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AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF PREHISTORIC BODIES AND EMBODIED IDENTITIES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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Front cover: Chalcolithic cruciform figurine from Pomos, Cyprus (Cyprus Museum, 1934/III-2/2). Photograph courtesy of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.Back cover image courtesy of Athens, National Archaeological Museum.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The essays included in this volume were originally presented at the conference *Embodied Identities in the Prehistoric Eastern Mediterranean: Convergence of Theory and Practice,* which was held in Nicosia, Cyprus on 10–12 April 2012. The idea to organise an international conference that focused on the body stemmed from the realisation that many of us archaeologists working in the eastern Mediterranean often touch on the subject of bodies, each in his or her own field of expertise, but rarely are the results of our research discussed within a common framework of the archaeology of the body. The aims of the conference were threefold: (a) to instigate a dialogue between archaeologists who study aspects relating to the body, (b) to encourage archaeologists working in the eastern Mediterranean to reappraise archaeological evidence through body-focused theoretical and methodological approaches, and (c) to highlight the way an archaeology of the body can contribute to a nuanced understanding of prehistoric cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. By encouraging the contributors to discuss their topics with relevance to their particular sets of data, we also aimed to bridge the gap that occasionally occurs between the discipline's often ambitious theoretical pursuits and the actual application of methodological strategies on the archaeological record.

Recent archaeological research has raised awareness about the relevance of the body in understanding collective and individual identities, shared or subjective experiences, symbolic meanings, existential perceptions, and social and cultural practices in past societies. This growing interest in body-focused research is also reflected in the bibliography related to the eastern Mediterranean, as indicated by the works of Hamilakis (2004; 2012), Knapp and Meskell (1997), Morris and Peatfield (2002), Meskell and Joyce (2003), Malafouris (2008), Lorentz (2009), Bulger and Joyce (2012), Simandiraki-Grimshaw (2015), to name but a few. This collection of essays, therefore, aims to contribute to past and ongoing archaeological research in the eastern Mediterranean that relates to the role of the body and embodiment in shaping prehistoric identities. The publication of this volume also reflects the conference's original scope which was to connect archaeologists working in the eastern Mediterranean, beyond the regional limits of their area of expertise, to the broader debates currently contested in the archaeology of the body. Furthermore, the essays included in this volume throw new light on already known and even new sets of data of the prehistoric eastern Mediterranean, but also open up the field to a discourse with archaeologists working in different parts of the world.

The content of the volume reflects the range of themes that were originally presented at the conference and portrays a picture of the areas of interest that occupy archaeologists working in the eastern Mediterranean. Regarding the organisation of the book, we have deliberately avoided grouping the essays according to chronological or regional criteria that would only serve to reproduce the restrictions of old scholarly traditions. By breaking down regional or chronological barriers, therefore, the volume brings together essays that highlight how different sets of data can contribute to our knowledge about themes that pertain to the perception, construction and performance of prehistoric identities. A final point that should be addressed is that the volume is heavily dominated by essays largely written by archaeologists trained in the Anglo-American tradition that focus on the archaeology of the Aegean and Cyprus. Admittedly, we deeply regret the absence of essays on the archaeology of the Balkans (with the exception of Greece), Anatolia, the Levant and the north-eastern African coast, which is nevertheless telling about the dominant trends in the research pursuits in these archaeological fields, the deeply rooted scholarly traditions, and even the hindrances that may be caused by the current state of political affairs in the wider region. Another trend that is apparent in the range of essays included in the volume is a heavy bias towards the Bronze Age, as opposed to earlier periods, which on one hand may be explained in relation to the availability of archaeological evidence, but on the other may also betray archaeologists uneasiness to apply body-centred theory to a less "robust" archaeological record.

