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Concepts of the body and personhood in the Mesolithic-Neolithic Danube Gorges: interpreting animal remains from human burials*

Abstract: In recent years, humanities have brought forward the idea of non-human agency; either in the form of meanings bestowed upon objects, animals and natural phenomena, or through deconstruction of ontological differences between ‘people’ and ‘things’. In case of the former, it has been argued that non-human agents have the power to act as ‘participants’ in social action (e.g. the agentive power of material properties of things, or of animal behaviour). In this paper, I discuss the practice of placing animal body parts alongside human bodies in the Mesolithic-Neolithic Danube Gorges, by using the concept of *perspectivism* as a theoretical framework. The choice of species and their body parts varied, but was by no means accidental. Rather, it reflected certain culturally specific taxonomies, which were based on animal properties: how they look, move, feel or what they *do*. Common examples include red deer antlers, which have the power to ‘regenerate’ each year, or dog mandibles (physical remains of ‘mouths’) which have the power to ‘communicate’ (i.e. bark). The aim of the paper is to explore how various aspects of animal corporeality, associated with certain ways of seeing and experiencing the world, could be ‘borrowed’ by humans utilizing animal body parts.

Keywords: animal agency, personhood, embodiment, perspectivism, Mesolithic-Neolithic, Danube Gorges, Lepenski Vir, Vlasac, human-animal relations, burials

Introduction

The cultural context I discuss here are the Mesolithic-Neolithic sites in the Danube Gorges of the Balkans, where structured deposition of several hundred individuals took place over a long time span of c. 9500 to 5500 cal. BC. Complete

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human bodies were often accompanied by disarticulated or burnt human and/or animal body parts, and buried alongside hearths, under stone constructions, and below or on top of house floors. In certain cases, fragmented human and animal remains were not associated with intact bodies, but deposited on their own, similarly related to architectural features. However, in each case, there was an apparent tendency to interpret all contexts with human remains as ‘burials’ or ‘disarticulated burials’, whereas animal remains have been referred to as ‘grave goods’, ‘offerings’, ‘trophies’, or evidence of ‘food consumption and preparation’¹ (see Срејовић 1969, Sreјović 1972, Bökönyi 1972, Срејовић и Летица 1978, Radovanović 1996a; b).

Clearly, it cannot be denied that animals have always been a source of food, work force and raw material for human societies; or that their remains are often treated and deposited differently from human bodies. What I would like to query here is the notion that only human subjects possess personhood, which implies that their remains are always deposited in a meaningful act of ‘burial’, whereas animal bodies belong to the sphere of ‘everyday’ economy or symbolic abstractions. The very idea of ‘burial’ most often evokes an image of a human body in an anatomical position, accompanied by grave goods or some form of funerary architecture, deposited in an act of ‘removal’ of the dead from the domain of the living. In archaeological practice, these criteria have often been used to bestow ‘burial status’ to animal deposition practices. However, the human dead can be manipulated in a variety of different meaningful ways: bodies can be burnt, fragmented, left outside of settlements, deposited in rivers and so on; consequently all these practices could be interpreted as ‘burials’. Why is it, then, that the integrity of the animal body is still used as a starting point in determining whether or not something counts as a burial, and how useful is this concept really?

The evidence from the Danube Gorges shows that both human and animal bodies were broken down and disintegrated. Whereas animal dismemberment is an inevitable outcome of killing and consumption, and the fragmentation of human bodies was practised only after death and decomposition, one must not uncritically assume that these practices were operating within different modes of thought. According to Chapman (2000; 2001), the idea of partibility of the human body might have been embedded in the agency of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers precisely because of their day-to-day experiences with disarticulation of animal bodies, consumption of their body parts and further fragmentation of bone in tool making. In addition to Chapman’s idea that ‘parts’ incorporate memories of the ‘whole’ and therefore “enchain social relations”, various authors concerned with the Danube Gorges phenomenon have suggested that human body parts were objects of worship (Sreјović 1972), cited past lives and events and had apotropaic qualities (Borić 2003), and that animal body parts captured the essence of the animal in some way (Radovanović 1999).

¹ For an alternative view on dog remains in particular, see Radovanović 1999.

