Session Title:

Bodies in pieces: the changing relations between body parts and bodies whole

Abstract:
Is the whole more than the sum of its parts? Questioning Aristotle's famous statement, we want to investigate the tension between the human body as an integrated whole and a collection of constituent pieces. Body parts may stand metonymically for whole bodies, but through fragmentation and isolated representation, their meanings can be altered. Although body parts lose their original function when disarticulated from their whole, through their separation they can gain additional significances as well as alternative values and meanings. For instance, isolated body parts can become relics, objects of exchange, symbols of fertility, or indications of bodily malfunction.

Case studies in different periods and geographical contexts will include: the emphasis and significance of particular body parts in the Early Bronze Age, cremation as a process of fragmentation in Later European Prehistory, and votive body parts from healing sanctuaries in the classical Greek world. The broad range of examples will enable us to compare social practices cross-culturally, exploring the changing meaning of bodily fragmentation over time and space. Like last year's EAA session on 'Knowledge, Belief and the Body', this session arises from the broader context of the Leverhulme project 'Changing Beliefs of the Human Body' based at Cambridge University. We welcome participants from all disciplines, including archaeology, classics and anthropology, in order to approach the practice of bodily fragmentation from all angles.

Organizers:
Marie Louise Stig Sorensen,
Katharina Rebay
Jessica Hughes

University of Cambridge - Leverhulme project - Changing Beliefs of the Human Body
http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/lrp/intro.html

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13. Deirdre O’Sullivan: The power of bones: corporeal relics in the medieval church
14. Estella Weiss-Krejci: Heart burial in post medieval German speaking Europe
15. Annia Cherryson: In the pursuit of knowledge: dissection, post-mortem surgery and the retention of body parts c.1750-1850

Speaker’s abstracts:

Preston Miracle and Dušan Borič (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom)

**Heads, shoulders, knees, and toes: Body parts and parted bodies in the Mesolithic-Neolithic of the Balkans and Western Asia**

The burial record of the Late Upper Palaeolithic to Neolithic periods in Europe and the Near East contains many more body parts than "complete" bodies. These body parts can occur on their own, in association with other, disarticulated parts, and/or alongside complete skeletons from a wide range of depositional contexts. These parts have been considered from various perspectives, including burial rites, grave goods (e.g. "trophy" skulls), grave disturbances and site formation processes, the presentings of ancestors, and more recently, the distribution of personhood. Here we describe the special treatment of extremities, including heads, hands, and feet from the mortuary records of the Balkans and Western Asia. In particular, we examine how these parts inform on body concepts, including body boundaries and relationship between parts and wholes, and ultimately the question “what constituted a body?” in the past.

John Chapman & Bisserka Gaydarska (University of Durham, United Kingdom)

**“Bury me whole” – deviations from Williance Leap’s will in Later Balkan Prehistory**

According to a popular AD C19th North Yorkshire legend, after a certain Mr. Williance Leap lost a leg in a fall, the initial separate burial of the amputated limb was supplemented, at his death and according to a desire expressed in his will and recorded on his tombstone, by the re-unification of the remainder of Leap’s body with the errant leg. This desire to be whole and immaculate in death was strong in the Modern period but, in later Balkan prehistory, it was a regular social practice for the survivors to manipulate the body and body parts of the newly - (and not-so-newly -) dead in a variety of ways, invoking such concepts as fragmentation, removal, re-combination, substitution and re-integration. The extent to which these practices and concepts created a specific kind of enchainged personhood rather than simply the denial of individual identity will be explored through a diachronic analysis of data sets ranging from intra-mural burials on Early Neolithic tells, cemeteries from the later Neolithic and Copper Age and barrow burials from the beginning of the Bronze Age. The importance of the mortuary domain is the widespread occurrence of contexts that can be argued to be more ‘closed’ than most settlement contexts. These examples of body sub-division will also be juxtaposed with the common practice of deliberate object fragmentation and re-use of fragments ‘after the break’, which can be documented from inter-site re-fittings and the absence of object parts from totally excavated sites in many time/places in the past (see Chapman & Gaydarska, 2006 Parts and wholes: fragmentation in prehistoric context. Oxford: Oxbow Books).
Kirsi O. Lorentz (University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom)

