

Heady Business: Skulls, Heads, and Decapitation in Neolithic Anatolia and Greece

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Abstract

Bodily dismemberment—particularly decapitation—appears in the iconography and mortuary practices of many ancient societies. A powerful and complex cultural statement, archaeologists working in the prehistoric Levant and contiguous regions of the Near East have explored decapitation in some depth. Very little research, however, has focused on the notion of headlessness and decapitation throughout the rest of the prehistoric Mediterranean. Some limited examples appear in the artistic traditions and burial practices of Anatolia and Greece; Anatolian wall paintings depict headless individuals, Neolithic burials in both regions produce skulls placed in specially designated locations, and select figurines appear to be designed with detachable heads. This paper gathers together some of the disparate information on headless bodies and bodiless heads from Anatolia and Greece, and offers preliminary conclusions on the range of their possible functions and meanings.

Introduction

Bodily dismemberment—particularly human decapitation—is a powerful statement that surfaces in the iconography, mortuary practices, and political agendas of many cultures. Hoards of skulls, images of decapitated individuals, and depictions of disembodied heads occur along a broad spectrum of ancient contexts, ranging from Mayan skull platforms and head ornaments (Moser 1973) to displays of bloodied heads in the Roman forum (e.g. Lintott 1968; Hinard 1985; Richlin 1999). Beheading by guillotine became a compelling symbol of tyranny during the French Revolution and the alleged fence of heads attributed to Vlad the Impaler remains a mainstay of Vampire legend.

In each case, the headless bodies and bodiless heads encapsulated specific, though not necessarily identical, meanings. While the

actual act of severing the head from the body may be universal, the precise messages condensed in both the deed itself and the resulting fragmented images vary from one culture to the next. To our modern sensibilities, intentional decapitation is categorized as barbaric or even psychotic—depictions of headless bodies and ‘unmoored’ heads evince visceral and negative reactions (e.g. consider the beheadings of foreign hostages in the aftermath of the recent war in Iraq). Trophy head-taking by Indonesian, Indian, and Malaysian headhunters, however, reifies ideals of masculine prowess, honor, pride, and heroism (e.g. Krohn 1927: 271-85; Hutton 1928; Needham 1976; Gohain 1977: 26, 41-43, 58, 69; Phelan 1994; Tillema 1989: 241; Hoskins 1996), and procuring heads during warfare was officially sanctioned by both the Romans (Goldsworthy 1996: 271-76) and

the Assyrians (Campbell and Green 1995: frontispiece). Anthropological reports are rife with references to ancestor cults, where skulls of the deceased are often revered, consulted, and placated (e.g. Meek 1931: 109-10; Til- lema 1989: 241; Perrois 1990: 45-50). These cross-cultural examples clearly underscore the notion that decapitation is a contextualized enterprise; the messages broadcast by such behavior are neither simple nor unproblematic, let alone unambiguous. Rather, the social and ideological boundaries of a culture often dictate the significance embodied by a severed head or an intentional beheading.

Given the seemingly universal use of the untethered head as an effective tool of symbolic expression, it would not be surprising to find this image manifested, in one form or another, throughout the early cultures of the Mediterranean. While archaeologists have explored the subject of decapitation and skull cults in the prehistoric Levant (e.g. Margalit 1983; Wright 1988; Bienert 1991; Banning 1998; for 'Ain Ghazal see Rollefson 1983, 1986; Simmons and Rollefson 1984; Simmons *et al.* 1989; Butler 1989; Rollefson *et al.* 1992; for Jericho see Kenyon 1970; Cauvin 1972; Strouhal 1973; Kurth and Röhrer-Ertl 1981; for Tel Ramad see Ferembach 1970; de Contenson 1964; 1971; for Beisamoun see Ferembach and Lechevallier 1973; and for Nahal Hemar Cave see Yakar and Hershkovitz 1988; Arshenbourg and Hershkovitz 1989), very little research has focused explicitly on the importance of the severed head in neighboring areas (see however, Stanley Price 1977: 81; Bienert 1991). Limited examples appear in the artistic traditions and burial practices of Neolithic Anatolia and Greece¹ and include skulls placed in specially designated locations, both domestic and mortuary, portrayals in wall paintings of decapitated individuals, and figurines with heads that appear capable of being detached.

The following study presents both a survey of current evidence on bodiless heads and

headless bodies in early Anatolia and Greece, and preliminary discussions about what it may have meant in those cultures to behead the body and thereby break the integrity of the human form. The perspective adopted in this paper is a broad one, since detailed evidence is often lacking. Moreover, allowing ourselves a long line of sight helps generate questions that might otherwise become submerged in a closer study. Scant as the data are, it is evident that unmoored heads and decapitated bodies emerge in several guises and contexts throughout Anatolian and Greek prehistory. Like their Levantine neighbors, the early inhabitants of Greece and Anatolia may not have linked this kind of bodily fragmentation to acts of violence, expressions of subjugation, or the ineluctable cessation of life—presumably the intended message on several famous objects, including Narmer's palette (which depicts ten beheaded, presumably supine, and bound corpses with their heads placed between their legs), and the well-known scene from the Nineveh palace of Assurbanipal's feast (which portrays the decapitated head of the Elamite King Teumman hanging from a pine tree). Rather, the untethered head presents us with a kind of visual vocabulary or metaphor, which, while difficult to define in our terms, appears to have encapsulated notions about the fluid or shifting nature of identities, particularly those that persisted into death.

The ensuing pages begin with a discussion of this 'heady business' in Neolithic Anatolia followed by a consideration of the evidence from Neolithic Greece.

Anatolia

Skulls

Decapitation in the form of detached and specially treated skulls occurs at half a dozen aceramic and Neolithic sites in Anatolia, including Hacilar, Çatalhöyük, Çayönü, Nevalı Çori, Köşk Höyük, and Cafer Höyük (Figure 1).

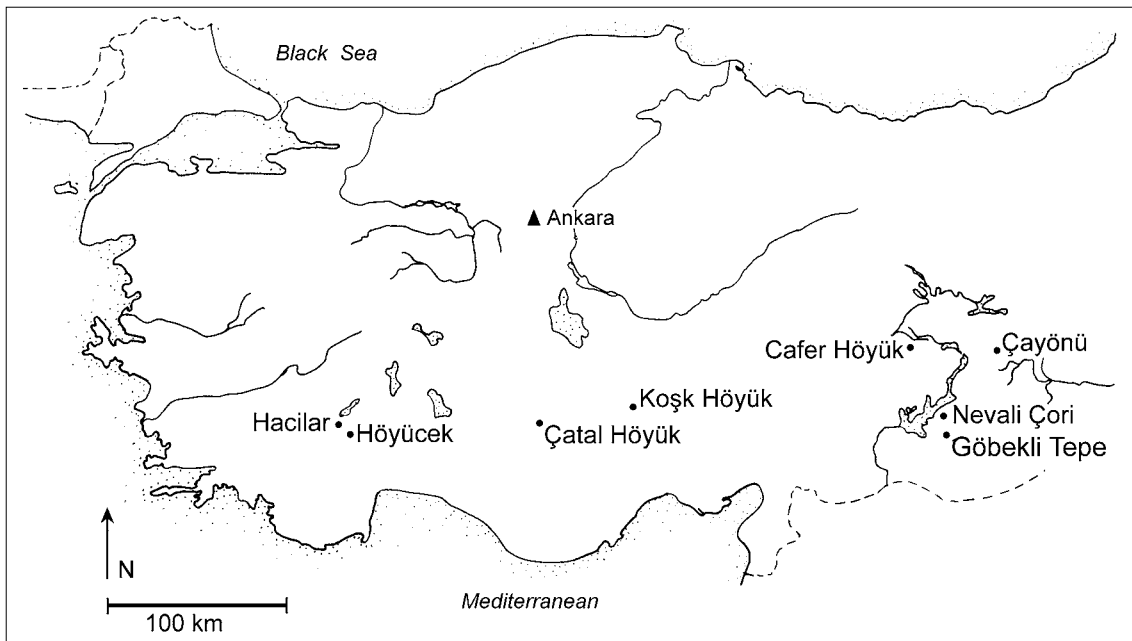


Figure 1. Map of Anatolian sites discussed in text.