I find the interpretation of body parts as ‘essences’ especially captivating; although it might be argued that the meanings ascribed to body parts were highly relational. More precisely, it was the relations in life that allowed animals or persons to act in specific ways or stand for specific things, and the relations between the body and the part that allowed the bone to stand for the whole. In this paper, I elaborate this argument by arguing that animal bodies were invested with meaning because of their properties (or ‘effects’, *sensu* Viveiros de Castro 1998): how they look, move, feel or what they *do*. Following on recent phenomenological approaches in archaeology (Hamilakis *et al.* 2002, Borić and Robb 2008) which focus on the body as the locus of subjective experience, I raise the question whether various aspects of animal corporeality, associated with certain ways of seeing and experiencing the world (*sensu* Viveiros de Castro 1998, see also Conneller 2004), could be ‘borrowed’ by humans utilizing animal body parts.

Detailed contextualization of human and animal remains, with respect to age, gender, spatial and temporal patterns of deposition falls outside of scope of this study and has been addressed elsewhere (Срејовић 1969, Sreјović 1972, Срејовић и Летица 1978, Radovanović 1996a; 1996b; 1999; 2000, Borić and Stefanović 2004, Stefanović and Borić 2008, Borić and Dimitrijević 2005; 2007, Dimitrijević 2000; 2008; Dimitrijević *et al.*, in preparation). As a result, the evidence I present here does not necessarily reflect changes in meanings over time, or explore the meanings attributed to specific buildings, places or social categories in the Danube Gorges setting. I have chosen mostly individual contexts to discuss my hypothesis on the possibility of experiencing Other ways of being in the world, which could be related to specific persons, events or circumstances, rather than reflect long-term narratives.

Non-human agency, personhood and embodiment in a perspectivist framework

In understanding how different human and non-human agents, persons and bodies emerge from different material social worlds they inhabit, an approach open to exploring alternative ontologies is of particular significance (Alberti and Marshall 2009). In this sense, recent revival of animism and animism theories provides an important framework to explore past human-animal relations, both as a model for studying the past and as an intellectual resource for problematising ingrained ‘Western’ categories of thought (Alberti and Bray 2009, Alberti and Marshall 2009). In classic Tylorian tradition, the concept of animism was used to designate the first ‘primitive’ stadium of religion, often defined as a belief that non-human entities possess ‘souls’, ‘animating spirits’ or other aspects of personhood. However, with rising interest in questions of ontology, agency, subject-object and person-thing boundaries (Gell 1998, Latour 2005), and new readings of various different ways of relating to the environment, animism is

becoming reformulated as an alternative ontology which does not privilege human relations as the exclusive form of social interaction (Bird-David 1999, Brown and Walker 2008, Alberti and Bray 2009). Animism rests on understanding that animals (as well as objects, substances, etc.) are active participants in the world, ‘persons’ with their own motives and intentions, in other words – agents.

Understanding that the world is populated by both human and animal persons, and can therefore be experienced from a variety of perspectives has been especially articulated in Viveiros de Castro’s (1998) account of *multinaturalism* or *Amerindian* (i.e. South American) *perspectivism*. In modernist dichotomies, human beings exist simultaneously as “organisms with bodies” (and are therefore similar to animals) and as “persons with minds” (and are therefore unique) (Ingold 2000). Multinaturalism, however, implies just the opposite: both human and animal beings have ‘souls’ (which are essentially the same), but it is their *bodies* that make them different. Possession of a soul enables a specific point of view, which allows each species to *see themselves* as human; however this point of view is located in the body, which Viveiros de Castro (1998, 478) understands as an “assemblage of effects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*”. Apart from physical attributes, these effects include “what one eats, how it communicates, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary”, in other words how it relates to the world. Humans and animals see the same things as they are *essentially* the same, but they see them *differently* because of their bodies. Given that the body is a form of ‘clothing’, or an ‘envelope’, consequently it is ‘exchangeable’, along with its point of view. This is enabled through animal masks or other objects, however shamans, “multinatural beings by definition and office” (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 483) can transit between perspectives at all times.

