 30.



Figure 16  
"Kat.-Nr. 65," in *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde*, by Frank Rumscheid (Kohlbeck: Reichert Verlag, 2006, black and white photograph, Tafel 29.

Figure 17

*Terracotta pomegranate*. Terracotta, Classical (5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE), Greek. Diam.: 3 5/16" (8.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 24.97.110.

Notes from the Met: "Throughout Greek art and the Greek world, the pomegranate has been associated with funerary beliefs and ritual. The mythological expression of its connotations is clearest in the story of Persephone, daughter of the goddess Demeter, who is fated to spend half of each year in the Underworld after eating seeds of the pomegranate."

Figure 18

"Kat.-Nr. 71," in *Die figürlichen Terrakotten von Priene: Fundkontexte, Ikonographie und Funktion in Wohnhäusern und Heiligtümern im Licht antiker Parallelbefunde*, by Frank Rumscheid (Kohlbeck: Reichert Verlag, 2006, black and white photograph, Tafel 30).

Figure 19

*Figure.* Terracotta, excavated from the terracotta workshop at the eastern edge of the city of Naukratis, Ancient Egypt, Ptolemaic (3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE). 4.72" (H) x 4.41" (W) x 1.61" (D) (11.99 x 11.2 x 4.09 cm). The British Museum, 1886,0401.1452.

Figure 20

*Figure.* Terracotta, excavated from the terracotta workshop at the eastern edge of the city of Naukratis, Ancient Egypt, Ptolemaic (3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE). 4.65" (H) x 4.76" (W) x 1.61" (D) (11.81 x 12.09 x 4.09 cm). The British Museum, 1965,0930.974.

Figure 21

*Figure of a goddess lifting her skirt*. Terracotta, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE, Egyptian. Height: 5  $\frac{3}{4}$ " (14.6 cm). Ägyptisches Museum, Universität Leipzig, 3634. From: "A Rare Mechanical Figure from Ancient Egypt" by Nicholas Reeves in *Metropolitan Museum Journal* vol. 50, p. 53.

Figure 22

*Figure.* Terracotta (orange clay; white coating, red on mouth, pink on flesh), Cyrenaica, Libya, Hellenistic (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE). Height: 2.4" (6.1 cm). The British Museum, 1856,1001.58.

Figure 23

*Baubo squatting female*. Blue glass, excavated Nubia, Sudan, Meroitic Period, Nubian. Height: 15/16" (2.39 cm). Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 23.383.

Figure 24

*Pendant*. Glass (light green), Phoenicia, Lebanon, Phoenician (late) (2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE). 0.91" (H) x 0.55" (W) x 0.31" (D) (2.31 x 1.4 x 0.79 cm). The British Museum, 1979,1218.82.

Figure 25

*Pendant.* Glass (deep dark blue), Phoenicia, Lebanon or Egypt, Ptolemaic (?) (2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE). 0.91" (H) x 0.51" (W) x 0.35" (D) (2.31 x 1.29 x 0.89 cm) (Note: Not specified by the British Museum which figure these dimensions relate to). The British Museum, 1868,0501.6.



Figure 26

*Baubo auf Schwein sitzend* (*Baubo sitting on pig*). Burned clay, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE. 4.65" x 3.35" x 1.38" (11.8 x 8.5 x 3.5 cm). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Antikensammlung, TC 4875.

Figure 27

*Dice* (Top left: "Full: Front"; Top right: "3/4: Left"; Bottom: "Group of Objects"). Bronze, 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE, Roman. 0.87" (H) (2.21 cm)  
(Note: Not specified by the British Museum which figure these dimensions relate to). The British Museum, 1975,1103.1.