Two skulls, set upright and supported by pebbles, were recovered on virgin soil from the very lowest level (Level VII) of aceramic Hacilar (Mellaart 1970a: 6; 1970b: fig. 4, pl. Vb; 1961: 73, pl. XVb). The skulls stood in a courtyard and were positioned facing domestic structures. A third skull, lacking a mandible and found in a slightly later aceramic level, was also found in a courtyard (Mellaart 1970a: 6; 1970b: fig. 3), and a baby's skull lay 'abandoned' on the floor behind a possible courtyard wall in an occupation level near the top of the aceramic sequence (Mellaart 1970a: 6). Although the published details are meager and occasionally contradictory, no post-cranial remains were noted in association with any of these skulls. At least three of the four skulls seem to have been intentionally placed in outdoor and probably 'public' spaces. Whether they were readily visible to the people who frequented these courtyards, however, is not entirely clear, although nothing in the excavation reports suggests that the skulls were hidden or covered.

Two other crania were allegedly recovered near hearths in later Neolithic and Chalcolithic levels at Hacilar, but the reports are exiguous and it is impossible to determine whether the skulls were associated with post-cranial remains (Mellaart 1967: 84, only mentions these skulls in his publication on Çatalhöyük). It is also worth noting that one of the rare intramural burials, which Mellaart assigns to the Late Neolithic and suspects was a hasty undertaking (Hacilar VI, house Q.6; Mellaart 1970a: 88–89), contained a fine clay cup in the shape of a human head (Figure 2; Mellaart 1970b: pl. LXIII 1, fig. 57: 3). The cup, which must be placed upside-down in order to be read correctly, was wrapped in cloth and partly burned, possibly as a result of widespread conflagration in Level VI (Mellaart 1970a: 107–108). Although the burial seems to have been primary and apparently included a skull (Mellaart 1970a: 88; 1970b: fig. 43), we still might interpret the head-cup as a form of symbolic decapitation, especially given the hasty nature of the burial.

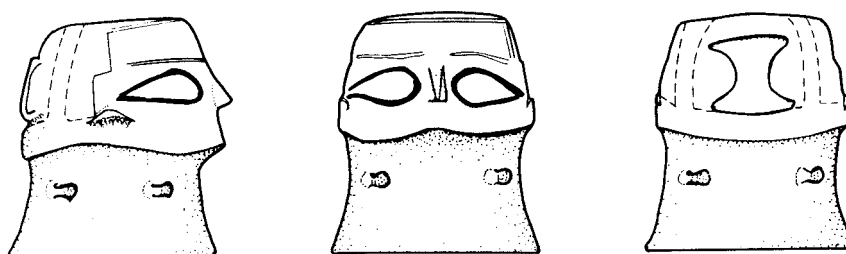


Figure 2. Headcup from Hacilar VI burial. H. 10.4 cm. (After Mellaart 1970b: 265, fig. 57. 3.)

Better known examples of carefully positioned crania derive from the impressive remains at Neolithic Çatalhöyük. Disembodied skulls dating to more than a millennium later than those from aceramic Hacilar were recovered in at least two of Mellaart's so-called 'shrines'. Shrine E.VII.21 contained four well-preserved crania: one lay facing a modeled image of a bull's head on the room's west wall, a second sat beneath another bull's head in the center of the east wall, and two were found paired together, perched on the corner of a platform associated with a wall painting of twin vultures attacking (?) headless corpses (Figure 3; Mellaart 1967: 108, 84,

figs. 14-15; Mellaart 1964: fig. 20). A second shrine (E.V.6) produced an additional skull, which again rested on a platform (Mellaart 1967: 84). Like their counterparts at Hacilar, the Çatalhöyük skulls were clearly visible and 'dwelled' in spaces presumably frequented and used by the living.

The positioning of human crania on platforms was, in all likelihood, not accidental. We know that the inhabitants of Çatalhöyük typically interred their dead, often in 'mass' or multiple burials, beneath these raised features (Mellaart 1967: 204-209; Hamilton 1996), and the skull's close spatial relationship with such mortuary platforms would have rein-

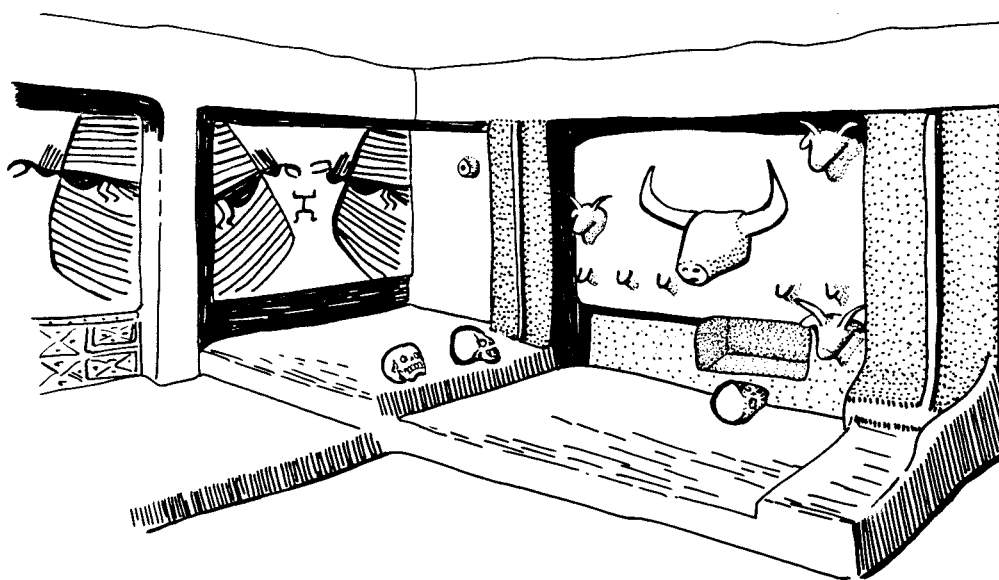


Figure 3. Çatalhöyük, Shrine E. VII.21. (After Mellaart 1967: 83, fig. 15.)

forced links with death, burial, and the possible powers of the deceased. Moreover, the associated paintings of headless corpses and predatory vultures probably afforded the living vivid reminders of ritual practice and, conceivably, the liminal stages of death.

Precisely how the viewer 'consumed' this constellation of images—skulls, vultures, and headless corpses—is a vexing issue. Last (1998) argues that we should problematize the role of the viewer and situate the images and artifacts at Çatalhöyük within the site's network of daily routines and discursive rituals. Valid as these observations are, the archaeological evidence does not readily lend itself to such investigations. We still have only a poor understanding of the kinds of activities performed in those structures that housed symbols of decapitation and have yet to comprehend fully the negotiated nature and valuation of the spaces within such buildings (cf. however, Hamilton 1996; Last 1998). At the very least, we can propose that, on some level, the objectified images of headless bodies and decapitated remains served to mediate the complex relationships between the living and the dead (Last 1998: 367).

