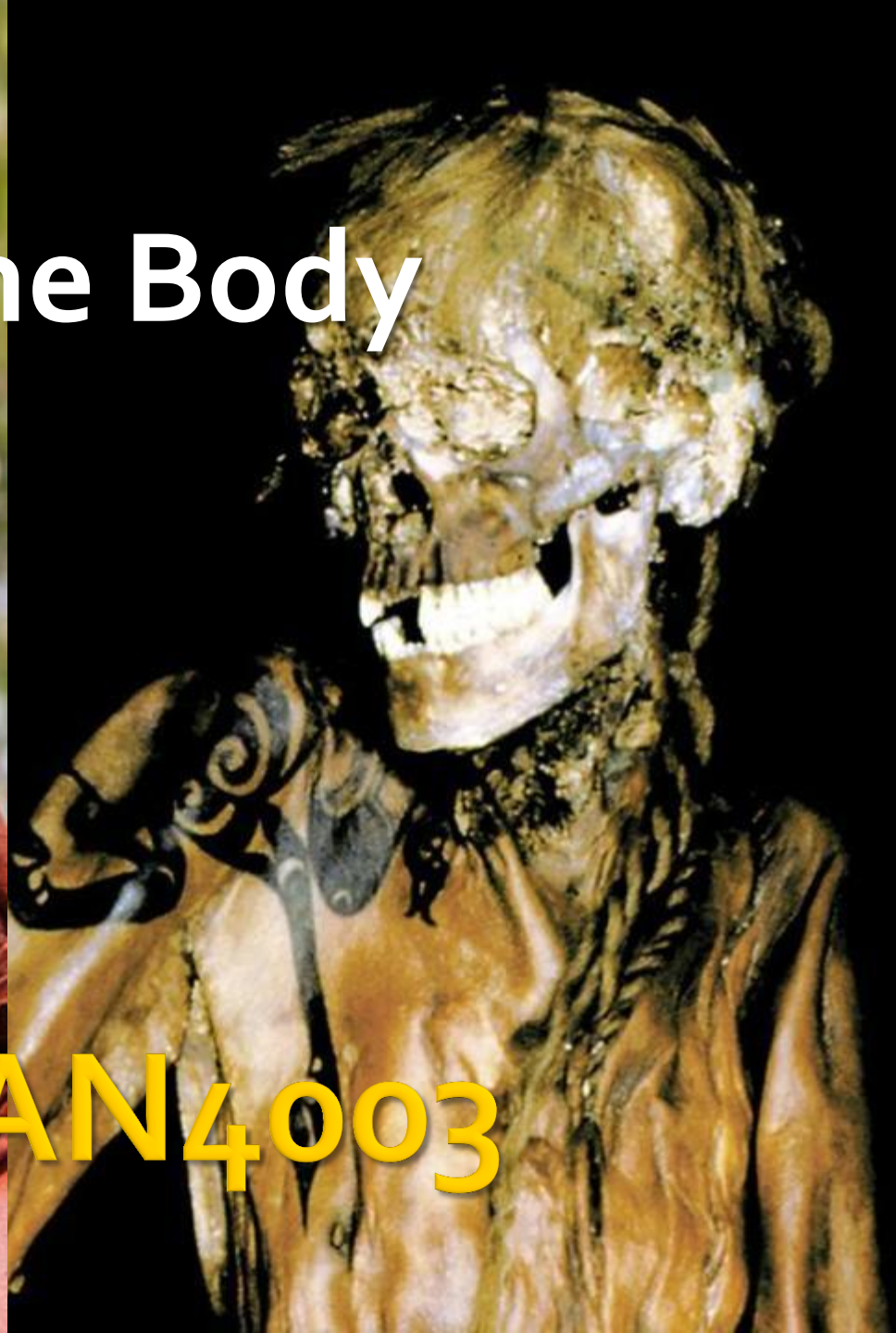




# The Body



AHAN4003

# Materialities of the Body

- How & why people inscribe & shape their body:
  - Temporary or permanent
  - Internal (ingestion) or external
  - Adornment
- Embodiment, agency, identity & style



# Key Texts

- Crossland, Z. 2010. Materiality & Embodiment. *Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*. 386-405. Oxford: OUP.
- Featherstone, M. 2000. *Body Modification*. London: Sage.
- Hamilakis, Y. et al. (eds) 2002. *Thinking Through the Body: Archaeologies of Corporeality*. New York: Plenum Publishers.

