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# Past Bodies

*Body-Centered Research in Archaeology*

edited by

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# Bodily beliefs and agricultural beginnings in Western Asia: animal-human hybridity re-examined

*Preston Miracle and Dušan Borić*

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## Introduction

One of the chronic problems in the field of body studies has been the persistence of nature-culture dichotomies, even in the works that consciously address or try sidestepping this conceptual determinism. A common critique of such dichotomies between 'Nature' and 'Culture' emphasises the historical and cultural embeddedness of this Cartesian way of thinking in the Western philosophical episteme. Related to this critique is the defamiliarisation of taken-for-granted and common-sense conceptual categories in our thinking that has been mentioned by both social anthropologists working in non-Western cultural contexts (e.g., Ingold 2000; Strathern 1988) and historically minded philosophers (e.g., Foucault 1970; Latour 1989). Anthropologists and philosophers respectively have either provided examples of indigenous ontologies different from those dominating Western thought or exposed the genealogy of the specifically Western trajectory in the constitution of the subject and the individual. Ethnographic examples show that in numerous non-Western cultural contexts, mind-body and culture-nature polarisations are less sharply drawn, or point to a complete inversion of these categories (see below). Mind, consciousness and the sense of being, it has been emphasised, are situated in the material world, while the body can hardly be separated from objects such as prosthetic devices that constitute it. Latour (1989) and other authors have even gone so far as to argue that our own thought is far from the post-Enlightenment, modernist dream of an absolute separation of mind and matter, and that the constitution of Western subjects largely depends on their situatedness in the world of material

things. Lambek (1998), on the other hand challenges the argument about the purely constructed nature of our own and other ontologies when it comes to the persistence of nature-culture, body-mind polarities by arguing that the persistence of mind-body dichotomies is more universal and cross-cultural than the current anthropological and sociological critique allows.

In this paper we focus on the problem of the culture-nature divide by tackling what on the surface appears to be the most critical material for examining this problem: relationships between animal and human bodies. This area, with some exceptions (e.g., Borić 2005; Conneller 2004; Ingold 1988, 1996; Meskell and Joyce 2003: 79-94), has been inadequately researched and the first goal of our contribution is to contextualise the difference drawn between animal and human bodies and indicate the relevance of this material for the constitution of the categories 'cultural' and 'natural' in Western, non-Western and past contexts. The second goal of this paper is to examine how categories of human and animal bodies are played out in a regionally and chronologically situated sequence of archaeological case studies, focusing on the process commonly described as the transition to agriculture in Western Asia. This area provides the classic Old World example for constructing the meta-narrative of a human separation from the natural order and the development of 'Culture' as part of a larger social evolutionary trajectory and, hence, is of particular importance in following the genealogy of human-animal relationships. We begin by discussing analytic tools and methodologies that are context specific, attempting to sidestep partly the familiar discussions of domestication, as a separation from nature, that

have dominated archaeological narratives from the region. We then use these tools to examine changing past beliefs with regard to animal and human bodies throughout the development that covers the span from the Natufian to the end of Pre-Pottery Neolithic periods, i.e., 12,000–6300 cal BC.

### **Animal and human bodies: nature-culture divide reconsidered**

Body studies in archaeology have been traditionally focused on the human body, animal bodies are thought of primarily in utilitarian terms, whether as sources of food, as draft animals, means of transport, and so forth. When the other dimensions of animals are considered, it is primarily in terms of animals as symbols or metaphors, through the abstraction of an animal's essence or reference to bodily characteristics and behaviours of an animal. Like human bodies, however, animal bodies in the past might have also been partitioned, modified, combined, and reconstituted through a variety of practices and representations (examples – butchery, taxidermy/trophies, ornaments made from body parts, use of skins/hides, imaginary beasts, representations of above through rock art, figurines made on body parts or other media). One way of approaching the topic of changing beliefs about bodies would thus be to widen the scope to include animal and human bodies, comparing the treatment of one to the other. However, this falls into the trap of assuming the existence of the various categories that we wish to examine: to what extent and in what ways were bodily boundaries defined and defended? Can we conceive of bodies in ways that move beyond our own familiar and comfortable assumptions as to what a body is, and what limits it has?

In fact, even in those mythological universes that are related to our own there are images and concepts of bodies that challenge a simple division between 'human' and 'animal' – human-animal hybrids abound, whether through composite bodies such as those presented by a satyr, minotaur, Anubis, etc., the sort of transforming bodies we bring out to scare ourselves – e.g., werewolves, Dracula, or explain the world around us – e.g., the raven 'trickster' common to many Native American cosmologies. These animal-human hybrids are often conceived of as 'dangerous' precisely because they break down boundaries and question categories (e.g., Aldhouse Green 2001; Bynum 2001; Douglas 1966). Here again, the discussion is predicated on assumed and accepted 'natural' categories of 'human' and 'animal'. As several different ethnographic examples, show, however,

these categories are not 'natural', but rather culturally constructed. Human-animal hybrids apart from being considered 'dangerous' might also have been accepted and expected part of the flow of the life cycle.