Three additional Neolithic sites in central and southeastern Turkey—Nevalı Çori, Köşk Höyük, and Cafer Höyük—yielded examples of skulls or headless skeletons positioned on or under house floors. Evidence of skull burials was recovered, for example, within at least four domestic structures from several of Nevalı Çori's five aceramic building levels. House 21A in the lowest level (Level I) produced five skulls and several long bones buried in a pit under a foundation platform. A long flint blade lay directly under one of the skulls, perhaps a tangible reference to the instrument of beheading (Hauptmann 1999: 70). House 25, in the same level, contained two burials sunk beneath the house floor, one of which held a skeleton, missing its skull, in a contracted position (1999: 71). In the process of digging a

later level (Level III), excavators unearthed a large structure approximately 16 × 7 m (known as House 2), which contained the buried crania of nine individuals—five children, two adult females, and two adult males. Three pits held two skulls each, paired either as an adult male and female, or a woman and child. None of the skulls had mandibles or lower teeth, and in each case, the dyad was positioned to face one another (Backofen 1987: 192; Hauptmann 1988: 102; Biernert 1991: 16-17; Yakar 1991: 68). Another pit held a headless skeleton buried with a large round stone (placed near its head), which the excavators suggest was intended to represent the missing skull (Hauptmann 1999: 72; it is worth noting that the nearby and roughly contemporary site of Göbekli Tepe, which produced no skull burials, yielded a large-scale sculpture of a pillar crowned with an animal holding 'what is quite obviously a human head' between its paws [Hauptmann 1999: 80]).

Postmortem skull treatments appear to be more complex at the later Late Neolithic site of Köşk Höyük. The inhabitants of this settlement usually buried children beneath house floors, with adults possibly interred extramurally. Level III, however, which is roughly contemporary with the upper levels of Neolithic Çatalhöyük, yielded one plastered and painted skull of a 21–24-year-old woman (Silistreli 1988: 62; fig 7; Yakar 1991: 192) and a second plastered and red-stained female adult skull, which may have been animated with black-beaded eyes (Yakar 1994: 47). The latter skull was found on a house floor (Melink 1991: 128).

Finally, Cafer Höyük, in the foothills of the eastern Taurus mountains, produced two headless burials in its earliest aceramic phase. Both burials were located in areas near, but outside, the constructed spaces of the village. One burial contained an adult inhumation, the skeleton of which was complete except for the skull. The second interment contained the

skeleton of a headless child lying in a foetal position on its left side and completely covered by a large flat stone (Cauvin *et al.* 1999: 90).

The preference in Neolithic Anatolia for small-scale burial and placement of human crania or headless individuals in domestic contexts is vividly contrasted by evidence from aceramic levels at Çayönü, which is slightly earlier than some of the evidence at other sites discussed above. Although burial practices varied over time, the inhabitants of Çayönü did not regularly introduce the dead into their domestic spheres, instead creating a long-lived, large, and separate edifice for the deceased. Referred to as the 'skull building', this unusual structure was rebuilt and redesigned several times, but always remained a capacious ossuary (Hauptmann 1988; 1997; Mellink 1988: 103-104; Özdoğan 1997). Earlier levels of the structure contained burial crypts, including one of a 'decapitated female buried with a new-born infant and a child' (Özdoğan 1999: 51). Later phases were more apt to contain compartments that included skulls as well as large quantities of human bones, some badly broken, with a total count of at least 400 individuals (Mellink 1990: 127). One small cell alone yielded 90 adult and infant skulls, all carefully arranged in a row facing east and west (Yakar 1991: 49-51). Other reports suggest that, at some point, masses of skulls were stored or arranged on 'shelves' that fell onto the floor at the time the building was destroyed (Özdoğan 1999: 51). The bodies, on the other hand, were haphazardly deposited, without order or orientation. Analysis of blood residue from a large polished stone slab in one of the subphases of this building revealed the mingling of human, Bos, and Ovis blood, suggesting that rituals involving human and animal sacrifice, dismemberment, and/or preparations for secondary burials may have been enacted in this unusual repository (Özbek 1988; Loy and Wood 1989; Schirmer 1990: 382).

Wall Paintings and Figurines

Symbolic displays associated with unmoored heads or headless bodies are not restricted to skull deposits within aceramic and Neolithic Anatolia. Çatalhöyük, for example, provides several enigmatic 'texts' in the form of wall paintings, the best known of which portray headless bodies attacked by vultures (Figure 4; shrine VII.8: Mellaart 1967: fig. 47, pls. 44, 48-49; shrine VII.21: Mellaart 1967: figs. 14-15, pl. 47; shrine VIII.8: Mellaart 1967: pl. 46). In some cases, the vultures are fitted with human legs and feet, in other instances with more avian appendages. One badly preserved painting possibly depicts a headless body between two large birds of prey and a man 'armed with a sling... warding off their attacks' (Mellaart 1967: pl. 46). Mellaart suggests that these images portray either excarnation scenes or costumed individuals enacting a ritual. In support of his proposal, Mellaart (1967: 65-66, pl. 8; cf. Last 1998) argues that the inhabitants of the site actually illustrated a 'charnel house' on the north wall of Shrine VI.B.I, depicting an excarnation structure in the top register and human skulls in the panel below. The other well-known headless images from Çatalhöyük do not fit comfortably into an excarnation scenario: one damaged painting possibly illustrates a headless man holding what is presumably his own head (E. IV.I: Mellaart 1967: pls. 50-51), and another seems to depict headless 'hunters'. The so-called hunting shrine contains not less than 24 painted human figures, several stags and a fawn—all ostensibly participating in some kind of collective dance, performance or activity (Mellaart 1967: pls. 61-63, 174-75). Several figures are headless, one painted half red and half white (half male/half female?). Mellaart's (1967: 175) proposal that these headless figures represent ancestors—perhaps 'great hunters of the past' called upon to participate in a hunting rite—is admittedly speculative. While there is no

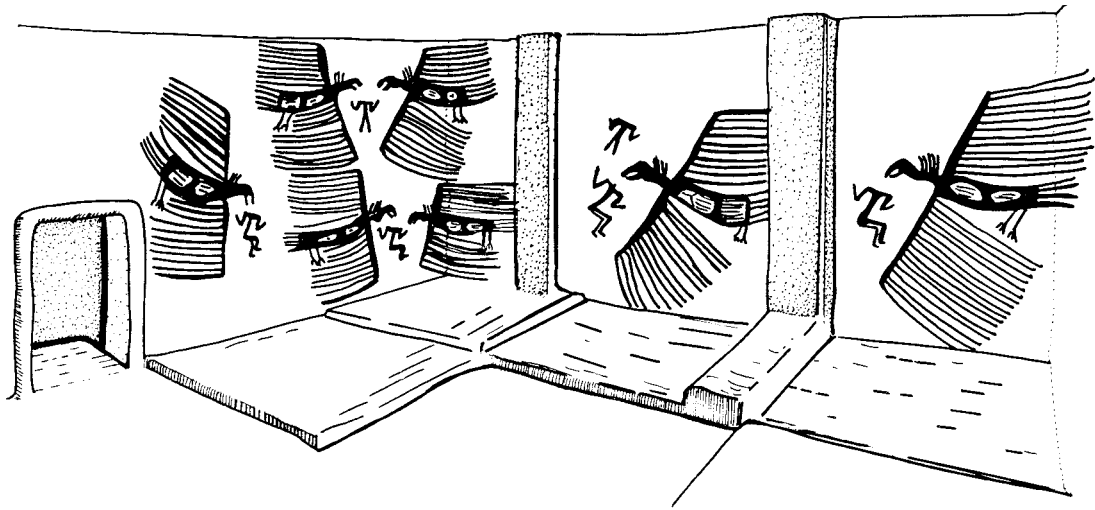


Figure 4. Çatalhöyük, early phase of ‘Vulture Shrine’, VII. 8. (After Mellaart 1967: 169, fig. 47.)

consensus about the ‘meanings’ behind these images, all seem linked to the enactment of rituals or perhaps depictions of mythological narratives in which the removal or absence of a head was central. In at least one case, the bodies seem to move or dance, despite the loss of bodily integrity.