Parts to a whole: Manipulations of the body in prehistoric Eastern Mediterranean

All human groups face the issue of how to dispose a dead body. Cross-cultural variation in burial pathways is extensive, ranging from primary, one-off disposal, often with ritual elaboration, to complex secondary manipulations of the dead body and/or its parts. This paper explores processes of bodily fragmentation in mortuary contexts through a focus on prehistoric Eastern Mediterranean, and Chalcolithic Cyprus in particular. Bodily manipulation in the Cypriot Chalcolithic is further explored through anthropomorphic depictions. Burial contexts on Chalcolithic cemeteries include intentional deposits of fully articulated, semi-articulated, and fully disarticulated human skeletal remains. Tomb floors contain between one to three fully articulated skeletons in a hyperflexed position, a carefully arranged stack of disarticulated bones, and semi-articulated remains. Most anthropomorphic depictions in Chalcolithic Cyprus can be seen to depict the human body in its entirety. However, figurine shapes suggest a multiplicity of interpretations, including viewing them as singular body parts. Evidence for secondary treatment and manipulation of anthropomorphic figurines throws further light on fragmentation and treatment of the body and its parts. There is clear evidence that the depicted bodies, or parts thereof, were worn on actual, living bodies, as well as included with the bodies of the dead.

John Robb (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom)

Composing bodies in the Copper Age Alps

Large-scale changes in body representation are visible throughout European prehistory, but it is uncommon to trace how such shifts happen at the local scale of traditions or corpuses smaller scale. This paper compares two adjacent valleys of the Alps in the third millennium BC, Valcamonica and the Alto Adige. In both valleys people participated in widespread third-millennium BC developments such as weapon symbolism and the placement of embodied beings (rock art, stelae, menhirs) in a monumentalised landscape. However, they did so in very different ways. In Valcamonica, the human body was represented as an assemblage of cosmological and biographical citations in ways which overlapped rock art. In the Alto Adige, as elsewhere in the Alps, the human body was represented as a set of fixed, formalised relations between defined zones of a standardised body. This paper traces the history of this distinction, its relationship to the body composed in life (through ornaments and gestures) and in death through burial, and its relation to social personhood.

Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom)

Living in divided bodies: Bronze Age body practices

The body always has the potential for being simultaneously parts and whole; the whole can be perceived as dividable into or as composed of parts. The cognition of the body involves navigating these possibilities and will involve cultural beliefs about the body. Questions such as “What is the body?”, or “In which part of the body reigns the person; is it in the stomach, the heart, or the head?”, or “Which body parts matter most?” are all cultural reflections on the very substance and experience of bodies – and the reflections they hint at are common throughout history and in ethnographic case studies. The body as dividable and divisible is a common
conception, and this and similar understandings provide basic metaphors used for the understanding of society.

This paper discusses how the presentation of the body, the dressing and attiring, during the Early and Middle Bronze Age in Europe may be used to consider the contemporary conceptualisation of the body, and of differences between bodies. Is the Bronze Age body emphasised and presented as a composite structure? And if so, which are its main parts? Furthermore, how may these divisions and the body zones that they materialised affect the functioning body? Did some of the cultural perception of the normative body prevent comfort and free movement of some body part? In short, looking at the various emphasis, adornments, and performative dramatics that are expressed throughout the Bronze Age, this paper aims to speculate upon whether a distinct body ontology was present during this period.

Jo Appleby (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom)

**Ageing as disintegration and fragmentation**

The process of human ageing is one in which the body undergoes a process of deterioration which can be seen as both disintegration and fragmentation, and which can be observed on the human skeleton. During the ageing process, some body parts deteriorate and disintegrate (for example, the loss of bone mass which leads to osteoporosis), whilst others may be lost altogether (for example teeth and hair). The body thus loses its sense of youthful completeness. How should we understand this changing physicality of the body? Does losing certain body parts mean that bodily boundaries become less distinct? Do lost parts of the body cease to be a part of that body and do they change ideas about what that body is?

This paper aims to address the problem of the disintegration of the body in old age through a case-study of ageing in the Early Bronze Age of Lower Austria. It will be argued that the fragmentation of the body itself is counteracted by an emphasis on bodily completeness and elaboration in the dressing and the disposal of the dead body. This gives rise to a situation where the most aged and therefore apparently disintegrated body is often the most elaborately buried.

Katharina Rebay (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom)

**Cremation as fragmentation in Later European Prehistory**

In this paper cremation is addressed as a process of fragmentation rather than destruction. The significance of body parts and whole bodies will be explored through two main themes: the relationships between bodies and objects after the cremation and the treatment of cremated bones in cremation graves.