Human attitudes toward animals represent one of the important topics of early ethnographic works that allowed the introduction of the analytical concept of *animism* in anthropological literature with regard to the origins of religious thought (Tylor 1871; cf. Stringer 1999). Lévi-Strauss's famous explanation for the importance of both animals and plants in religious, 'speculative thought' is 'that natural species are chosen not because they are "good to eat" but because they are "good to think"' (1964: 89). Such importance of animals and plants for the development of religious and sacred is based on the human meta-narrative of its place in nature and the nature of existence.

One particular strand of thought in western thinking about the relationship between animals and humans is provided by the philosopher George Bataille. Bataille, fascinated by the Upper Palaeolithic parietal art, suggested that the notion of animality can usefully be considered in following the trajectory of human separation from nature, in what he calls the 'passage from animal to man' (1955, 2005). Bataille sees Upper Palaeolithic art with its 'naturalistic' depictions of a large variety of animals and often schematic and sometimes hybrid depictions of humans as both underlying the difference between the animal and man, and, at the same time, as media of transgression – through cave paintings the realm of animality is revealed, while paintings on cave walls become entry points into the *animality*, seen as religiously sacred. Although Bataille's discussion on animality can usefully be considered to relativise our common sense understanding of whether humanity or animality can be related to the idea of sacred, his discussion very much remains confined to the meta-narrative that sees a universal and cross-cultural, in his words 'tragic', separation between humans and animals, with human acquiring of consciousness and 'Culture'.

That such an understanding of animal-human separation is not universally shared and widely accepted can most aptly be shown on the basis of indigenous understandings known as Amerindian perspectivism. It has been emphasised that across South America and particularly among various Amazonian peoples the main site of differentiation between different classes of beings is not the culture or spirit but the body. Here, animals and radically differentiated categories of humans, such as once kin, foreigners, enemies etc., share the same culture. Their true differences lie in different perspectives they occupy which depend on the type of body they have

(e.g., Vilaça 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998). To have a different body means to see different things: '...where we see a muddy salt-lick on a river bank, tapirs see their big ceremonial house' (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 6). In this ethnography, a 'properly human' body must constantly be constructed and negotiated. This is done through the practices of sharing food, or by inhabiting the same living space, by sleeping side by side. Our common-sense biological understanding of relatedness is of no relevance in Amazonia, as kinship is rather seen as a process of relating to and communicating with the 'exterior', inhabited by other classes of beings (Vilaça 2002). Furthermore, human and animal bodies in Amazonia are characterised by the 'chronic' instability of form: '...the possibility of metamorphosis expresses the ... fear of no longer being able to differentiate between the human and the animal, and, in particular, the fear of seeing the human who lurks within the body of the animal one eats ...' (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 481). This metamorphic capacity of all beings derives from an essentially hunting ideology that is based on the predator-prey balance of powers in the world. In such an ontological universe, every event is intentionally caused in the interplay of agencies that abound (Gell 1998: 16–17; cf. Ingold 2000a, 2000b).

By evoking this example of one specific ethnography with its set of ontological principles (some of which are not only confined to Amazonia, cf. Ingold 2000b on the Ojibwa), one relativises the separation along the animal-human axis. If one imagines an ontology in the past that, similarly to the Amazonian example, considered animals and humans to share the same culture and transform into each other through the metamorphosis of the body form, the relevance of aligning the category 'animal' with 'nature' and the category 'human' with 'culture' means that this particular alignment is relative to context. Such an understanding suggests that some of the meta-narratives that persist in the archaeological writings about the processes of domestication as involving a gradual human departure from nature need to be reconsidered.

In the field of research that focuses on the process of agricultural transition in western Asia such meta-narratives abound in emphasising the process of settling down, domestication of animal and plant species and the 'explosion' of symbolism. Authors such as Cauvin (2000) and Hodder (1990), with somewhat different perspectives, have most forcefully argued for an important shift with the start of the Holocene toward increasingly individuated human agency that tames 'Nature' and allows a human-like god image. In the core of their arguments, these authors suggest that there is the symmetry between our meta-narrative of social evolutionary, progressive move away from

'Nature' and the self-representation among societies of western Asia at the 'dawn of agriculture', i.e., in the period from around 12,800 to 6500 cal BC. Two main media for expressing such indigenous understandings are frequently considered: a) the treatment of human and animal bodies in the mortuary record, and b) depictions of images of human and animal bodies by painting, carving and moulding a range of materials.

In the next section of this paper, we examine whether one could sustain this implicit idea of the symmetry between our own meta-narratives that glorify the separation and individuation of human agency from the natural order, on the one hand, and what particular bodily beliefs might have been like at the beginning of the Neolithic, on the other hand. We discuss a range of analytical categories with which to approach animal-human mixtures in search of an adequate research methodology for the set of theoretical issues previously developed.