The possible importance of the untethered head is manifested by more subtle features of Neolithic figurines. Hacilar produced approximately half-a-dozen Late Neolithic figurines with detachable wooden heads pegged into crude clay bodies (Figure 5; Mellaart 1970a: 175; 1970b: fig. 233, pl. CLX a-e). One of these images, recovered from the largest and most complex building in Hacilar VI, was associated with several sizable clay statuettes, which may have been utilized in some kind of initiation ceremonies or rites of passage (Talay 1984). If such rites were indeed enacted in this room, it is not hard to imagine that transposable wooden heads, perhaps reflecting shifting personae or identities, would be inserted at specific times during the ritual. An unusual series of limestone head slabs recovered from the same level, also might have served similar purposes (Mellaart 1970a: 176; 1970b: figs. 236-37, pls. CLXII-CLXIII).

Detachable figurine heads are not an isolated phenomenon at Hacilar. The Neolithic occupations at Höyücek, near Burdur, produced a number of comparable clay images (Duru 1991: 157; figs. 3/4 and 3/6). The most instructive figurine had a bone tube affixed between the ‘shoulders’ of its schematic body. Several small bone pieces incised with facial features and found at the site probably functioned as transposable heads that could be inserted into the bone tube (Yakar 1994: 36; Mellink 1992a: 125).²

Bolstering these observations are the recent inferences drawn by Hamilton (1996) in her well-considered re-examination of the Çatalhöyük figurines. According to Hamilton, the heads on these figurines may have been periodically switched or replaced in order to fit the occasion and circumstances of their use. In support of her argument, she notes the frequent occurrence of headless figurines—more than might be reasonable even given the vulnerability of the neck area; the complete absence of heads on seven of nine figurines found *in situ* in one room; and the occurrence of a dowel hole at the base of one head. Equally important, Hamilton notes that many of the surviving heads reveal variation in facial

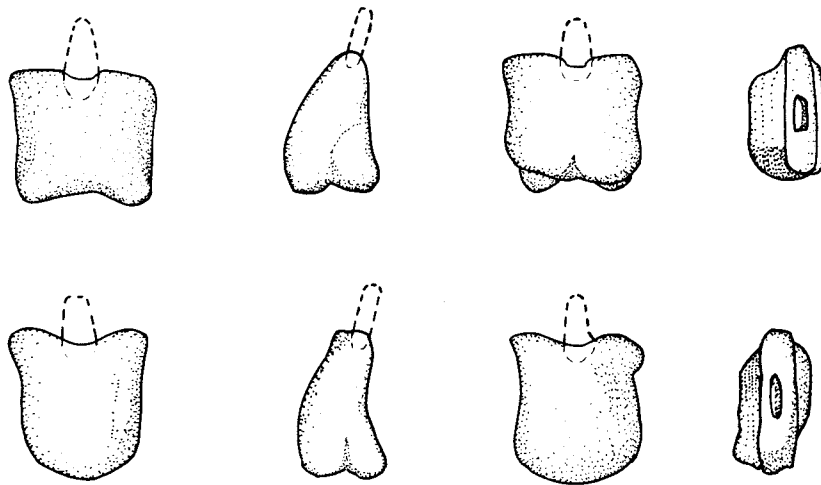


Figure 5. Late Neolithic figurines from Hacilar with pegged wooden heads. Heights: (a) 1.7 cm, (b) 2.0 cm. (After Mellaart 1970b: 508, figs. 233.1-2.)

details, suggesting that heads and faces were not regarded as sketchy and dispensable items used simply to finish off a figurine. Rather, they purposely portrayed a range of emotions, attitudes, or states of being (Hamilton 1996: 220-21).

Greece

Although Neolithic Greece provides us with less spectacular sites and less compelling data underscoring the symbolic importance of unmoored skulls and headless bodies, several examples from both mortuary remains and figurine collections mirror some of the Anatolian practices (Figure 6).

Skulls

By 1997 (the date of the most recent survey of evidence) no more than 400 total burials from 33 sites had been published for the Greek Neolithic (Cavanagh and Mee 1998: 6; see also Jacobsen and Cullen 1981). Given the total number of Neolithic sites from which this sample derives—over 900 sites (Papathanassopoulos 1996: 198-208)—it would seem that Neolithic communities did not

invest their energies in routine burial of the deceased (see Cavanagh and Mee 1998: 6, for a brief discussion of the scarcity of Neolithic burials). Despite this limited evidence, however, secondary burials or cremations entailing preferential selection of the skull are recorded at four sites: Prodomos and Platia Magoula Zarkou, both in western Thessaly; Alepotrypa Cave in the Mani; and Tharrounia on the island of Euboea. The burials at Prodomos date to the Early Neolithic (EN), while the relevant evidence from Alepotrypa Cave, Tharrounia, and Platia Magoula Zarkou dates to the Late or Final Neolithic (LN or FN), significantly later than the Anatolian data surveyed above.

The skulls derive from an array of contexts: house floors; niches along cave walls, graves within cemeteries, and cinerary urns. Excavations beneath one of the houses in the EN settlement of Prodomos, for example, unearthed 'eleven human skulls and a few other broken thigh and rib bones' (Hourmouziadis 1973: 210; see also Hourmouziadis 1971). The mandibles seem to have been deliberately separated from the skulls (Jacobsen and Cullen 1981: 91). The brief reports on this site note that two or three separate levels were recog-



Figure 6. Map of Greek sites discussed in text.

nized beneath the floor of the house, suggesting the residue from ‘at the most two or three ceremonies... whilst the skull count of eleven confirms a collective ceremony’ (Cavanagh and Mee 1998: 9; Hourmouziadis 1971).

The deposition of skulls in Greek caves documented by remains from LN–FN Alepotrypa and Tharrounia appears to be a much later example of skull caching than those reported from Anatolia. The former site, a large and

well-ventilated cave used for habitation, storage, and burials, included both primary and secondary interments, as well as cremations. Ossuary II, one of two areas within the cave containing burials, yielded 14 skulls and numerous other cranial and post-cranial bones of both adults and children from a total of 19 individuals. It is estimated that the cranial bones represent at least twice the number of individuals reflected by the post-cranial sam-

ple (Papathanasiou 1999: 105-106). All skulls appeared to lack mandibles and many were carefully and deliberately placed. Almost all were upright, positioned next to one another and occasionally encircled by stones. One skull was purposely set in the bottom of a broken pithos. Although interpretations vary, it has been argued that the careful arrangement of the skulls reflects a single and collective act of secondary burial carried out at a designated time (Papathanassopoulos 1971; 1996: 175-76; cf. Lambert 1972). Cavanagh and Mee (1998: 120) further observe that, in general, the 'awe-inspiring setting, the large number of human remains, and the cave's relative inaccessibility suggest ritual which reached beyond the local community'. It has not yet been determined, however, whether the residue derives from a single ceremony or multiple rites, nor if the skulls come from one community or a supra-local region.