Objects that were important for constructing and signifying identity in life, such as ornaments and weapons, can be treated in a variety of ways during a cremation burial. Close relationships between bodies and objects can be taken apart or maintained or deliberately emphasised. Cremation does not necessarily destroy the sense of a bodily entity, which is evident by how the burnt remains are treated and graves are constructed in Later European Prehistory. The survival of the idea of a body, however, does not mean that the complete recovery of all cremated bones was important and desired. The archaeological evidence proves quite the reverse. In most cases, only a part of the body ended up in urns or is buried in pits after cremation, and usually only a non-representative amount of bones is found in the graves. Lack of preservation, site formation processes or problems with bone recovery do not provide a satisfactory explanation. So does this
mean the deposition of the whole body was no longer crucial for Bronze and Iron Age funerary rites and that the burial of body parts sufficed?

Ulla Rajala (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom) & Heli Arima (University of Helsinki, Finland)

**Transformation of persons and their bodies: Archaic belief systems and the disarticulation and redeposition of skeletal remains at Cisterna Grande (Crustumerium, Rome, Italy)**

In this paper we will discuss the different religious beliefs and ideas of personhood indicated by the cases of human skeletal disarticulation and re-deposition in the Archaic chamber tombs at Cisterna Grande. The Remembering the Dead project has excavated in this mainly Archaic cemetery at Crustumerium (Rome, Italy) for four years. During the excavations we have revealed new information on the variability related with chamber tombs and inhumations. Archaic tombs are less visible in central Italian funerary research partly due to the rarity of the research projects dedicated to their study. Therefore, our contribution will help to understand better cultural attitudes represented in ritual practices.

The few excavations in Archaic cemeteries show that Archaic communities had differing local burial practices but also shared some customs on a regional scale. Although the dominant practice was inhumation, cremations are not unheard of, and thus, the motives for this fluidity between completeness and fragmentation will be debated. In the case of inhumations, the different transformations of bodies and persons resulting in redeposition and rearrangement of skeletons are to be discussed in the light of the findings at Cisterna Grande and elsewhere in central Italy.

Ian Armit (University of Bradford, United Kingdom)

**Porticos, pillars and severed heads: the display and curation of human remains in the southern French Iron Age**

The Iron Age of Mediterranean France contains a wealth of evidence for the removal, curation, display and representation of the human head. Previously taken as a manifestation of a distinctively ‘Celtic’ interest in heads, this material has recently been subject to reassessment. Oppida such as Entremont, Glanum, La Cloche, and sanctuaries such as Roquepertuse, have yielded numerous sculptural representations related to headhunting in its broadest sense, as well as skeletal remains. However, the very diversity of this material suggests that it does not reflect a single, unchanging ‘cult of the head’, but rather a complex and evolving set of beliefs and practices which can be interpreted in the light of wider social changes in the region. A re-examination of the porticos with head-shaped niches at Roquepertuse, for example, suggests that the monument was constructed to receive heads which had already been curated for some time. The plastering and painting of these skulls, seems to have been intended to subsume them within the design of the porticos, blending previously disparate ‘objects’ within a unitary design. At the slightly later oppidum of Glanum, pillars and porticos again bear head-shaped niches but here show different fixing mechanisms which suggest that only the preserved faces were displayed, rather than the complete head or skull. This may suggest a desire to preserve some vestige of the individuality of the severed head. These sorts of changes in the modes of head preparation and display parallel developments in the associated iconography, where the depiction of headhunting alters over time. The values and meanings attached to heads appear to shift with the changing social circumstances of the Later Iron Age in the region.
Jessica Hughes (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom)