As noted by Conneller (2004), this specific understanding of the body as an ‘assemblage of effects’ is a potentially useful tool in addressing questions of agentive potential of animal corporeal and behavioural qualities, their potential to be transmitted to objects made from animal bodies, and consequently to humans using them. In her study of red deer frontlets from Star Carr, Conneller (2004) suggests that they were intended for the wearer not to ‘look like’ a deer, but to ‘see’ as deer; enabling an ontological rather than symbolic transformation. In this paper, I adopt a similar phenomenological and perspectivist position that one’s experience of world is located within the body, and can differ because of corporeal diversity. At the same time, following queer and feminist studies of the body (Butler 1993), I do not treat these differences as stable, but manipulated into existence. Similarly to Conneller (and in accordance with Viveiros de Castro’s emphasis on point of *view*), I stress visual perception² as vital in

² In addition, I touch upon the subject of experiencing the world through sensations and acts related to the mouth – food consumption, breathing and most importantly, communication.

creating subjective bodily experience, as well as its potential to be ‘borrowed’, however I discuss this possibility through orientation and fragmentation of human and animal bodies in the Danube Gorges setting.

Danube Gorges: the setting

The Danube Gorges area refers to the 130 km long section of the Danube valley between present-day Serbia and Romania. Its complex relief was formed by Danube cutting into southern parts of the Carpathian Mountains, and is characterized by interchanging deep, narrow and high gorges and vast open basins (Radovanović 1996a). The sites of Padina, Lepenski Vir and Vlasac were located on sandy loess river terraces sloping towards the Danube, in a narrow belt between the river and the forest. The earliest traces of human presence, manifested by occasional burials (some of them in a seated position), are dated between c. 9500–7400 cal. BC, corresponding to the regional Early Mesolithic (Борић и Димитријевић 2009, Borić 2011). The later phases of the sequence – the Late Mesolithic (c. 7400–6200 cal. BC) at Vlasac, and the Transformational Mesolithic-Neolithic phase (c. 6300–5900 cal. BC) at Lepenski Vir and Padina (Борић и Димитријевић 2009, Borić 2011) witnessed extensive building and occupational activity. The site of Vlasac proved to be the largest formal disposal area, witnessing numerous episodes of overlapping burials and open-air rectangular hearths, and a couple of dugout dwelling structures (Срејовић и Летица 1978, Borić *et al.* 2008). Somewhat later sites of Lepenski Vir (Fig. 1) and Padina had a more ‘settlement-like’ appearance, consisting of superimposed trapezoidal structures with reddish limestone floors and rectangular hearths, often containing both complete and fragmented human bodies, sculpted sandstone boulders representing human/fishlike beings and a significant number of animal bones (Срејовић 1969, Sreјović 1972, Jovanović 2008, Radovanović 1996a, Dimitrijević 2008).

The riverside terraces were probably recognised as attractive fishing and fowling spots due to their proximity to large whirlpools and small river tributaries. Intensified fishing probably led to the prolonged stay of human groups in the Gorges in the Early Holocene, and consequently, to the rise of first (semi) sedentary settlements (Radovanović 1996a, 37, see also Dinu 2010), and fish continued to play the role of an important resource throughout the sequence (*cf.* Bonsall *et al.* 1997, Borić *et al.* 2004). Apart from fresh water species (carp, catfish, huchen), inhabitants of the Gorges also caught anadromous sturgeons, which migrated from the Black Sea each spring and autumn to spawn in the fresh waters of Danube (Živaljević, in preparation, Borić 2001; 2002, Bartosiewicz *et al.* 2008, Dinu 2010).