Tharrounia represents a multi-component site consisting of a cave (Skoteini), a settlement, and a cemetery, the last approximately 400 m southwest of the settlement. Like Alepotrypa, the remains at Skoteini include débris from habitation, storage, and occasional burials; unlike Alepotrypa, however, Skoteini was probably occupied only seasonally. Excavations unearthed one skull in a niche close to the cave wall (Sampson 1992: 68), while two separate graves in the cemetery both contained skulls from secondary burials. According to Sampson (1992: 88), the two graves were smaller and 'differently shaped, compared with the rest', and consisted of shallow pits defined by vertically placed slabs. One grave contained six crania, the other yielded two skulls. Unfortunately, both erosion and intrusive cultivation have left the burials in poor states of preservation.

Less direct, but nonetheless equally valuable, evidence for the use of skulls in particular contexts derives from two other sources: the cremation burials at Platia Magoula Zarkou,

a site in Thessaly that was occupied from the Early through the Late Neolithic, and scattered human bone from the Early through Final Neolithic levels at Franchthi Cave in the Argolid.

Platia Magoula Zarkou produced more than 50 cremation burials dating to the Late Neolithic. The cremations were confined to a cemetery located approximately 300 m north of the settlement. According to published reports, both children (25%) and adults (75%) were cremated, possibly in an area close to the burials. The burned bones were disposed in vases buried upright or inverted in pits, and sometimes surrounded by a few pebbles or positioned on a layer of small stones. While long bones appear among the cremated remains, the preference seems to have been for skulls (Gallis 1982: 234; 1996: 172); one of the cremations also included a headless figurine (Gallis 1982: 228).

Cullen's work on the burials at Franchthi Cave raises a number of interesting points, several of which have relevance for the present study. In particular, she has undertaken a meticulous study of the site's scattered human bones—a class of evidence that is usually ignored or under-reported—in which it is argued that such scatters should be neither dismissed nor facily attributed to random disturbance of primary intramural burials (Cullen 1999; cf. Chapman 2000, for the Balkan Neolithic). While admitting that the nature of such samples is inherently problematic, Cullen (1999: 168) convincingly demonstrates that the scatters from inside the cave, as well as from the adjacent area near the current shoreline (the 'Paralia'), contained skull and lower limb fragments that are 'significantly over-represented in comparison with other bone classes'. While she is careful not to draw categorical conclusions from the data, it is clear that the pattern of (mostly EN and MN) bone scatter at Franchthi is far from random. As Cullen suggests, it is possible that skulls

and lower limbs of the deceased received special treatment at some point during the burial or re-burial process. Until further studies are undertaken on other Neolithic sites in Greece, we cannot know whether the tantalizing evidence from Franchthi is anomalous or typical. Finally, it is worth observing that the EN and MN burials there occasionally reveal preferential treatment of the head in primary burials. At least two EN–MN burials appear to have a stone ‘pillow’ positioned under the skull of the deceased; another EN–MN inhumation revealed a fire pit with dense white ash above the burial, with the deepest portion over the capstone(s) located above the skull (T. Cullen, pers. comm.; Jacobsen and Cullen 1981: 88).

In sum, a particular interest in placing skulls in specific contexts seems to exist in the Greek Neolithic, particularly toward the end of the period. Evidence is unfortunately paltry and understudied, but what data there are suggest that skulls were placed in a variety of mortuary contexts, occasionally in domestic or household contexts, and more commonly in caves that served multiple functions. Unlike Anatolia and the Near East, crania are neither plastered nor painted, and in at least one instance are associated with cremations, suggesting a different set of activities than those practiced further east. Postmortem treatment of the skull does not seem confined to particular ‘age grades’, but a full analysis of the skeletal material has yet to be published.

Figurines

Like the Anatolian examples, Greek anthropomorphic figurines occasionally appear to have been designed to support transposable or detachable heads that could have been periodically switched to accommodate the changing needs of the owners or users. As Chapman has observed, the practice of modelling separate heads that could have been inserted into different bodies was popular in the Balkans as well, particularly from the Rachmani and

Gumelnitsa cultures through the Early Baden period. The evidence from southeast Europe indicates at least two distinct variants: legged torsos with conical perforations designed to accommodate a head on a ceramic or wooden peg, and legless images with completely perforated torsos (see Chapman 2000: 68–79 for a discussion of figurine fragmentation in the Balkan Neolithic and Copper Age).

The latter legless variant is not unlike an unusual type of figurine, usually referred to as ‘acrolithic’, which emerges at several sites in northern Greece during the latter stages of the Neolithic (Figure 7; Hourmouziadis 1973: pls. 64, 77; Gallis and Orphanidis 1996: pls. 115–20). These figures consist of a schematic clay body dominated by a large stone axe-like head occasionally painted with facial features. Very few intact acrolithic figurines have been unearthed and their archaeological contexts are largely undocumented. Several acrolithic figurines, however, were recovered inside a house at the FN site of Rachmani in Thessaly, in association with assemblages suggesting domestic activities (viz. millstones, bone points, polished stone axes, other figurines, ceramic vessels, and remains of lentils and figs [Wace and Thompson 1912: 39–41]).

Although recent studies (Nanoglou 2004) have now identified at least 30 acrolithic figurines/heads, it is possible that these items are under-reported or mistakenly catalogued as stone tools. Without clear indications of paint, these acrolithics can easily be misidentified as axes. It is, however, conceivable that these heads were intentionally designed by the makers and understood by the users to project a metaphor.³ In Neolithic Greece, a stone axe would have served as an eminently suitable cutting tool, whether for ritual activity or more quotidian behaviors. Since the act of decapitation entails cutting, the decision to render the transposable head of a figurine in a form that mimicked or recalled a cutting tool may not have been accidental. The

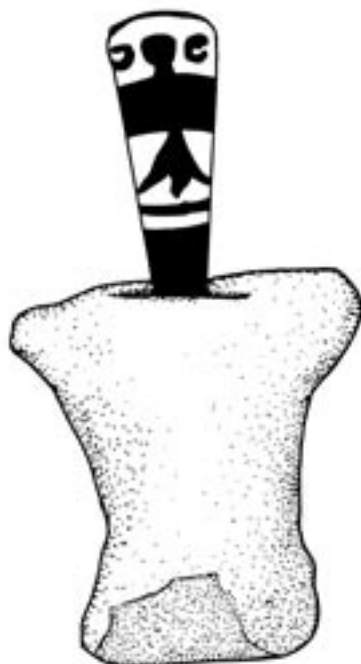


Figure 7. 'Acrolithic' figurines, Rachmani, Greece. Height 5.8 cm. (After Theocharis 1973: 307, fig. 198.)

'personification' of these axes may have been quite calculated, perhaps intended to alert the user to the ritual significance of cutting. The notion of shifting or fluid identities, which I believe underlies the use of transposable heads on figurines, is even more effectively evoked by the use of masks. Powerful symbols of disguise, masks are prevalent in many ethnographic societies for use in public funerals, mourning ceremonies, rites of passage and warfare (Greub 1988). While no masks have been recovered from Neolithic Greece in either domestic or funerary contexts, several unusual clay examples of possible interchangeable 'faces' were unearthed at the site of Achilleion (Gimbutas *et al.* 1989: figs. 7.18, 7.52, table 7.2:11; see also Talalay 1993: pl. 8b, 9b, for a possible mask fragment or 'face pot' from Franchthi Cave). These pieces, which depict a face on the obverse and a concave depression on the reverse, appear to have been designed so that the face could slip on

and off the clay, pillar-like necks (Figure 8). Gimbutas long argued that certain Early and Middle Neolithic figurines, principally from Thessaly and the Balkans, portray masked images, with the mask permanently affixed to a cylindrically-shaped head (Gimbutas 1974: 57-66; Gimbutas *et al.* 1989: figs. 7.20, 7.50; Gallis and Orphanidis 1996: pls. 43, 47, 49, 77-79). Her idea may have some credence and we now have secure evidence that masks occur at least as early as PPNB in the Near East (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988: 23-27).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the chronologically later but interesting case of the decapitated figurine from the Dark Age site of Lefkandi on Euboea. The well-known centaur was discovered in two burials—the head in one grave and the body in a neighboring interment (Themelis 1980: 215-16).