# Why all the fuss about the body?

- Focus on the individual: the importance of presentation of self & the need for self expression
- Feminist critique & gender studies:
  - Gender is culturally constructed & variable
- Experiential approaches & embodiment:
  - The distinction between the human body/self & the tools we use
- Role of representation in (re-)producing cultural meanings

# Why all the fuss about the body?

- “The body then, has moved from being a universal & biological basis of subsequent experience, to being itself a culturally variable entity, demanding philosophical & critical attention”
- (Hamilakis *et al.* 2002: 4)



Neolithic figurine, Haçilar

# Embodiment

- Critique of dualist Cartesian separation of body & mind:
  - Thinking subject: **res cogitans**
  - Physical world: **res extensa**
- Conception & experience(s) of the body are culturally constituted



# Embodiment

- Lived experience of the body:
  - Production of the lived body & performance of identity
- Phenomenological approach emphasises human physical experience
- “the **human body** provides the fundamental mediation point between thought & the world” (Tilley 1994: 14)
- Through our bodies we are able to relate to, perceive & understand the physical world around us

# Embodiment & Practice Theory

- Draws on concept of *habitus*: aspects of culture rooted in daily practices
- Our world is structured by embodied practices:
  - Totality of learned (embodied) actions & way of life
- Mediation of human relations through material world



# Body Modification

- Very ancient & global practice(s) but with modern resonance:
- Several practices to alter the surface of the body
  - Directly inscribed: piercings, tattooing, implants etc
  - Management of ingestion to transform body's appearance: body building, anorexia etc
  - Modern medicine: transhumanism