### **Western Asian sequences: From the Natufian through Pre-Pottery Neolithic B**

The region of western Asia as we consider it here encompasses a huge territory that includes parts of the present-day countries of Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Iraq (Figure 11.1). In our Natufian case study we examine mortuary evidence from the Early (12,800–11,000 cal BC) and Late Natufian (11,000–10,000 cal BC) periods from Israel. Here, with the Natufian we see the emergence of what are considered to be more sedentary base camps with the evidence of domestic architecture and associated human burials, along with a proliferation of ground stone and bone artefacts, ornaments and 'art' objects (e.g. Bar-Yosef 1998; Bar-Yosef and Valla 1990). For the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (10,000–6750 cal BC) we discuss evidence from the larger region of western Asia, which exhibits shared elements in various aspects of mortuary practices and symbolic and ritual expression (Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2002, 2003; Kuijt 2000; Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002). There are three phases that can roughly be applied to this larger territory that we consider: PPNA (c. 10,000–8,550 cal BC), PPNB (c. 8550–6750 cal BC) and PPNC/early Pottery Neolithic (c. 6750–6300 cal BC). Although the cultural unity of the subdivisions of the PPN is debated, there are some widely shared traits in the region. Features commonly shared during the PPNA include oval to circular huts and primary human burials with secondary skull removal. During the PPNB period we often find a shift to rectangular buildings with plastered, red-coloured, limestone

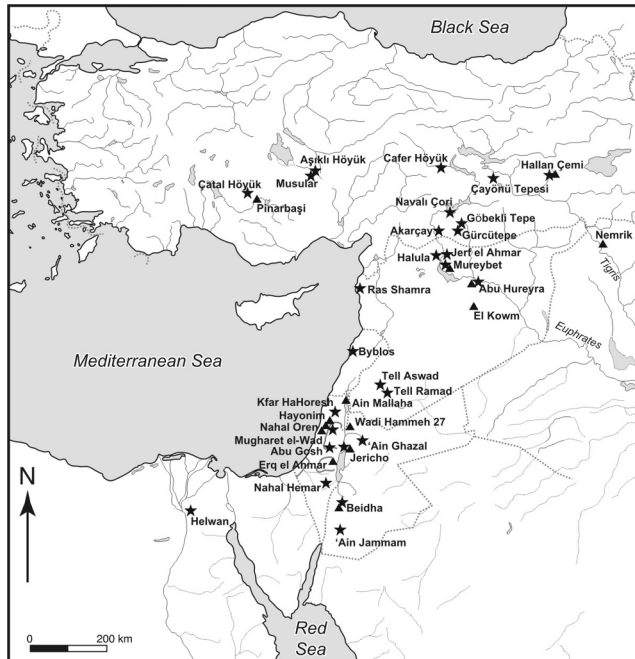


Figure 11.1. Map of south-west Asia with principal sites mentioned in the text. Natufian sites and other epi-palaeolithic sites marked by triangles and PPNA-B sites marked by stars (drawn by Dora Kemp)

floors; there is also an increase in various aspects of symbolic expression (e.g., large plastered statues, clay figurines, the secondary removal and circulation of skulls that are sometimes plastered, etc.).

### Animal-human hybridity: Developing methodologies and case studies

There is clearly a strong case for examining both human and animal bodies and examining how these bodies were created and defined. Our core thesis is that beliefs about human and animal bodies have varied in time and space, and that our own assumptions about bodies provide only one lens for examining these past beliefs. A critique of 'western' body categories and concepts is relatively easily made; see the work of innumerable anthropologists and social theorists over the last several decades. While archaeologists have increasingly accepted this critique, with a few exceptions aside, they have made only modest contributions to the question of 'what were bodily beliefs in the past' beyond the banal observation that 'the past was different'. Our goal in the rest of this paper is to outline an approach for examining human-animal hybridity, which we will illustrate with a few case studies taken from the 'dawn of agriculture'

in Western Asia. We focus on the burial record and representations (pictorial and sculptural) of humans and animals.

A first step is to consider human and animal bodies as two ends on a continuum, and the ways in which we might define the space in between them. Next we can examine the process by which humans and animals might be combined. Questioning 'human' and 'animal' as categories is not to deny their existence. By examining the conditions and contexts in which these categories are undermined, reconstituted, and in which new categories are introduced should tell us something about bodily beliefs and how/when they changed. If we accept that 'human' and 'animal' are two ends on a continuum, what do we have in between them? It is a spectrum of human-animal hybridity. In trying to develop an adequate methodology for the examination of this spectrum of animal-human hybridity in the archaeological record, we shall compare the 'human' and 'animal' elements through their combinations. We have chosen to examine following analytical categories: association, substitution, and transformation.

### Association

Association refers to a deliberate juxtaposition or association of humans and animals. Examples are many and include the following: the use of animal parts (e.g., teeth) as ornaments/clothing on human bodies, the use of animal representations as grave goods, the inclusion of human and animal bodies (or parts) in a single grave, the inclusion of human and animal burials in the same cemetery, the association of humans and animals in rock art, on stelae, and so forth. A whole series of choices are reflected in such associations, including the choice of species, whole bodies versus body parts, unmodified versus modified parts, fleshed versus defleshed, the association with particular parts of human body (e.g., head, neck, arm, torso, pelvis, feet, etc.), and the association through mediating elements (e.g., clothing) or through direct contact with the skin.