Although the evidence for unmoored heads in Greece differs from that in Anatolia, certain features are shared. Like Anatolia, there

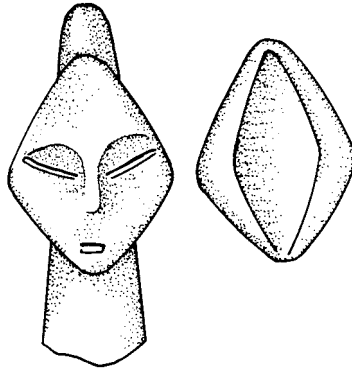


Figure 8. Composite of 'masked' clay figurines from Achilleion, Greece. These figures range from 4-6 cm in height and 2-4 cm in width. (After Gimbutas *et al.* 1989: 181, table 7.2, 11.)

is a decided preference for the skull in secondary interments and for transposable heads on figurines, hinting at the importance of shifting *personae*, probably during ritual performances. In both cases, the head appears to possess identities or personal biographies that were susceptible to manipulation in various contexts.

Taken in aggregate, the evidence from both Anatolia and Greece indicates that the unmoored head surfaces in a range of contexts and forms, no doubt projecting complex and variable meanings. While decoding their precise functions and symbolic intent may elude us, we can, at least, pose new questions by situating the notion of decapitation within the larger conceptual framework of recent studies on fragmentation and the anthropology of the body.

Discussion

The unattached head, in one guise or another, clearly mattered in the early societies of Anatolia and Greece. Postmortem interference with the body's integrity and a distinct interest in fragmenting the body at the neck persisted for approximately two millennia, stretching from the aceramic and Neolithic of southeastern and central Turkey to the latter half of the Greek Neolithic.

Throughout that span of time, severed heads and headless bodies emerge in several aspects of material culture—as two- and three-dimensional depictions, and as specially curated skeletal remains. These varied expressions may reflect some kind of symbolic redundancy. Moreover, disembodied skulls or headless anthropomorphic forms appear in both mortuary and domestic settings, in what we broadly define as artistic iconography, and in more subtle ways on figurines. Crania of the deceased were placed in a range of contexts: public and visible areas such as courtyards and large special-purpose buildings, slightly less accessible locations such as niches in inhabited caves; and more private and hidden locations such as the sub-floors of houses. In EN Greece, skull fragments were purposely selected from cremated remains for placement in secondary burials, and in LN Anatolia the iconography suggests that, at least at Çatalhöyük, headless images figured in ceremonies, mythologies, or social performances. Finally, anthropomorphic figurines from both regions indicate that small clay and stone figures may have been periodically animated or redefined with transposable heads during rituals, dramatic enactments, or whatever occasions might have required shifting personae. Masks may have served comparable purposes in Greece.

The symbolic intent of these disembodied images—be they crania, wall paintings, or transposable figurine heads—certainly had social ramifications. It is not a given, however, that all manifestations of headlessness and disembodied heads were monolithic in meaning. Indeed, the images and skulls may have projected intentional ambiguities or a multiplicity of meanings, not surprising in the context of ritual symbols. Although I have made little distinction in this paper between the headless body and the disembodied head, the differences between the two may have been quite significant to Neolithic communities. We do not know, for example, whether the two modes were set in opposition to one another or whether they were thought of as interchangeable. Nor do we know when a headless body rather than a bodiless head would have been symbolically appropriate. The data are, unfortunately, too meager to let us parse these differences.

Regardless of these uncertainties, it is apparent that the placement of skulls and headless images in definite and specific venues or in association with other objects was not random. Anthropologists are well aware that objects ‘burdened’ with symbolic importance (which work only in special contexts or associations) can have limited effectiveness (Perrois 1990: 54). It is possible, for example, that the unmoored figurine heads were only effective once they were connected to the body of the figure. Perhaps their powers lay dormant, only to be restored after the fragments of the body were temporarily rejoined at the neck. In addition, it may well be that the skulls of the deceased required a limited but particular range of contexts, such as ‘shrine’ platforms, on or under house floors, and (at least in LN–FN Greece) in caves, before their powers could be either contained or rendered accessible to the living. The directions in which skulls faced, or the items they were associated with, may have been equally significant.

The data raise an array of questions: Who was selected for postmortem decapitation and were the decapitations hostile or benignly ceremonial (presumably following natural causes of death)? Were cranial burials related, as argued in the Near East, to ancestor cults and periodic re-affirmations of group identity and control; and if so, were the rituals of decapitation and reburial linked to the rhythms of economic or social stresses? Is the appearance of pairs of decapitated heads or headless images significant; and what are the meanings of the occasional pairing of skulls and headless bodies, or bulls and crania?

While admittedly important questions, I would like to pursue several different lines of inquiry that force us to focus more on the symbolic significance and ‘performative’ aspects of the unmoored head in these early societies. The following discussion, which is speculative, is divided into three short sections: one on possible enactments associated with the final disposition of these skulls, a second on the contribution of fragmentation studies to the current data, and a third on why the head was chosen as the ‘body part of choice’ in these ancient contexts.

The Head and Performance

The notion of ‘performance’ (especially in the field of feminist studies) has been explored by several postmodern scholars, most notably Judith Butler (e.g. 1990a: 134–41; 1990b). Butler focuses on the ‘performativity’ of identity, arguing that the social realities of identity are never given, but continually created. Gender, for example, is not a stable entity; it must be repeatedly performed in one way or another—linguistically, gesturally, and symbolically—in order to secure its existence. Marilyn Strathern’s extensive ethnographic research in Melanesia (e.g. 1988) underscores related, though by no means identical, notions about bodily identities, gender, and social *personae*. According to Strathern, the body is not

viewed in those societies as bounded, stable, and indivisible; both the body and attendant *personae* are neither fixed nor essentialized. Rather, they are perceived as in flux, needing to be drawn out or revealed through ongoing personal interactions and activities (see also Busby 1997). Both these writers, as well as other scholars, suggest that gender, along with other kinds of identities—some intimately connected to or expressed through the body—are social constructions, which are susceptible to renewal and revision over time.

Although the basic outlines of these complex theories and the concept of ‘performance’, particularly as linked to concepts of gender, might seem, at first glance, unrelated to the topic of untethered heads in early Anatolian and Greek societies, they are broadly instructive, and can help reframe or redirect our thinking. These models suggest that the body is a powerful, complex, and often unstable social symbol that is frequently employed to draw out and explicate multifaceted identities through repeated action. Various kinds of performative activities require the use of the body, and serve to remind or instruct individuals about expected behaviors, beliefs, or social roles. While we cannot determine the kinds of identities symbolized or expressed by the head in the Neolithic cultures of Anatolia and Greece, we can explore how the head was used to refract social constructs. In particular, we can consider whether the archaeological evidence reveals patterns hinting at specific performances and displays that involved the use of this unattached body parts. Were images of the head, severed skulls, or headless bodies used in ongoing displays or repeated actions, suggesting that they served, perhaps, as ‘agents’ for the living? Was there what we might call a *habitus* of the head?