# Adorning the Body

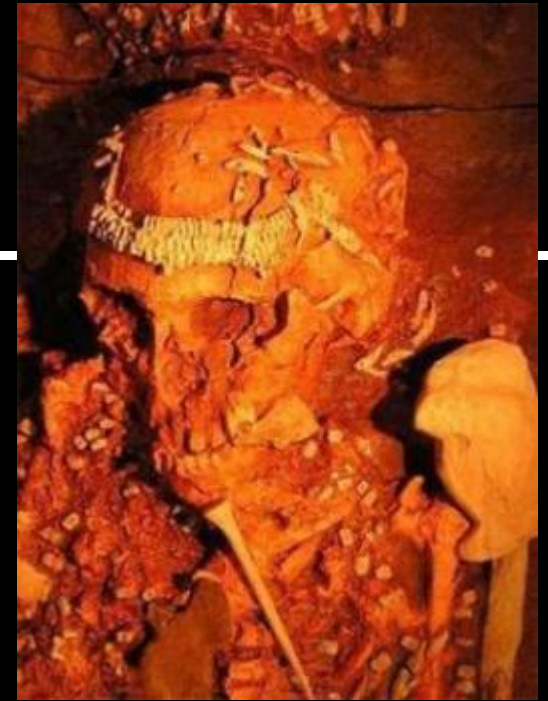
- Stretches back to Upper Palaeolithic



El Wad skull



Lespugue Venus,  
tassel skirt



Sungir burial



Necklace, el Wad

# Mediating Authority

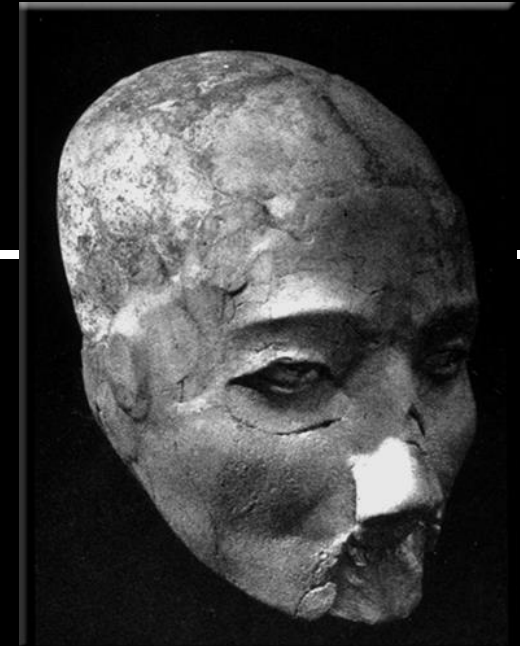
- Adornment & inscription of body originally a means of marking status, identity, group
- Developed into symbols of wealth, power & authority:
  - Insignia/regalia
  - Impression
  - Enchanted objects
- Performing identity: display



Pu-abī's headdress  
Royal Tombs of Ur

# Modelling the Dead

- Post-mortem removal of cranium
- Removed teeth
- Facial features modelled in lime plaster, marl & animal collagen (often recreating lower jaw)
- Other materials used:
  - Pigments, cowrie shells, asphalt, cording



Jericho, plastered skull



Skull, Nehal Hemar

# Modelling the Dead

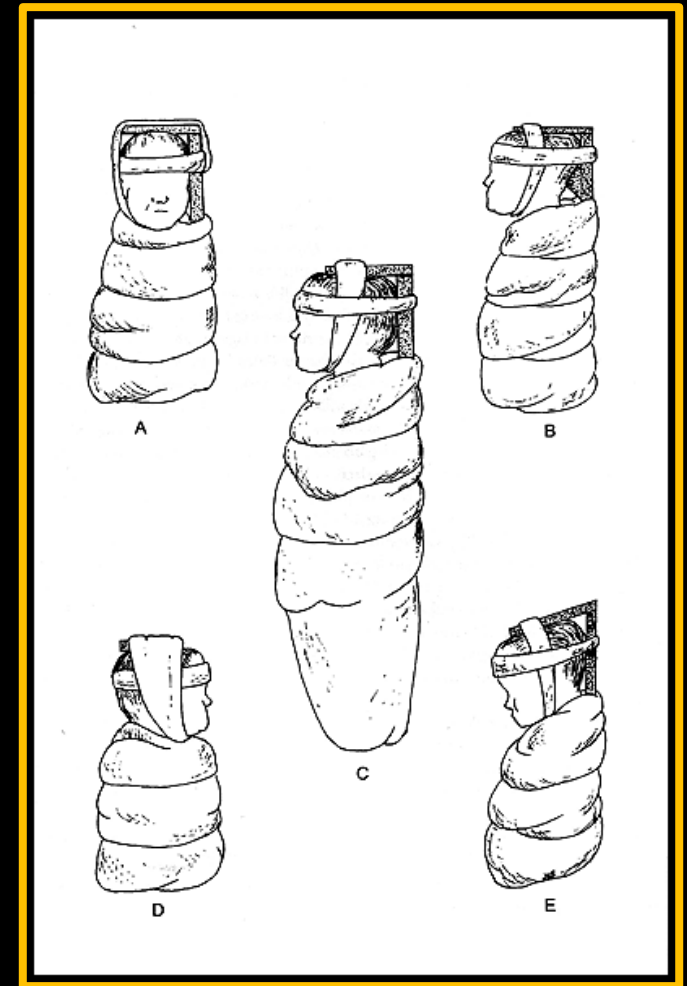
- “one cannot help but feel that they are portraits, which bring the men of the earliest Neolithic astonishingly to life” (Kenyon 1953: 870)
- How might we explain this practice?
  - Attitudes to the dead
  - Attitudes to the body