For example, a number of Early Natufian burials from el-Wad, Hayonim Cave, Mallaha, Erq el Ahmar, and Wadi Hammeh 27 have associated beads made out of animal parts, commonly dentalium shells (Figure 11.2), but also made out of gazelle phalanges, partridge tibia-tarsus bones, and rarely fox teeth (only at Hayonim Cave) (Belfer-Cohen 1995; Sellars 2001). The dentalium beads were interpreted by Wright (1978) and Henry (1989) as status markers, and the decorated burials are central to their interpretation of social ranking during the Early Natufian. Belfer-Cohen (1995: 15), as part of a wider critique of Wright's model



of Natufian social ranking, notes that dentalium shell beads are unlikely to have served as prestige goods because dentalium shells are readily available and can be made into beads with little effort. Perhaps the dentalium shell garments had magical/ritual significance, for instance protective or apotropaic properties. These beads, particularly the dentalium shell caps, necklaces, bracelets, and leggings, were in very close contact with human bodies. Were they an extension of the body or were body boundaries extended to incorporate them? What is interesting is that during the Late Natufian beads are no longer used to decorate dead bodies, even though the raw materials for bead production are still widely available (e.g., dentalium shells, gazelle toes, partridge bones). Since beads were not manufactured out of other materials, it would seem that this change has more to do with bead use rather than changing beliefs about human-animal bodies.

More rare human-animal associations come from the inclusion of animal parts, apparently as grave goods, in human graves. The species and parts used are tortoise carapaces (el-Wad, Hayonim Terrace), gazelle horn cores (el-Wad, Hayonim Terrace, Mallaha), horse teeth (only at Erq el Ahmar). This practice is not very common, but does show continuity from Early to Late Natufian.

With current data, it is not possible to study in detail if particular species are associated with particular body parts, skeletal sexes or ages – the general impression is that dentalia are associated particularly with the head and long bones, and probably were sewed onto caps and garments. Gazelle phalange beads are associated with head (young child, adult male), neck (adult male and female), pelvis (belt – adult female), arm (bracelet – adult female). Gazelle phalange beads may occur on their own or mixed with dentalia or partridge bone beads. Partridge bone beads are less common than either of the other bead types. They are found in association with dentalium shells in headdresses, or on their own forming bracelets. Partridge bone beads have not been found at Ain Mallaha; they appear to be associated with adult males.

Also, it is important to ask the question whether shells were important as animals or as a raw material – would these be thought of as animal remains in regions distant from the coast – where animals were not encountered ‘alive’ but disassociated with the living animals – in this case a chunk of shiny or colourful mineral? To what extent could one make similar arguments about the use of animal teeth as pendants. Is the material transformed when disassociated from animals? – so that people in donning the pendants would not see them as some association with animals,



Figure 11.2. Natufian dentalium shell headdress on Homo 25 from Garrod's excavation at Mugharet el-Wad (photograph by D. Garrod, 1929, Pitt Rivers Museum 1998-294-301, University of Oxford)

but rather with ‘hard’ or ‘white’ or ‘thing with hole’ or some other category. Put slightly differently, when do things like pierced shells, teeth, worked bone, etc. stand for bodies (of animals), are recognised and thought of as parts of a body, or were thought of in completely different ways? How would one distinguish between these different possibilities?

One famous example of this dilemma from the study region is the puppy buried with an old woman at Ain Mallaha during the Early Natufian period (c. 9300 BC) (Figure 11.3). Domestic dogs buried with people may also be present at el-Wad and are definitely present in Late Natufian contexts at Hayonim Terrace (Belfer-Cohen 1995). The intimacy implied by this association has received considerable comment, and this burial is pivotal to discussions of the domestication of the dog and human-animal relations in general. To the best of our knowledge, the puppy burial at Mallaha is the first case of a complete animal body buried with a human body – where people have consciously respected the integrity of a non-human body. Likewise, the positioning of the puppy near the woman's head, their analogous burial position – crouched and facing left, and the position of her left hand on the animal were deliberate and probably significant, a point we return to below.

Within the southern Levant region of Western Asia, while there is widespread evidence of the manipulation of human bodies after death, including deliberate skull removal starting at least in the Late Natufian and continuing through the PPN, these practices were mostly about the partibility and boundaries of human bodies; animals play only a minor role in these practices. Exceptions include ‘votive offerings’ of animals in human graves during the MPPNB at



Figure 11.3. Puppy burial with Burial H104 from Ain Mallaha, c.9300 BC (photograph by Simon Davis)

Kfar HaHoresh (Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002: 422), and during the PPNC the inclusion of pig tusks and bones with two secondary human burials in Building C2 at 'Ain Ghazal (Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002: 416). Other examples of human-animal associations are grave goods such as shell necklaces that apparently were placed on bodies starting in the MPPNB after 9250 BP (Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002: 411).