The data are indeed suggestive. For example, the long-term maintenance of the Çayönü ossuary and the deposition of hundreds of skulls within that structure over time sug-

gest that both careful management and some kind of ‘calendar of events’ must have been associated with these skulls. At the very least, individuals or collectives would have been required to oversee the arrangements for initial burial or excarnation, the subsequent retrieval of dismembered elements, and the final installation of skulls or post-cranial remains in their permanent resting place. It is reasonable to imagine a series of ‘performative’ steps involved in this sequence: severing of the head possibly after natural body decomposition or excarnation, occasional painting or reconfiguring of the skull, transporting the skull to the designated location, and creating a final resting space with all the required associated assemblages. Since secondary burials often involve ceremonies and periodic displays of conspicuous consumption (Hertz 1907; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Carr and Knüsel 1997), it is conceivable that rituals of some sort accompanied the various stages in the Çayönü mortuary calendar. Various scholars have proposed that, in the Levant, collective rituals or festivals associated with secondary burials and skull caching possibly served as powerful social regulators, intended to preserve community cohesion and periodically reaffirm social identities, kin-owned territory, or ancestral ties (e.g. Rollefson and Kohler-Rollefson 1989; Hershkovitz and Gopher 1990; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1990; Byrd and Monahan 1995; Kuijt 1996). Whether the ossuary from Çayönü reflects comparable rituals remains unknown. Nor can we determine whether the ossuaries represent the ‘ultimate stop’ for local kin and ancestors as opposed to a designated location for trophy heads procured through raids on rival communities. What we can suggest, however, is that these heads were linked to lengthy and probably intricate activities, intensive building construction, long-term display (whether private or public is not known) and, as the blood studies cited above indicate, activities that must have

included cutting, cleaning, 'ritual' slaughter of select categories of animals, and multiple participants.

Although the treatment and placement of a few crania at such sites as Hacilar, Nevalı Çori and Köşk Höyük also necessarily involved long-term planning, the scale is entirely different. The evidence hints at smaller, more private, and perhaps family-based affairs. In both cases, however, the detaching, treatment, and placing of the skull are likely to have included various kinds of 'performances' that reinforced the values and meanings embedded in the head.

Not all crania from Anatolian settlements were buried and, consequently, removed from public (or private) view or inspection. As noted above, single crania or small clusters of skulls were situated in visible loci, such as courtyards, 'shrine' platforms, or house floors. Both the ethnographic record and classical texts offer interesting parallels for such practices. Headhunters, for example, typically display their trophies in obvious areas such as verandahs, portals, or the main post of a house, and ancestral skulls are often left in conspicuous or accessible venues (e.g. Codrington 1881: 308; Woodthorpe 1882: 205; Godden 1897: 180; Bennett 1899: 87; Chalmers 1903: 123; Tilley 1989: 240-41). Among the Dowayos of northern Cameroon, who believe that the spirits of ancestors inhere in the skull, male skulls are stored in skull-houses, which are open to restricted sectors of the population during designated ceremonies (Barley 1983: 15, 83-85, 99-103, 106-107). According to one classical author, Kleomenes of Sparta kept the head of his friend in a vessel of honey and consulted it before every undertaking (Onians 1954: 101, citing Aelian, *Varia Historia* XII, 8). This practice is not unlike that of the Russian Yukaghir, who place the skulls of revered shamans in wooden boxes and consult them before all manner of expeditions, including trips, hunts, or wars (Jochelson 1975: 163-65). Skulls need

not be complete to retain important powers. The Fang from equatorial Guinea, for example, fragment the skull of certain individuals, distributing the resulting pieces among designated individuals. Such distributions prohibit the uneven procurement of authority among the living, especially as it is passed from fathers to sons (Vander Linden n.d.).

Particularly intriguing in the context of unburied and possibly displayed skulls are the two examples (cited above) from Hacilar that were carefully propped up on virgin soil, and were probably visible to those who frequented the space. Were these heads part of a ritual linked to the founding of the settlement? If so, did they represent ancestors or protective spirits or serve some other function? Dedicatory or foundation rituals involving the burial of objects or skeletal remains are known from other Neolithic contexts in the Mediterranean (e.g. Makkay 1983; Gallis 1983; 1985), and ethnographers document the placement of skulls under the central posts of newly erected houses in order to placate soil genii (e.g. Evans 1922: 159-60). In the Hacilar case, it is conceivable that the future stability and prosperity of the new community was associated with the careful arrangement of the two skulls and their individual or collective powers.

Several other inferences that are broadly related to the notions of display and performance arise from further consideration of the data. First, the Greek and Anatolian evidence indicates that very little physical distance was maintained between the skulls of the dead and the living community. For the most part, this particular part of the body was kept close at hand—under a house floor, visible in a courtyard, or placed with 'companion' skulls inside a prominent structure within the settlement. The extant iconography also suggests that skulls or headless bodies, in various forms, were part of the visual vocabulary of the living. This seems to imply, then, that the living needed

to maintain a web of relationships with the deceased, particularly with the disembodied head. Ongoing interactions between the living and the deceased were required to preserve certain identities or powers. Given not only the proximity of the deceased skulls to the living, but the extensive activities involved in preparing and transporting various body parts, particularly the head, to their final resting place, I would argue that, as Thomas (2000: 662) has stated in another context, 'although the dead were no longer social agents, they were actively involved in the production of social relationships'.

If we imagine the head moving through a series of performative acts, some questions follow: Did the head take on different and shifting dimensions as it travelled through the transitional stages from severance to burial? Could it metaphorically still see, talk, hear, or smell (ethnographies suggest that the heads of deceased still retain some of these powers)? Did those most closely linked to these rituals or activities somehow partake of the identities once embodied by the head? In other words, were any of the social personae originally associated with the head of the living viewed as permeable or transferable (a situation that has ethnographic analogues)?⁴ Conversely, did the burial of a headless body imply that its powers were effectively removed?

Fragmented Bodies

A slightly different, but related, set of questions arise from situating the data within the context of recent work on fragmentation. Like Strathern, Chapman (2000: 28-29) suggests that different parts of the body may relate to different aspects of the 'fractured' (or divided) self, and in turn, to different social or cultural concepts. This idea becomes more layered when we acknowledge that objects and people often have dialectical relationships. It is not just parts of the body that may be linked to individual or group identities, but also a wide

array of objects, both whole and fragmented. Objects become attached to people and are constitutive of those individuals; every object, whole or part, is distinct, carrying with it a personal biography and complex cultural memories, recalling the individuals who created, worked with, or used it (Chapman 2000: 28). Certainly, ethnographies support the idea that societies often create a blurring of human-object boundaries. This blurring or entanglement of categories is particularly significant when we look at the Anatolian and Greek evidence. Was the detached head, skull, or decapitated body viewed as an object or a human, a symbol of an individual, once living and formerly associated with a particular person, or of a more complex, fractured, and collective identity now linked to death, the larger realm of deceased ancestors, or some other liminal world? When attached to the body, the head is readily recognizable as an individual, who likely partook of many roles or identities in society. Once the head was detached, however, and no longer 'living' in our Western biological sense, was it seen as a particular individual, a collective symbol, or an object with other multiple meanings? What social memories were projected by decapitated images, and were those memories different for different segments of the population?