Plastered skull, Jericho

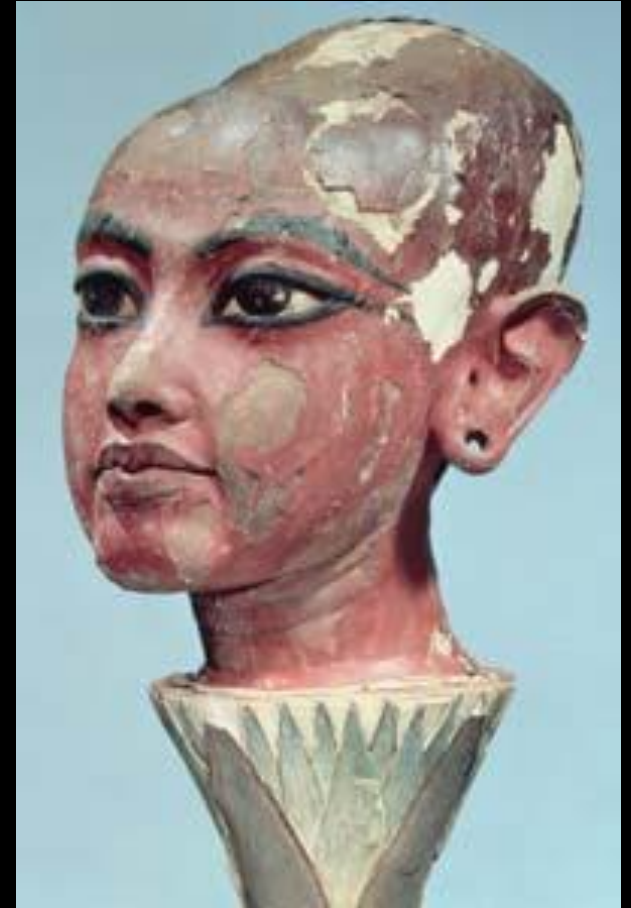
# Shaping Heads

- Artificial cranial modification: intentional shaping of skull using a padded cradle board held in place with bandage
- Aim = cosmetic: to achieve differential shape of the skull
- Widespread in ancient Near East:
  - Neolithic & Bronze Age Cyprus
  - Amarna Egypt



# Shaping Identity

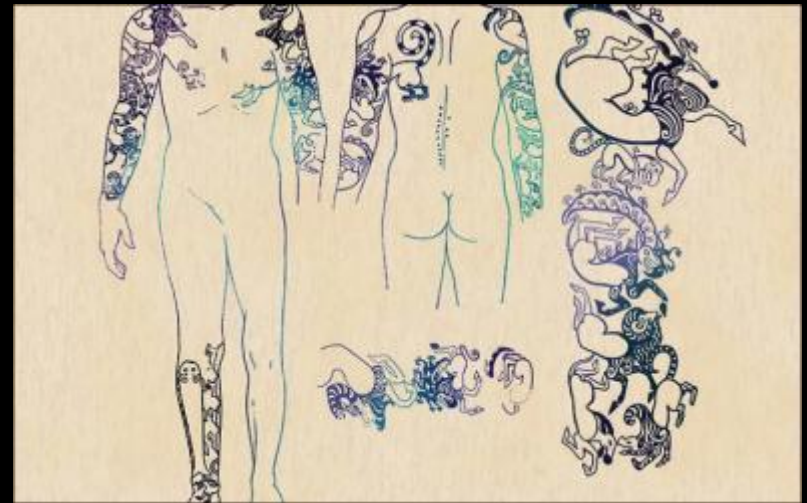
- Bolger: adopted as a means of marking identity & to enhance social status
- Cyprus: particular emphasis is on females (exogamic relations?)
- Imposed on individual at birth to demonstrate membership of a social group
- Recognising infants & children as valued members of society



Model from tomb of Tutankhamun

# Permanent Body Marking

- Diversity of highly visible body modification practices & diversity of functions/social meanings:
  - Amuletic
  - Rites of passage
  - Group affiliation & identity
  - Memorialisation
  - Social Reproduction



Tattoo markings on Siberian ice mummy

# Amuletic Value

- Evidence from Egyptian Middle Kingdom mummies
- “the inalienable tattoos of this world could be bartered for spiritual privileges in the next” (Turner 2000: 39)
- Mediterranean & Middle East: tattoos to ward off Evil Eye
- & as sign of beauty