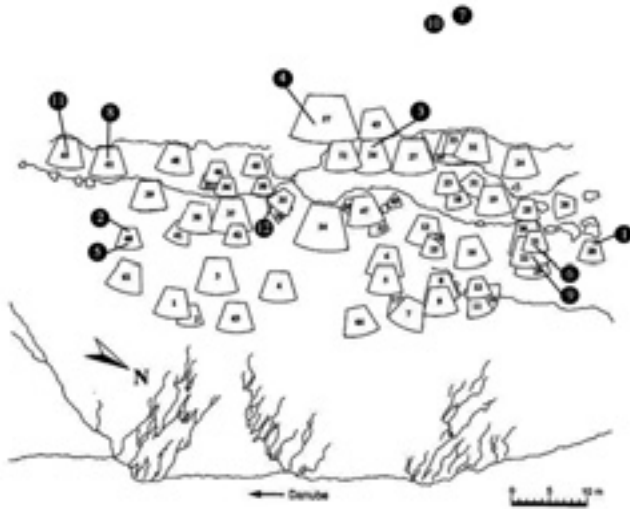


Fig. 1. Plan of the Lepenski Vir settlement with relevant contexts discussed in the text (marked with numbers in black circles): 1. Child Burial 92, associated with a sculpted boulder with shut eyes; 2. Child Burial 61, associated with a sculpted boulder; 3. Burial 26 (young man with skull detached from the body); 4. Burial 19 (young woman with skull separated from the body by a stone slab); 5. Burial 21 (female mandible placed upside down); 6. Burial 7/I-a (an older man buried with an isolated human skull 7/II-b, an aurochs skull and a red deer skull); 7. Burial 89a (an adult individual with aurochs horns); 8. Burials 45a-c (disarticulated human remains with a red deer skull); 9. Red deer skull placed upside down; 10. Burial 93 (woman with red deer antler); 11. Burials 54d-e (two women associated with dog remains); 12. Burial 70 (disarticulated human remains) with a dog mandible (plan modified after Radovanović 1996a, fig. 3.2).

The dense forest surrounding the sites was a natural habitat of a great number of mammal species: red deer, roe deer and wild boar, as well as brown bear, marten, badger, wolf, lynx and fox (*cf.* Bökönyi 1972; 1978, Clason 1980, Dimitrijević 2008, Dimitrijević *et al.*, in preparation). It may seem that the interactions of humans and animals were taking place solely in the ‘boundary’ zones of the human world, which were the forest and the river. However, there is evidence that inhabitants of the Gorges had knowledge of the ‘outside’ world too: in certain cases they hunted aurochs – species that prefers the forest steppe, and chamois and ibex, which typically dwell in high mountains (Bökönyi 1972, 186–8). The occurrence of marine molluscs *Cyclope neritea* and *Spondylus* in burials (Срејовић и Летица 1978, Borić *et al.* 2009) implies at least an indirect knowledge of other, distant worlds.

During the final, Neolithic phase of the Danube Gorges sequence (after c. 5900 cal. BC), domestic animals (cattle, pig, sheep and goat) were introduced on sites for the first time (Borić and Dimitrijević 2007). However, there is no

evidence of herding large number of animals on sites; rather, there seems to be a continuity of hunting and foraging (Borić and Dimitrijević 2005). The only animal that could be identified as 'domesticated' throughout the sequence was the dog. According to Bökönyi (1975) (see also Dimitrijević and Vuković 2012), it is very likely that dogs were locally domesticated at Vlasac during the Mesolithic.

It is evident that human existence and experience of the world was inseparable from and interwoven with the existence of various animals, and their day-to-day interactions were taking place within the various features of the landscape: the river, forest, high mountains and even in the settlements and houses themselves. Although we must not assume that the treatment of the dead mirrored the experiences of the living in a straightforward manner, it certainly offers a window into how these experiences were articulated. I draw on interpretations of other authors, namely Radovanović (1997) and Borić (1999; 2005), who have emphasized the significance of body position and orientation in relation to the landscape. It might be argued that the position and orientation of the body reflects the belief on how one moves through the landscape during life, and/or how its 'soul' continues this journey after death. The life at the Danube Gorges riverside terraces was revolving around and between the river and the forest and cliffs; personal life-cycles were inseparable from animal life-cycles, seasons and time-spans of the house and household (Fowler 2008, 293). The directions of natural movement of the river (running downstream), anadromous fish (swimming both upstream and downstream), the sun rising over the hills on the opposite bank (entering the front 'light' area of the house) and setting behind the village (behind the rear 'dark' area of the house) were loaded with meaning and related to the human experience of being in the world (Fowler 2008, *cf.* Radovanović 1997, Borić 1999; 2005). In addition to moving upstream and downstream and back and front, there was obviously a concept of moving 'deep down' into the depths of time, witnessed by numerous episodes of superimposing hearths, burials and building floors (Borić 2003), or possibly 'forward in time', as deposition of antlers on house floors could suggest (Срејовић 1969, 137, Dimitrijević 2008, 128–9). As Fowler (2004; 2008) has shown, the construction of personhood and personal identity can be closely bound to features and elements of the material world, and these features can be conveyed through the human body and other media. Therefore, what kinds of persons, bodies and experiences emerged from these interactions, and how were they materialized?