In Anatolia, at the Pre-Pottery Neolithic site of Çayönü Tepesi, directly associated with a special purpose building called the Skull Building, due to a continuing interment of around 450 individuals in several successive levels for at least a thousand years if not longer (9200/8400 to 7500 cal BC), there were pits containing secondary human burials and aurochs skulls with horns (Özdoğan 1995, 1999; Özdoğan and Özdoğan 1998; Schirmer 1999). These pits were found in the first building phase (BM1), below the floor where detached human skulls were placed. In the following phase of this building (BM2a), similarly to the earlier levels, there was a depression in the floor of the building containing aurochs horns along with ninety skulls and postcranial bones in piles found on the floor level within specially constructed cellars. In the southern area of the Skull Building, on a large stone slab blood residues of both humans and aurochs have been identified (Loy and Wood 1989; Wood 1998). In addition, in Grill-Building Sub-phase (PPNA-EPPNB

period) at Çayönü a male burial was accompanied by a dog burial and boar skull (Özdoğan 1999: 47).

Another example of spatial-temporal contrasts within the study area involves the use and deposition of clay and stone figurines. In the southern Levant, during the PPNA the few figurines are mostly anthropomorphic, although a few birds are also represented at sites like Gilgal I and Salibiya IX (Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002: 377). Clay animal figurines, primarily of cattle (but perhaps also sheep/goat and equids) are much more frequent during MPPNB, and are commonly associated with residential architecture. Such examples are also found at the site of Çatalhöyük in south-central Anatolia (Hodder 2006; Mellart 1967). Interestingly, some of these cattle figurines appear to have been ritually 'killed' with flint blades. Moving on into the LPPNB and PPNC, the few figurines are mostly anthropomorphic (Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002: 411, 417). From our standpoint, however, what is significant is that although the representation of animals is clearly important, it is temporally restricted within the PPNB and these figurines are not directly associated with human bodies – whether in graves or through the association with human representations. This pattern is in stark contrast to that found in southeast Anatolia where at sites like Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori animals are frequently carved on stelae and T-shaped monoliths that have been interpreted as representing humans (Peters and Schmidt 2004: 182). Do these associations constitute animal-human hybrids? This question only makes sense by taking a narrow view of what hybridity is all about – and misses our very point about opening up the interpretive spaces among human-animal-hybrid.

### **Substitution**

Substitution refers to cases where animal bodies are being substituted for human bodies. One example would be the burial of animals with grave goods, for example some of the dog burials at Mesolithic sites like Skateholm in Sweden (Larsson 1990), or other cases where the personhood of animals is particularly underlined in a manner analogous to humans.

In this light, the Natufian burial of a puppy with a young woman at Ain Mallaha also hints at substitution. The analogous treatment of the bodies in terms of burial position, and the emphasis on the intact body of the puppy implies that the boundaries of the social 'body' also included the puppy, and the puppy may in fact be a substitute for a young human, as there are occasional Natufian burials of adults with children (e.g., el-Wad H. 23, H. 28; Hayonim Cave Grave VII [Belfer-Cohen 1995: 11–13]).

Other examples of substitution would include the

substitution of animal parts for human parts in a grave, or the substitution of animal bones for human bones in the manufacture of bone artefacts. We are not aware of any evidence of substitutions of these sorts during the Natufian period. Slightly later during the MPPNB at Kfar HaHoresh there is a plastered human skull 'directly associated with an otherwise complete but headless gazelle carcass' (Goring-Morris 2000: 110). Gazelles continued to receive special treatment during the LPPNB, at 'Ain Jammam a gazelle skull was placed in a small niche at eye level, while a group of charred gazelle horns on a building floor at 'Ain Ghazal led Rollefson to suggest the presence of a gazelle cult at the site during the LPPNB (Rollefson 1998: 113). In both cases, the treatment of gazelle heads is reminiscent of the special treatment given to human skulls during the MPPNB at a number of sites in the wider region (Rollefson 1998: 112). These examples suggest a certain interchangeability between humans and gazelles, and that in some contexts one was a substitute for the other. We are not aware of any human bone artefacts; in many cases, however, it may be impossible to determine the species used to make bone artefacts in the absence of genetic/chemical tests.

### *Transformation*

Transformation is seen to involve a more thorough or complete combination of human and animal bodies than either association or substitution. Of course, it is quite possible that many of the 'pure' animal or human bodies and images that we have might have been conceived of as 'transformed' humans or animals. For this reason, we think it is most profitably to examine cases where the process of transformation is emphasised. From this perspective, the referent of an animal-human 'hybrid' may be the *process* of transforming from animal to human rather than the outcome. Animal-human 'hybrids' can be documented through the iconography; there is also evidence of their creation through the combination of animal and human remains. In the former case, there is considerable ambiguity as to whether significance was attached to the 'finished' hybrid or to the transformational process within which a hybrid is simply in an intermediate state.

We are not aware of any human-animal hybrids from Early or Late Natufian contexts. The same is also true for the PPNA. The situation changes provocatively during the MPPNB. Now there is clear evidence of human-animal hybrids in both the burial and figurative records. One possible case, that of Kfar HaHoresh, was briefly discussed earlier. This is a headless gazelle skeleton associated with a plastered human skull (Goring-Morris 2000: 110). Together

they constitute a hybrid body. Human and animal bodies, partially articulated but lacking skulls, were also commingled at Kfar HaHoresh (Goring-Morris 2000: 115). Examples include gazelle-human and aurochs-human. Goring-Morris (2000: 115) suggests this selection and symbolic treatment of wild animals may have significance in the context of incipient animal domestication (of the goat). Another possible example, again from Kfar HaHoresh that points to the arrangement of disarticulated gazelle and human bones into a pattern that when viewed from above resembles the profile of an animal (aurochs?, wild boar?, lion?) (Verhoeven 2002: 238, also Kfar HaHoresh web site) is not adequately published and, at face value, needs to be taken with some caution. However, if the excavator's interpretation is correct, these gazelle remains are thus commingled to create a new body of yet another species – a human-animal hybrid with different levels of metaphorical associations.