Egyptian mummy



Berber woman, Algeria

# Memorialising the Body

- Hawaii: tattoos memorialise deceased relatives
- Indonesia: tattoos mark important events in life & achievements
- Melanesia & Polynesia: liminality & lifecycles signified by body markings
- Inscribing social reproduction

Hawaii

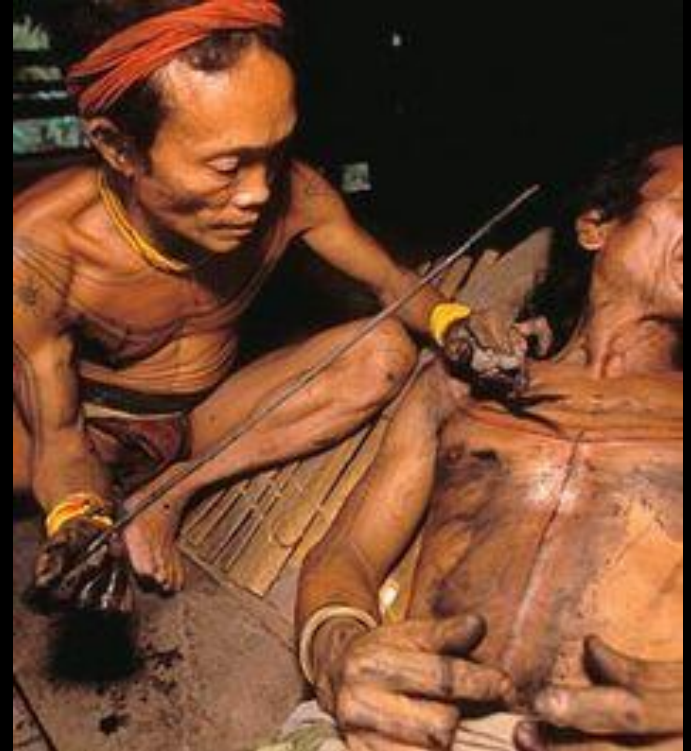


Indonesia



# Social Reproduction

- “body marks in pre-literate societies were permanent, collective and largely obligatory...set within a shared culture of collective meanings” (Turner 2000: 39)
- Social membership is marked through the metaphor of the human body



Marking the body

# Biography of the Body

- Connection between embodiment & social process
- Rites of passage – marking important stages in individual's life:
- Permanent markings which can be added to & transformed throughout an individual's life



Henna

# Culture and Politics

- Beauty rituals very important for the women of the harem:
  - Secret, natural recipes passed on through ritual of the 'harem' away from men
- Skin as a political agent:
  - Political (under the veil one could always look beautiful)
- Age old tradition embedded in cultural traditions



Henna

# Biography of the Body

- Henna designs used extensively in Middle East
- Temporary (though lasts for several weeks)
- Marks key stages in a woman's biography/social life:
  - Weddings
  - Birth: "traditional way to deter malevolent spirits that cause disease, depression, & poor bonding with her infant" (Cartwright Jones 2002: 5),



Henna at wedding

# Embodied Cognition

- Exploring the relationship between brains, bodies & things: phenomenology
- Material culture can change & shape our bodies by transforming & extending the boundaries of our *body schema*
- Experience world through our body: shapes our mind



Bronze Age pestle

# Embodied Cognition

- Breaking down the Cartesian duality of a natural boundary between people & things
- Mycenaean sword is a cognitive agent “by directly participating in the distributed cognitive system that defines the boundaries & contours of the Mycenaean lived body” (Malafouris 2008: 111)
- **Being** a Mycenaean warrior depends on embodied interplay between person, object, mind....



Signet ring, Mycenae

# Summary

- Discourse on the body occupies central place in materialities
- How we know, experience & shape the world around us: embodiment
- Questions our notions of the bounded body
- Also consider how we shape, alter & perform the body:
  - Rich variety of social messages mediated through our manipulation of ourselves
  - Integral to human experience