Lastly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to our guest speakers at the conference, Professors John Robb and Kostas Kotsakis, who offered constructive comments at the conference discussion and for contributing their essays

to this volume. We are also indebted to members of the Scientific Committee who provided useful advice in the process of preparing the conference, namely S. Andreou, J. Bennet, C. Broodbank, M. Iakovou, K. Kotsakis, O. Kouka, P. Kourou, L. Meskell, D. Michaelides, D. Pilides, J. Robb, J. Sofaer and J. Whitley. We would also like to thank the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of Cyprus for hosting the event and the members of staff of the University for their logistical and technical support, as well as Dr O. Kouka for her help with the smooth running of the conference, and Dr S. Phillips for his advice and support. Thanks are also due to the funding organisations and bodies that offered financial support for the organisation of the conference: INSTAP, the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus, the University of Cyprus and the Cyprus Tourism Organisation. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute and the following hotels in Cyprus for offering subsidised accommodation prices to the conference participants: the Holiday Inn, Castelli Hotel, The Cleopatra Hotel, The Classic Hotel, Centrum Hotel and Europa Hotel.

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Headshaping and Identity at Tell Nader

Konstantinos Kopanias and Sherry C. Fox

Human skeletal data are presented in this chapter within the context of the archaeological data from the site of Tell Nader in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to help elucidate long-standing questions of cultural dynamics. In particular, a form of circumferential headshaping has been found in the skeleton of an adult female recovered from the Ubaid site. It is suggested from the integrated results of the study of the human remains in their cultural context that the intentionally produced modification of the cranium recovered from the archaeological site of Tell Nader is linked to group identity in the Ubaid.

Tell al Ubaid is the name of a small site in southern Mesopotamia where a particular black-painted buff pottery was discovered in 1919 (Hall and Woolley 1927). Later excavations unearthed pottery of this style in stratigraphic layers mainly of the 6th and the 5th millennia BC in many sites in southern and northern Mesopotamia, eastern Iran, northern Syria, and southeastern Turkey (map with sites: Carter and Philip 2010a, viii). It is generally thought that pottery of the Ubaid style first appeared in southern Mesopotamia already in the late seventh millennium and gradually spread to the rest of this vast geographic area. The term Ubaid refers not only to this particular pottery category, but also to the contemporaneous chronological period (late 7th–5th millennium BC), as well as to the associated material culture (Stein 2010, 23).

The cultural affinity of the Ubaid sites is indeed not restricted only to the black-on-buff pottery, but includes also the following finds: tripartite buildings, niched-and-buttressed public buildings, communal cemeteries (Carter and Philip 2010b, 4), clay "ophidian figurines" (in southern Mesopotamia), clay nails (with unknown use), flanged clay disks (probably attached on garments as ornaments, as seen on figurines; *e.g.* Daems 2010, 151, fig. 10.3), conical pottery rings and horn-shaped small clay objects (probably used for body piercing). The dietary practices seem also to have been similar, as suggested by the available archaeobotanical evidence (Pollock 2010), but also the fact that very similar vase types were in use in the Ubaid sites. Beer production and consumption is also thought to be a recurring common trait (Joffe 1998). It is evident that, despite the various regional variations, the inhabitants of the Ubaid settlements shared a common way of life.

The oldest occurrence of the Ubaid material culture occurs in southern Mesopotamia in newly founded sites during the later part of the 7th millennium BC. In the case of Tell Awayli, the pottery in the Ubaid 0 layer seems to have been influenced by the Samarra pottery from northern Mesopotamia (McIntosh 2005, 58), which indicates that a movement of people could have taken place at that time from north to south. The Ubaid material culture spreads again to the north only after the middle of the 6th millennium BC and gradually replaces the Halaf culture (Roaf 1998, 53). That is why in many older publications, southern Mesopotamia is usually considered to be the core of this culture and its spread was explained as the result of a migration; some even imply that a colonisation took place, in a comparable way to the so-called Uruk expansion of the 4th millennium BC (Oates 2010). More recent studies give emphasis to the regional diversity of this material culture and prefer to explain the Ubaid phenomenon within a model of "hybridiastion", rather than "acculturation", migration, or colonisation (Carter and Philip 2010b, 7). The main argument against the association of the Ubaid material culture to a particular people is its huge geographical distribution, from western Iran to southeast Anatolia and the Mediterranean shores of Syria; it seems very improbable that a single people would have been able to colonise this

vast area. Also the transition from Halaf to Ubaid was gradual and without any hiatus in northern Mesopotamia (Campbell and Fletcher 2010), a fact that speaks against the idea of a violent invasion from the south.