### *Imagery of human-animal hybrids*

Some of the most potent examples of human-animal hybrids come from images executed on stone, particularly from the sites of Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori in southeastern Anatolia. Göbekli Tepe has important ritual structures from the Late PPNA/Early PPNB (9100–8500 BC), along with later components from the Middle and Late PPNB. The site is on a large limestone ridge and consists of several large mounds; the location is somewhat unexpected as it is not close to either water or arable land. To date, at least six semi-subterranean 'ritual' structures have been exposed, although the site contains neither clear 'domestic' structures nor human burials (Peters and Schmidt 2004; Schmidt 2001; 2003; Schmidt and Hauptmann 2003). These ritual structures contained numerous, large, T-shaped pillars; the T-shape has been interpreted as anthropomorphic, and this interpretation is supported by engravings of human arms and fingers on the narrow sides of some pillars (Figure 11.4). Many of these pillars are decorated, and to these we can also add a number of large limestone sculptures. Some of the themes include: an animal with human head, an animal on human head, wolves, reptiles, boar, dog, a headless lion, turtle, sceptre, giant phallus, incised snake, snake relief, and discussed previously, a human body, human arms, and human fingers. Excepting a clear representation of a woman on a stone slab from the 'lion pillar' enclosure, the remainder of unambiguous gender depictions on animals and objects are male. If such an anthropomorphic understanding of these stelae is accepted, carvings of animals are thus inscribed on/in human bodies. Such



Figure 11.4. T-shaped pillar with the carvings of human arms, Enclosure D, central pillar 18, Göbekli Tepe (photograph by Irmgard Wagner, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut)

associations can perhaps be interpreted as a way of releasing these animals or hybrid beings onto the surface that represented the interface between different realities. At Göbekli, these human-animal hybrids and transformations are also gendered male. There is a temporal shift in depictions on pillars and sculptures; animals predominate in earlier layers, while humans predominate in later layers. However, there remains the question whether right from the inception of these T-stelae the idea was to represent a stylised human body or if this shape became anthropomorphised through the interpretive acts of carving human arms, fingers, etc. (Figure 11.4)

Many of these themes are repeated at the PPNB site of Nevalı Çori, also in southeastern Anatolia, where there is rich imagery of human-animal hybrids executed on stone stelae and sculptures. Again we have T-shaped stelae, sometimes carved with arms and hands (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005: 30),

interpreted as anthropomorphic (Hauptmann 1999; Verhoeven 2002). There are eleven other limestone sculptures, many of which depict human-animal hybrids. Examples include a snake on the back of a human head, two humans with raised arms on either side of a tortoise (?) similarly depicted (the tortoise is a human transformed?), and a large carnivore (lion?) with bared, human-like teeth. There is particular emphasis at the site on human-bird combinations; the most provocative image (compared to a totem pole by Hauptmann) is of a bird (raptor?) missing its head (decapitated?) perching on top of a human-bird hybrid (human head with flowing hair on a bird body and tail) (Hauptmann 1999; Voigt 2000: 271). The same human head/bird body hybrid is represented in a second sculpture (Hauptmann 1999; Voigt 2000: 272). All of these representations were incorporated into the walls and foundations (in the case of the limestone bowl with three figures) of ritual structures at the site. Hauptmann (1999) and Voigt (2000) focus on rounded stomachs and interpret the imagery in terms of fertility and abundance. We are struck, instead by the implied instability and transformation of bodies suggested by these hybrids. Furthermore, the images may have been used in various rites until they either lost their efficacy, or were needed to found/construct ritual buildings, at which time they were incorporated into the very fabric of these structures. Although unclear from published descriptions, these hybrid images may have remained visible once incorporated into walls, niches, and benches, or accessible through other bodily senses (e.g., touch) during the use of these structures. Although immobile, these incorporated images may have still served as props in rituals.

Similar images to those hybrid beings with raised arms and legs found at Nevalı Çori and other sites in southeast Anatolia (Figure 11.5) and the Levant were also found at the site of Çatalhöyük in south-central Anatolia (Hodder 2006; Mellaart 1967). Here, many buildings have moulded headless figures with raised legs and arms that since the time of Mellaart's first discoveries have been interpreted as pregnant women, thus promoting the widely accepted meta-narrative about the Mother Goddess that, along with the bull, was one of the main figures in the Çatalhöyük's religious pantheon. However, in 2005 season, a discovery of a stamp seal in the infill of one of the buildings at the site shows a similar iconography to those images moulded on building walls, this time with an animal's head that is interpreted by team members as a bear (Hodder 2006: 201). This example possibly indicates that all of the headless moulded figures with raised arms and legs on building walls at Çatalhöyük represent similar hybrid beings.