Whereas some cultures believe that fragmenting an object or dissolving its integrity can ritually or symbolically atomize its power, I suspect that perceptions were more nuanced in Neolithic Anatolia and Greece. The untethered head emerges as an important symbol in these regions precisely because its identity and powers were perceived not only as persisting after detachment but also as moving into a new symbolic domain. Attached, the head cannot be easily objectified and manipulated; it is not usually a source of contention or ownership. Rather, it remains a stationary and uncontested part of a single individual. Once disengaged from its body, however, the skull or

image of an unmoored head can be controlled, transported to different venues, hidden, highlighted, or associated with various and changing objects. While it technically may lose its corporeal sensibilities, the disembodied head is not necessarily reduced to the status of a 'lesser' object, a simple or enfeebled reflection of its former incarnation. Severing the head from the body generates, in a sense, a new life for this part of the human form. Deciding how to curate the crania, where to house them, whether to situate them in groups, pairs, or singly helps (re)define the skulls' particular roles, allowing them to mediate between the living and the dead. As suggested above, the transposable figurine heads reflected, perhaps, a comparable underlying concept: once the head was severed from the body, it became susceptible to a series of manipulations. In the case of anthropomorphic figurines (or masks), we can propose that the transposable head was eminently useful for displaying changing identities in ritual contexts. Other 'performances', perhaps also related to notions of identity, were possibly enacted as the skull(s) of the deceased made its journey within the settlement to a final place of rest.

Importance of the Head

Finally, it is useful to end where we began: stressing the general significance of the head in the overall 'landscape of the body'. Traditional ethnographies provide a useful entrée into this discussion. The literature suggests that the significance attributed to the head ranges from wisdom and virility to personhood and fertility (Freeman 1979: 236). In Celtic cultures, for example, the head plays a central role in ideology, viewed as the seat of understanding and the source of strength, while, in ancient Greek myth and religion, the decapitated head is consulted for its prophetic knowledge (Onians 1954: 100-101, 156-58). In Hindu mythology, where beheading is seldom fatal, severed heads transposed

onto the wrong bodies act as metaphors for the forbidden mingling of castes and sexualities (Doniger 1995). Among the Suku of Zaire, cups in the shape of human heads are sacred, reserved for the headman; all other tribe members are forbidden to touch this sign of office without permission (Greub 1988: 80). For the Dogon of Africa, who physically structure their village in the shape of a human lying on its back, the buildings that represent the head are reserved for the men's Council huts, where the 'head business' of the village is conducted (Griaule 1965: 95-96). And, as noted above, trophy heads procured after battle or in head-hunting usually underscore the importance of valor, bravery, and manhood, providing societies lacking hereditary rank with a system of social prestige. A slightly different interpretation of trophy head-taking is seen among the Iban of Borneo, where the severed head is directly linked to the notion of fertility and germination (Freeman 1979); trophy heads contain seeds, which, when sown, bud into a human crop.

These examples provide only a sampling of the range of ethnographic evidence. What is important is that the head, more than any other part of the body (except, perhaps, the hand), consistently insinuates itself into the discourses of cultures. Couched in postmodern terms, the ethnographic examples suggest that the head was viewed as a discursive element of the body—it reflected and helped construct complex ideologies. Moreover, the head's presence, absence, adornment, and modification in various contexts and guises were regularly used to affirm, deny, submerge, or give voice to individual and collective powers or identities. Those identities, however, could be fluid, or transferable even after death; indeed, the ethnographic examples cited above indicate that, for many cultures, fragmenting the body at the neck is not necessarily connected to the notion of death, but rather to the concept of continuity and rebirth.

As Meskell (2000: 21) observed, the human form is a complex composite of many parts as well as an interface between different domains: the biological and the social, the collective and the individual, structure and agent, cause and meaning. I would argue that the head is a particularly significant element of this complex composite and one whose unique qualities did not escape the ancients. Evidence for skull burials or special postmortem treatment of the head extend back at least to the Mesolithic in Europe and perhaps several hundred thousand years earlier, depending on how certain cut-marks on skulls are interpreted (Parker Pearson 1999: 154-56). We even have on an Egyptian writing board, which may date to the 22nd Dynasty, a schoolboy's flawed copy of the beginning of a tale in which the parts of the body squabble about their relative importance. The head argues that it should come out, as it were, on top (Erman 1966: 173-74). Part of this universal interest in the head may lie in the fact that many of our senses reside therein. It is the body part par excellence most closely intertwined with an array of human capacities (e.g. sight, hearing, smell, taste, speech). Indeed, it is through various features of the head that humans experience much of the world.

The observations and interpretations provided in this paper, while perhaps controversial, offer a first step in exploring how we might refocus our thinking about decapitation in Neolithic Greece and Anatolia, and how that reframing might be relevant for similar practices elsewhere in the Mediterranean and the ancient Near East. This paper has raised many more questions than answers, and much more context-specific and fine-grained research is obviously needed before we can make substantial progress in our analyses. In the meantime, I have tried to show that future discussions can benefit from adopting a broad perspective and looking for evidence that cross-cuts various aspects of material culture. Although we cannot, at this stage, penetrate behind the

complex scrim of meanings embodied by the data, it is reasonable to suggest that Neolithic inhabitants of Anatolia and Greece were well aware that the head, particularly when severed from the body, was an extraordinarily rich and flexible text that could be variously remembered and re-presented to suit an array of purposes.

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Readings in Cavafy (Athens: Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, 2002).

Notes

1. The chronologies of Neolithic Anatolia and Greece are a matter of much debate. Although few dates are explicitly mentioned in this text, it is grounded in an underlying chronological framework based on a series of radiocarbon determinations. For Anatolia, the reader is directed to discussions by Mellink (1992b), who uses uncalibrated dates, and Yakar (1991) who provides both calibrated and uncalibrated radiocarbon dates; for Greece, the reader is directed to Coleman (1992), who gives calibrated dates. The following divisions are based on their discussions—Anatolia (uncalibrated C-14 dates): Aceramic: 7600–6600 (aceramic Hacilar, Çayönü, Nevalı Çori); Early Neolithic: 6600–6000 (Çatal levels XII–IX); Late Neolithic (earlier phases): 6000–5600 (Çatal levels VIII–II; Köşk Hüyük Level III); Late Neolithic (later phases): 5600–5000 (Hacilar IX–VI). Greece (calibrated with standard deviation of 1 σ): Early Neolithic: 6400–5700; Middle Neolithic: 5700–5300; Late Neolithic I: 5300–4300; Late Neolithic II (or Final Neolithic): 4300–3700.
2. Excavators at Nahal Hemar Cave in Israel recovered a rare and well-preserved collection of anthropoid bone heads, which were also probably inserted into figurine bodies. Most of these bone heads, which appear to be male, were repainted, possibly over time, often with the addition of a lime-plaster beard. The repainting is viewed as evidence for 'sequential modification, either as part of isolated ritual events or as a representation of the biological cycle in which human males age and their beards grow grey' (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988: 23).
3. I would like to thank Lars Holten for this insight. He first suggested the idea of the possible 'personification' of axes.

4. The idea of enduring identities embodied in a severed head is particularly striking in the case of the Marind-Amin of lowland New Guinea. One of the main motivations for head-hunting expeditions in that society is the need to obtain new names that can be passed on to young boys (van Baal 1966: 676). Not only are the boys given the names of the head-hunting victims at an initiation ceremony, but they acquire the 'powers of growth and vitality contained in the head' of the deceased. The victim's kin even treat the young initiates as the incarnation of their relatives. Among this group, then, personal and social identity, as symbolized by the head, is conceived as transferable (Harrison 2002: 215).

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