Before theorising, however, a closer examination is needed of the hard evidence at hand. In addition to the scarcity of data, which is often overlooked, is the ambiguity the data present. The important Ubaid sites of Tepe Gawra and Arpachiyah, are presented as examples from northeastern Mesopotamia, east of the Tigris. East of the Great Zab, there is only Qalinj Agha in the city of Erbil, although older investigations of the Directorate of Antiquities of Iraq located a total of 35 Ubaid sites between the Great and the Little Zab (Vértesalji 1984, 164, table 7). These sites have been called Ubaid, even though, apparently in most cases, no more than a few surface sherds of Ubaid pottery were found. Even among excavated sites, like Qalinj Agha, and the extensively excavated sites of Tepe Gawra and Arpachiyah, the lack of documentation of essential information inhibits attempts for accurate interpretations. There is doubtless fact that a significant amount of Ubaid pottery has been unearthed from these sites, but its relationship to locally produced non-Ubaid pottery is less well understood. Additionally, the number of the contemporary sites with only locally produced, undecorated non-Ubaid pottery (which in fact still remains undated) is unknown. Another factor that renders such distribution maps rather problematic is the preference of archaeologists and our criteria for the selection of excavations sites. This is also the case of Tell Nader (excavated since 2011) and Tell Surezha (excavated since 2013) in the Erbil province, which were selected because Ubaid pottery was discovered on the surface. According to the Directorate of Antiquities of the Erbil province, a total of 3000 archaeological sites lie within their jurisdiction, but nothing is known about contemporary non-Ubaid sites. Surface surveys cannot reveal these sites, at least not without knowledge about the undecorated and locally produced pottery of this region.

We should not underestimate the fact that the similarities in the Ubaid material culture are not only evident in the public aspects of life (tripartite building, communal cemeteries), but also in private everyday life (dietary customs, as well as the use of clay nails, flanged disks, conical rings and horn-shaped objects). Those who reject the idea that the Ubaid culture was connected to a particular group of people, have proposed several theories, in order to explain why different people would choose to adopt this particular way of life:

1. the Ubaid culture was adopted by their elites, as a means to form communal identity and consolidate their social status; but the elites in the 6th and 5th millennia BC do remain elusive so far (Carter and Philip 2010b, 12–3).
2. the Ubaid was spread, because of the need to create an extensive trade network for the import of needed raw and also exotic material (Stein and Özbal 2007, 332). Nevertheless, the imported materials in Ubaid sites were relatively rare and even the use of obsidian was very restricted (Healey 2010, 183–6, pls 13.1–4). There is absolutely no evidence, which suggests that extensive trade networks existed in the Ubaid period. It is in the opinion of the authors that the trade of obsidian was more probably not conducted by "professional traders", but was mainly in the hands of nomadic populations, regularly moving between southeastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia.

Based on the available data, the safest assumption would be to associate the Ubaid material culture to a particular group of tribes, who spread throughout the Near East and formed more or less isolated clusters of settlements. This migration was in no way similar to the Uruk trade network of the 4th millennium BC, but was probably more similar to the migration of the Aramaic people during the late 2nd and early 1st millennia BC. There is in fact a relatively new argument, which could be used in favour of this interpretation, namely the use of headshaping.

Headshaping and the study of the human remains

As Pollock (2011, 31) recently noted "until quite recently, archaeologists working in the Near East tended to ignore human remains, focusing instead almost solely on the construction of tombs and provisioning of the dead with grave goods". It could be added that the hunt for cuneiform inscriptions is still present among some archaeologists in the region. In addition to an emphasis on architecture and artifacts in Near Eastern archaeology, scientific investigations of archaeological sites, including bioarchaeological research, have been limited. The authors are not underestimating the importance of information gleaned from inscriptions, architecture and pottery; rather they are attempting to emphasise what can be gained from a careful study of human skeletal remains. Buikstra *et al.* (2011, 14) state that:

> "until recently, remnant bodies of past individuals were treated only sporadically in archaeological investigations of embodiment and the life course. Given the direct, fine-grained information that both mummified and skeletal human remains can provide about embodied lives in the past as well as their commonplace recovery from archaeological contexts, this oversight is surprising … Only more recently have scholars begun to expand this line of inquiry, in terms of body modification and adornment, sex and gender and age".