Figure 11.5. T-shaped pillar with the carving of a splayed hybrid human-animal or reptile figure, Göbekli Tepe (photograph by Michael Morsch, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut)

## Discussion

In our survey of evidence for animal-human hybridity in the Natufian and Pre-Pottery Neolithic A and B periods in southwest Asia, we have, on the one hand, pointed out a permeable character of categories animal and human for the type of societies we have discussed, and, on the other hand, we have suggested analytical categories that can be used to examine this archaeological data set. Animal-human mixtures in the pre-Neolithic eastern Mediterranean speak of a distinct ontology that might have been characterised by a ‘multi-naturalist’ position, i.e., where the true difference between different categories of beings was grounded in the body as the main site of ontological differentiation. The change of the body in death or through various stages of life cycle might have been emphasised by comparing such changes with the most radical examples of shape-shifting, such as a transformation into an animal. This position seems to have characterised many non-Western societies (e.g., Aldhouse Green 2001; Borić 2005, 2007; Ingold 2000; Vilaça 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Such transformations might have had both positive and negative connotations. Many ethnographies, including the European medieval beliefs in shape-shifting (Bynum 2001), express a fear of metamorphosis that is frequently equated with the death as a radical change of topological orders. At the same time, individuals and groups were often equated with certain animals that could have been considered to have apotropaic character, due to their strength, potency or other positive attributes. Examples of such associations can

perhaps be seen in a metonymic placement of specific animal parts in burials or bucrania on the walls of houses, seen as bodies of a collective agency, in the (pre-)Neolithic eastern Mediterranean.

Some representatives of the embodiment paradigm suggest an anti-Cartesian or pre-Cartesian model of the self for non-Western societies. Meskell and Joyce suggest ‘that the intellectual legacy of Cartesianism pervades the dualism of human/animal...’ (2003: 89). It is certainly true that our own Western view of animal-human or plant-human relatedness depends on ‘the rigid taxonomies that we have constructed and naturalized’ (Meskell and Joyce 2003: 88). However, it could hardly be claimed that various boundaries between humans and animals in non-Western and past social contexts were not constructed in various ways. While many such ontologies allow for permeable boundaries between animal and human worlds, it does not mean that the change is a comfortable place and that the maintenance of boundaries between humans and various categories of beings such as animals, enemies, the dead as well as other forms of alterity is not necessary or needed. Hence, we can imagine that in the Neolithic eastern Mediterranean specific ontologies of relatedness as well as processes of constructing and naturalising differences between diverse kinds of beings, including animals and plants, must have characterised the social reality.

There are three important questions that should be posed on the basis of the existing evidence of animal-human mixtures for the given period and region. First, can the material of human-animal mixtures and the context of their placement or deposition tell us something about specific aspects of long-term structures of beliefs that might have persisted for a very long period of time across this vast region? Second, can one identify decisive moments that prompted alterations of such beliefs and practices in the diachronic perspective? And, third, can certain aspects of animal-human, or even supposed plant-human, hybridity be related to changes that the period from 12800 to 6750 cal BC saw with regard to the process of the domestication of plant and animal species?

The obvious difference in the diachronic perspective relates to a change from the Natufian to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A period. In the Natufian period animal human mixtures appear primarily by metonymical kinds of association with a spectrum of species by attaching animals’ body parts to the garment or by incorporating a skeleton of a puppy into a human burial. It seems that the primary focus here is the body itself where ornaments seem to be conceived as extensions of the body. Only with the beginning

of the PPNA one encounters a clear change toward the depiction of animal-human hybridity and a specific elaboration of the context of the placement or deposition of such an explicit narrative form. It should be noted that the depiction of such hybrid beings is widespread during the Palaeolithic period in Europe through various media (cf. Bataille 1955; Borić 2007; Lewis-Williams 2002). Even though such hybrids are not known from the Upper Palaeolithic and Natufian of western Asia, one could still argue that human-animal transformation has been part of the human cognitive repertoire for tens of thousands of years. Clearly what makes the PPNA-B cases interesting and significant is not simply the novelty of the practices, but the cultural contexts within which they occur.

Most of the hybrids achieved through manipulation of bodies/skeletons come from the Levant, although the prominence given to cattle heads is more widespread. Images of human-animal hybrids, on the other hand, appear to be more common to the north, i.e., southeastern Anatolia at the sites of Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori (and other unexcavated sites from the Urfa region – Karahan Tepe [Verhoeven 2002: 253]), or moving farther to the west, at Çatalhöyük.

Verhoeven (2002) discusses human-animal linkages as part of a wider study of the function and meaning of rituals during the PPNB in the Levant and southeastern Anatolia. He (Verhoeven 2002: 252) notes that evidence of human-animal linkages comes from clear ritual contexts. For instance, Kfar HaHoresh and Göbekli Tepe have been interpreted as specialised ritual sites without any domestic structures. Variability in the association of particular animal representations and structures at Göbekli Tepe (Figure 11.6) has been interpreted through the idea of totemism to imply different clan or ritual groups aggregating at the site from a wider region (Peters and Schmidt 2004: 210–212). The Nevalı Çori evidence for the most part comes from special ritual structures (Buildings II and III), although House 3 (with stone bowl with three figures in foundation) was domestic. At Çayönü the treatment of aurochs skulls and horns is from ritual structure – ‘Skull’ building. While all of this may suggest restricted access to these human-animal hybrids and depictions, perhaps by a newly emerging elite of priests-shamans during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005: 81–82; Peters and Schmidt 2004: 213), Verhoeven (2002: 247) argues that at Nevalı Çori the repetition of images from the large sculptures/stelae on small carvings deposited in houses undermines interpretations of these special ritual structures as restricted to ‘secret societies’.