**Votives Body Parts in Classical Greek Sanctuaries**

The models of individual body parts which were dedicated in sanctuaries across the ancient world represent a valuable and under-explored resource for studying ancient beliefs about the human body. In this paper I offer an initial reappraisal of the iconography and significance of votive body parts from Greek sanctuaries of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the period in which the dedication of body parts became widespread as a cult practice on the Greek mainland. Focusing in particular on one fourth-century BC relief from the Athenian sanctuary of Asklepios, the god of healing, I examine the form and display of the votive body parts, drawing attention to their iconographic and structural parallels with images of the mythical sparagmos on fifth-century BC Attic vases. On the basis of this analysis, I put forward a reading of the votive body parts as effecting the fragmentation or dismemberment of the dedicants' bodies. Such a reading is intended to complement, rather than challenge or replace, those traditional interpretations which see the representation of the body part as drawing attention to a localised part of the body for the purpose of indicating sickness or healing, or, in the terms of Walter Burkert, as a pars pro toto 'sacrifice' for the health of the (whole) body of the dedicant. Nonetheless, I argue that this appeal to the imagery and language of dismemberment has profound implications in the context of the sanctuary space, both in mediating relations between the mortal and divine spheres, and, in some cases, in the reification of contemporary beliefs about the human body in sickness.

Lotte Hedeager (University of Oslo, Norway)

**Body and self (in the Late Iron Age/Viking Age of Scandinavia)**

My paper will contextualize the human “self” in the Late Iron Age/Viking Age of Scandinavia. The iconography demonstrates that there existed other perceptions of the “self” than modern and post-modern western notions of the individual. During the late Iron Age bodies are presented in separate pieces or as human bodies amalgamating with animals. In addition, archaeological data as well as the Old Norse text demonstrate that animals and humans have been subjected to the same ritual treatment and thus played corresponding roles in religion. Therefore a modern perception of the human body as a structural category in opposition to animals might not be relevant if we wish to understand body and self during the late Iron Age. During this period a fragmented human body was more than the sum of its parts and the human “self” was a hybrid embodiment.

Deirdre O’Sullivan (School of Archaeology and Ancient History, Leicester, United Kingdom)

**The power of bones: corporeal relics in the medieval church**

The veneration (not the worship) of the physical remains of dead saints formed an important element in medieval piety. The tradition stems from the days of the early church when the remains of the first martyrs were treasured in the catacombs, but it became much more prominent from the ninth century, when relic cults were actively promoted by the papacy, and bodies were often moved around (translated), and skeletons broken up. By virtue of their association with God’s Elect, corporeal or primary relics created a locus or place of sanctity, to which pilgrimage could be made. Saints were already in heaven, and could
intercede with God on behalf of the suppliant. Relics were therefore tied to a belief in the possibility of miracles, signs of God’s direct intervention in the human world. More usually, however, they served as a focus for individual devotion, linking the supernatural with human concerns. This paper will explore the signification of corporeal relics, arguing that tactile nature of medieval contact created an intimacy with the holy that was of considerable potency for ordinary people.

Estella Weiss-Krejci (University of Vienna, Austria)

Heart burial in post medieval German speaking Europe

In late sixteenth and early seventeenth century German speaking Catholic Europe, during the Counter Reformation, tremendous political and ideological transformations coincided with significant dead-body manipulations. In an effort to reclaim and revalue sacred places and sacred history, the Catholic reformers not only re-deposited saintly relics and restored shrines, which had been destroyed by Protestants, but also promoted the separate burial of the inner organs of ecclesiastical princes, royalty and war leaders. Especially the separate burial of the heart became increasingly important. The introduction of new rituals such as the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the seventeenth century additionally turned the heart into a highly sacred and very special symbol. The association of the heart with dead royal bodies promoted the development of a new relation between religion and the ruling authorities.

Annia Kristina Cherryson (University of Leicester, United Kingdom)

In the pursuit of knowledge: dissection, post-mortem surgery and the retention of body parts c.1750-1850

By the mid-eighteenth century, human corpses were an integral part of medical teaching. Dissection of the dead was considered a vital component of anatomical studies, while surgical techniques were perfected on the recently deceased. Body parts, or in some cases the whole body, were retained for reference as part of anatomical collections. This paper will examine the archaeological evidence for dissection, post-mortem surgery and the retention of body parts in Britain between c.1750-1850. Prior to 1832, only the corpses of executed murderers could legally be used in medical teaching and research, with the medical partition of the body seen as continuing punishment beyond death. This comparatively small number of bodies was insufficient to meet the requirements of the teaching hospitals and private anatomy schools, resulting in a flourishing black market in stolen corpses. The Anatomy Act of 1832 attempted to resolve this problem by giving the medical profession access to the unclaimed bodies of the poor. The majority of excavated dissected remains have been recovered from prison and hospital cemeteries and the treatment of these remains will be examined as means of assessing contemporary attitudes towards the dissected corpse as an individual, a teaching resource and a commodity.