More specific to the region, Pollock (2011) continues:

> "the result of this neglect of bioarchaeological evidence can be seen in the sparse data available on most Halaf-period human remains, which are principally reported in terms of their more strictly 'archaeological' characteristics".

The study of the human remains from Tell Nader allows for a better understanding of the way of life of the people from the site. One discovery among the remains of an adult female from the site, in particular, provides evidence for headshaping. Headshaping is a permanent form of body modification and it was presumably initiated by the family of a child by applying bindings to its head in infancy. It is known in many different forms among various cultures around the world, and at different times from prehistory to the present, and in addition to marking individual identity, headshaping can indicate social status, gender, as well as tribal identity (Croucher 2010; Lorentz 2010; for an extensive discussion of embodiment as it pertains to body modification, see Lorentz, this volume).

Lorentz (2009) lists 14 Ubaid sites or sites dating to around the time of the Ubaid in present-day Turkey (Degirmentepe, Sey Hoyuk), Iran (Tepe Ghenil, Ganj Dareh, Tepe Abdul Hosein, Ali Kosh, Seh Gabi, Shaga Sefid, Qumrud, Choga Mish), and Iraq (Eridu, Tell Arpachiyah, Telul-eth Thalathat, and Tell Madhur) with human remains demonstrating circumferential forms of headshaping. The vast majority of these sites are published, although the majority of sites from the Ubaid (about two-thirds of the total number of known sites), for a number of reasons do not possess human remains demonstrating headshaping, (*i.e.* poor preservation, human remains either not recovered or not saved *etc*.). It could be additionally argued that this form of headshaping, at least as depicted in an adult male from perhaps Middle Bronze Age Enkomi, in Cyprus, demonstrates a circumferential form of headshaping produced by two bands (Lorentz 2009, 80, fig. 5.2). The extent of the practice at Enkomi or whether this individual originated from somewhere else remains to be determined. What is certain, however, is that Tell Nader must now be added to the growing list of Ubaid period sites demonstrating a circumferential form of headshaping. Although the reconstruction of the position of the bindings belonging to the adult woman recovered from a disused kiln at Tell Nader may vary somewhat from the standard reference, it nevertheless demonstrates the value of bioarchaeological analyses and also documents that headshaping existed in northern Mesopotamia during the late 5th millennium BC.

Archaeological context from Tell Nader

To date, two excavation seasons have taken place in Tell Nader (2011–12). Several pyrotechnic clay constructions were revealed, which belong to the same chronological horizon, namely, the Late Ubaid, including a two-chambered sun-dried clay construction with irregular walls (probably a kiln), a small clay oval-shaped oven, a circular clay oven, a circular arrangement of pebbles, and a concentration of large river stones (Fig. 20.1) (Kopanias *et al.* 2014). The site has produced thus far all typical find categories expected in Ubaid sites (pottery, clay nails, labrets *etc*.). Under a concentration of small stones, two more circular clay kilns were discovered. The western one was damaged. Within the eastern one, there was an inhumation burial of an adult woman ("Skeleton 2") with her head oriented to the west (Fig. 20.2). Her legs were flexed, her hands positioned under her breast and belly, but strangely, her body was in a prone position with her face facing into the ground. The kiln was too small for the body, so her feet stuck out. The impression given is that the female was placed inside the kiln without a great deal of care. Her prone position was, nonetheless, intentional. Several pieces of clay were found near her head, an indication that the soil was thrown very carelessly on the dead body. No funerary offerings were found inside the grave, with the exception of three dog teeth, all from different animals.