The species chosen for human-animal links are almost always wild and male (Verhoeven 2002; Peters and



Figure 11.6 T-shaped pillar 33, with the carving of a fox, Enclosure D, Göbekli Tepe (photograph by Irmgard Wagner, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut)

Schmidt 2004). Verhoeven (2002: 251) offers a functional interpretation for the explosion and evocativeness of ritual symbolism in the PPNB, compared to both the preceding PPNA and the succeeding Pottery Neolithic; it is a response to the massive changes and uncertainties introduced with the new, Neolithic way of life. The specific symbolism is thought to derive from beliefs of domestication/control, whether of land, settlement space, people, or food. Another influential perspective comes from Hodder (2006) who interprets humans represented at Çatalhöyük teasing wild and dangerous animals as a celebration of human agency in the Holocene that mastered the Nature and the wild.

Yet, these interpretations do not move very far from the domestication meta-narrative that has dominated archaeological accounts of this evidence to-date. An alternative explanation for the predominance of wild and dangerous animals in the described contexts would be to argue that increasing mixing of human groups of different origins across this wide region from





Figure 11.7. T-shaped pillar 12 with the carvings of birds in a landscape (?), wild boar and fox, Enclosure C, Göbekli Tepe (photograph by Dieter Johannes, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut)

the beginning of the PPN prompted the necessity of defining individual and group identities in relation to the plenitude of emerging social ‘Others’. In the course of this period, we see an increase in interactions between cultures ‘with a consequent need for transferability and intercultural validity’ (Sherratt 1995:16–17; see 2004). Yet, one should be warned that the very category of ‘the human body’ may be problematic to sustain since the bodily resemblance, as we understand it did not have to be understood necessarily in terms of ‘humanity’. To put it differently, non-human beings (e.g., animal and plant species) sometimes could have been more understood as ‘us’ within a given group of humans than other humans themselves. Thus, interactions of quite diverse groups of people and new ways of relatedness in the course of the PPN period might have triggered the emphasis on the depiction of wild, dangerous and transformations (Figure 11.7), in other words, the exterior, beyond the confines of here and now.

The exterior could have been a stretchable category; something beyond this landscape, this settlement, this house or this wall. The fear of shape-shifting and the emphasis on the mutability of the body might have been entangled with an increasing mutability of individual and group identities that had started being reshaped through new forms of sociality.

## Conclusion

Concepts of what constituted human and animal bodies and how they could be combined were clearly not stable in time and space over the period from the Natufian to PPNB in western Asia. During the Early Natufian, boundaries of human bodies were marked through shell and animal bead decorations; emphasis was on the integrity of human bodies or members of the wider social body (e.g., dogs), although the very focus on body boundaries may suggest that these boundaries were contested or perceived to be under threat.

Beliefs about the human body and its boundaries, as expressed in the mortuary record, clearly changed in the Late Natufian and PPNA; some human bodies were now clearly divisible and distributable and animal bodies/parts were not involved in these transactions. In the PPNB, there is a return to animal imagery and animal-human combinations. Humans, aurochs, and gazelle were in specific, ritually framed contexts interchangeable. Aurochs and gazelle may at times have served as ancestors or stood in for other members of the human social group. We also have true hybrids that emphasise the instability of human and animal bodies; these beings do not fit simple animal/human categories. When we turn to representations of humans and animals, however, a different pattern emerges. Animals inscribed on anthropomorphic, T-shaped pillars during the PPNA at Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori represent a new development compared to the animal figurines of the Natufian. These human-animal associations suggest transformations of bodies, if not actual hybrids.

These data undermine narratives of the transition to agriculture that treat domestication as a progressive separation of humans from nature or a ‘taming’ of the wild. Instead of thinking of the process of agricultural beginnings in terms of such a simplistic cause-effect relationship, we rather see overlapping trajectories of changes in mortuary rites as opposed to visual depictions that do not necessarily correlate with changing human-animal-plant relations involved in the process of domestication. Throughout the period there is an almost paradoxical emphasis on wild and dangerous animals in representational media,

despite an increasing reliance on domestic plant and animal species. This pattern may alternatively be interpreted as an increasing concern with defining one's identity in relation to other beings that was a corollary of living in aggregated agricultural villages. These villages engendered new human socialities grounded in more intense interactions among people from distant regions, which resulted in a mixing of human groups with diverse origin myths and social values. Categories of human-animal and culture-nature in such a social context might have become more blurred in the course of our temporal sequence. Human-animal combinations were yet another way of creating identities and differences, that, along with the bodies themselves, were perpetually constructed and transformed throughout western Asia.

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