Bioarchaeological analysis

The excavation of "Skeleton 2" was carried out by S. Fox, M. Koutsoubou and A. Hadjikoumis. The skeleton was transported to Athens and its study took place at the Wiener Laboratory of the American School of Classical Studies. The cranium was reconstructed, the remains were photographed, pathological material was radiographed, the skull was CT-scanned, and select samples were taken for radiocarbon and stable isotope analyses (Fig. 20.3). The right lower leg from "Skeleton 2" was not recovered, and although virtually complete, this skeleton is also in a poor state of preservation. Following completion of the study, "Skeleton 2" has been returned to Erbil and is now kept at the Civilisation Museum. The sex of this adult is female based upon pelvic and cranial morphologies. Her age at death appears to be 25–39 years based upon pelvic morphologies as defined by Lovejoy *et al.* (1985). In particular, the auricular surface morphologies of her ilia were examined and it was found that the left auricular surface appears to be a Phase 4 (35–39 years) when compared to the right (Phase 2/3, or 25–34 years at the age of death). Her stature could be reconstructed to 163.9 cm+4.6 cm (5' 2 3/4"–5' 6 1/4") based upon the length of her left ulna (24.1 cm) using the formula developed by Trotter and Gleser (1958). Thirteen teeth were recovered from "Skeleton 2", including eight teeth and an additional root within the mandible (#17–#20, root only of #23 as crown is lost postmortem, #27, #30–#32) along with the following loose teeth: #6, #22, #24, #26, and #29. Attrition

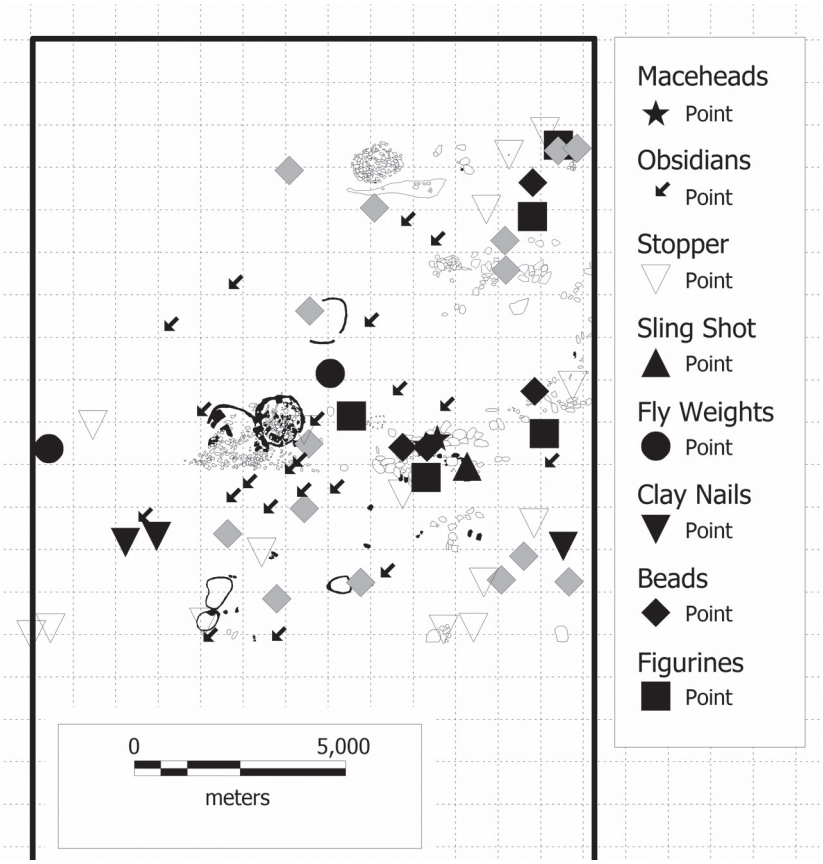

Figure 20.1: Tell Nader. Plan of Layers 1, 2a–c and finds (plan drawn by K. Kopanias).

Figure 20.2: Tell Nader. Kiln with burial (photograph and drawing by K. Kopanias. 3D-reconstruction by L. Kopania).

is not pronounced. Evidence in the form of dental enamel hypoplasias of the mandibular right canine, which is rotated distally, demonstrates a disturbance of growth during infancy or early childhood, perhaps from malnutrition, fever, or a constitutional disorder. Unfortunately, the poorly preserved remains, including samples from both mid-shaft cortical bone of a femur and a premolar tooth have failed to produce radiocarbon dates at the University of Arizona's radiocarbon laboratory. Stable nitrogen isotope analysis to aid in dietary reconstruction, was conducted at the University of Oxford, and similarly produced no results. The collagen is simply too degraded from the skeleton.

Conservator, Michel Roggenbucke, painstakingly reconstructed the poorly preserved cranium of "Skeleton 2". The reconstruction has led to a couple of discoveries, including the presence of extrasutural bones within the lambdoidal suture. What is clearly depicted, as has been mentioned previously, is evidence that this woman had been headshaped in infancy, likely during the first two years of her life. Additionally, a well-healed circular depressed cranial fracture, approximately 2 cm in diameter, was found on her right parietal near the parietal foramen and the sagittal suture (Fig. 20.4). There is no indication that the inner table was affected by the cranial

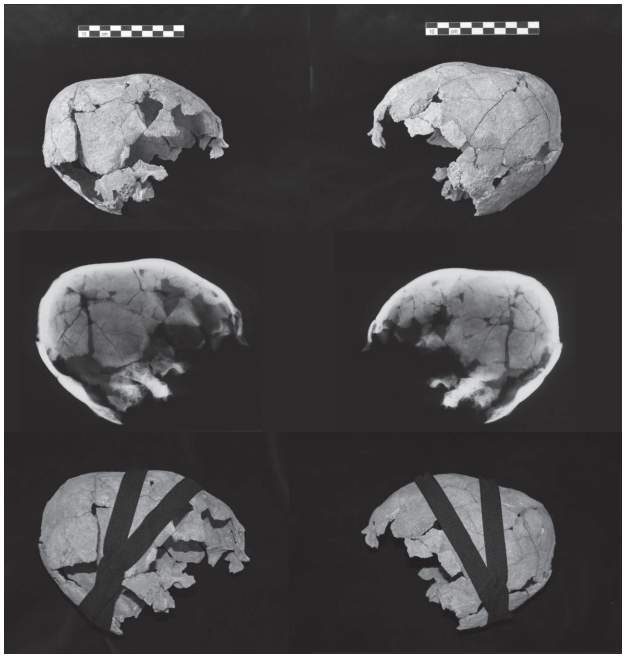

Figure 20.3: Tell Nader. Cranium with headshaping (photographs and X-rays taken by S. Fox).

trauma although interpretations are being made about the effects of this trauma on this individual's life (Kopanias *et al.* 2014).

Conclusions about "Skeleton 2"

With regard to "Skeleton 2" from Tell Nader, no other prone burials are known from the Ubaid, nor are other burials within kilns known to the authors from this time period. The lack of grave goods is documented, aside from the three dog teeth found near her head. It is certain that they belonged to different animals as they represent different aged dogs, according to zooarchaeologist, Angelos Hadjikoumis, but whether she wore them during life (perhaps in a pouch around her neck as they were not perforated), or they were a gift during her burial, or were even used as apotropaic magic objects to protect the living from the spirit of this particular individual, remains unknown. The fact that this adult woman was buried prone likely indicates something about the feeling of fear expressed by the living. She was placed face down to remain down. Fox (2012) suggests that brain injury to the right parietal lobe may have accompanied the cranial trauma producing other symptoms such as seizure disorder, personality change, memory loss, headaches, the inability for her to recognise her body, and any number of behaviours that could have caused her to have been excluded or marginalised from her community. Marginalised in death, she may have been similarly marginalised during life, at least since the time of her cranial trauma. She had not apparently experienced an easy childhood either, as demonstrated by

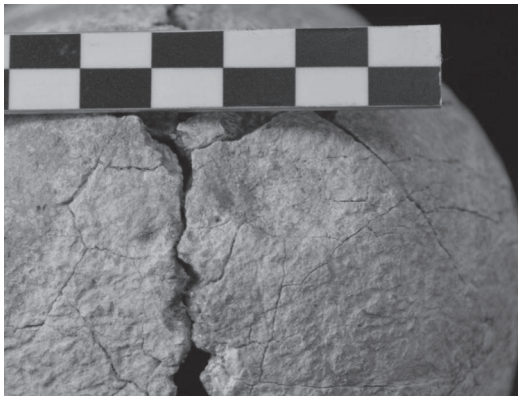

Figure 20.4: Tell Nader. Cranial trauma (photograph by S. Fox).

linear enamel hypoplasias on the rotated mandibular right canine (#27). Enamel hypoplasias indicate an interruption in growth during the time of enamel formation that can be caused by malnutrition, fever, or any number of constitutional disorders.

The type of headshaping this individual expressed was produced by two bands having been placed circumferentially around her head and secured at the back of her head (in the occipital region) during infancy (see above Fig. 20.3). The flatness of the occipital region indicates that the bindings were affixed to a flat object for securing them under her head. In no way was the mandible involved in the headshaping of this woman at Tell Nader, as indicated by the lack of binding marks on the inferior border of the horizontal ramus of the lower jaw. Even with remodeling over the course of the years, the binding marks should have been visible if the mandible had been involved. At Byblos, Özbek (1974) suggests that the mouth was tied shut with one of the bindings to achieve the form of headshaping identified there. As it is necessary for the infant mandible to move during breastfeeding, it does not seem conducive to survival to bind the jaw shut, nor expedient for the mother to repeatedly bind and unbind her infant's head as the baby breastfeeds:

> "While the Eridu series points to a universal prevalence of circumferential headshaping within a mortuary population, the Degirmentepe and Tell Arpachiyah series possibly point to differential modification practices (modified and unmodified). It is also clear that there are differences in degree and sub-type (one-band and two-band type) of circumferentail headshaping. The Degirmentepe and Seyh Hoyuk series illustrate this particularly well. At the latter site there may have been differences between male and female head modifications, but the small sample size prevents any firm conclusions". (Lorentz 2010, 133)

With regard to the circumferential type of headshaping produced from two bands, as in the case of the female

("Skeleton 2") at Tell Nader, the reconstruction of the bindings to produce the desired effect consistent with the morphology of the human crania and mandibles expressing this form, must be better defined. While antero-posterior forms of headshaping may not be intentional, but rather a side-effect of cradle-boarding, what is clear is that "the Ubaid circumferential headshaping is clearly intentional" (Lorentz 2010, 136).

Conclusions regarding headshaping during the Ubaid

Hampered by poor preservation, poor collection, and incomplete recording, it is obvious that more work is needed with regard to headshaping in the Ubaid. Only then will the identity of the people demonstrating this form of body modification be better understood. Further investigations must also be undertaken to determine the prevalence of headshaping, the degree of headshaping, and the kinds of sociocultural differences marked by headshaping such as status, gender or group identity. What is apparent is that a similar type of headshaping (circumferential) was practiced in many Ubaid settlements over an extensive area. It could have been important for baby girls during the Ubaid period to have been headshaped, for example, if the culture practiced patrilocality and female exogamy, where females married outside the group and moved to live with their husbands. They would literally carry their identity with them.

In the case of the Ubaid settlements it is difficult to make clear definitive statements about the cultural affinity or the "ethnicity" of the people who lived in them. Pots do not speak, and the reluctance of recent scholarship to associate the Ubaid pottery with a particular people is understandable. Nevertheless, there is a lot more evidence than just pottery, which suggest that people in the Ubaid sites had a very similar way of private and public life. Headshaping is an important new element, which hints to the association of the Ubaid material culture with a particular population group that extended through a great expanse of geographical space, from the Persian Gulf in Iran to the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean in Syria (and in between) and over the course of time of at least two millennia. The form of headshaping associated with the Ubaid, is a circumferential variety that was produced by application of two bands secured at the back of the head during infancy. Parents perpetuated this form of headshaping that formed a permanent indicator of group identity for the individual, and for which that individual had no control. During the 6th millennium BC, these people gradually spread throughout the Near East and created nucleated settlements in various regions, some of which grew and reached a significant size. It seems that there was no "political centre" controlling this migration and no "core" or "periphery" can be determined. The need for long-distant trade does not seem to have played any significant role for this migration. The case of the Ubaid sites in the Persian Gulf (in areas with scarcity of water and without any raw materials) clearly shows that, at least in the initial phase, the main reason for the establishment of new settlements was the effort of migrating groups to find arable lands and pastures able to provide means for their sustenance (for a more detailed discussion see Kopanias *et al.* 2013; Kopanias forthcoming).

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