Human bodies and persons

In order to explore the possibility of non-human entities possessing or acquiring certain aspects of personhood, let us first query whether humans have it automatically. In our contemporary society, it may seem self-evident, as personhood

is considered to be fixed and stable, a matter of being human (Fowler 2004). However, in different cultural contexts it may be situational (Bird-David 1999), acquired with certain age (Bloch 1989) or composed out of relationships with others (Strathern 1988); at the same time, the complexity of human experience allows for more than one singular ontology in a given context (Harris and Robb 2012). Even in our society, debates on justification of abortion and euthanasia manifest tensions and unease in determining the stages of when does one become or cease to be ‘fully person’.

Becoming persons

At Lepenski Vir, a significant number of infant burials and specific contexts of their deposition suggests that newborn babies were perceived as a specific social category. Unlike adults, generally associated with the front, hearth area of trapezoidal buildings, bodies of infants were interred in the narrow rear area cut deep into the slope, which due to its “cave atmosphere” might have served as a place of “protection” (Stefanović and Borić 2008, 139). At Vlasac, the practice of sprinkling the dead with red ochre, particularly related to bodies of women (some of them pregnant) and infants, might have served a similar purpose (Borić and Stefanović 2004).

The special treatment of infants at Lepenski Vir and Vlasac might imply that for the inhabitants of the Gorges, personhood was not seen as essential and inscribed in the body *a priori*, but rather as being in the constant process of transformation. This is especially evident in the varying degree of anthropomorphic features represented on the carved boulders from Lepenski Vir. Whereas some of them are completely unmodified, others resemble the body of the fish with scales/scutes, stylized human bodies and faces with large round eyes and mouths, or display both fish and human attributes (*cf.* Srejović and Babović 1983). The only sculpture associated with a young child (Burial 92, c. 4 years old) was markedly different from other representational boulders: its eyes were represented with two horizontal lines, as if firmly shut (Srejović and Babović 1983, 107). An older child (Burial 61, c. 8 years old) was commemorated by a fish-like sculpture whose eyes were open, however much smaller than the huge protruding eyes represented on other sculptures (Borić 2005, 60–1, fig. 15). According to Borić, it seems that the ability ‘to see’ was an important aspect of personhood, perhaps acquired by a certain rite of passage at a certain age. Therefore, the young child associated with the boulder with eyes shut and numerous infant burials ‘hidden’ and ‘protected’ in the rear of the houses were possibly not ‘fully human persons’ yet, but vulnerable and unstable forms of being with fluid identities.

The position and orientation of human bodies

Another emphasis on the importance of 'seeing', or more precisely 'looking in a certain direction' was manifested in the very manner houses and bodies were oriented in relation to the Danube. Srejović (Срејовић 1969, 147) believed that one of its attributes was that of a boundary, as the inhabitants of the riverside terraces spent their lives in a liminal zone between the forest and the river. On the other hand, the river could also serve as a means of communication, leading outside of the Gorges into other worlds, inhabited by other people and beings. For example, anadromous sturgeons migrate from the Black Sea each spring and autumn to spawn in the fresh waters of the Danube; in order to succeed, they must fight the current and swim upstream. One might imagine that in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Gorges, these were the only animals that were 'coming back', repeating their journey year after year. Radovanović (1997) recognized the relationship between anatomical features of the fish and the sculpted boulders (large downturned mouths and rows of bony scutes), as well as the relationship of the annual sturgeon run and a specific burial practice related to houses at Lepenski Vir. She interpreted the practice of placing the deceased extended on their backs, parallel to the river, with their heads oriented downstream, as a manifestation of a belief that fish would carry the deceased's soul on its downstream voyage. Similarly, Borić (1999) mentions the earlier practice (between c. 8400 and 7700 cal. BC) of placing the deceased in a seated position with legs crossed and facing the river as the best position to 'sit down and enjoy the view', possibly 'waiting for' and 'observing' the arrival of fish. According to this author (2005; 2007), human and fish features on the boulders might represent different stages of corporeal transformation of the deceased into a hybrid hyman-fish being.

The active role of the dead as 'spectators' in natural cycles and their relationship with the river was most powerfully accentuated in the case of two burials from Lepenski Vir. Both individuals (Burial 26, a young male, and the aforementioned child 61) were oriented parallel to the river (S-N). However, the skull of the young man was detached from the body and deliberately turned to face east (the river); whereas the child's skull has been left *in situ* but the boulder placed above it was facing the river (Borić 2005, 59, fig. 15). As opposed to the idea of the body as an integral whole, these examples seem to manifest an idea of a partible body and its potential to incorporate different perspectives through fragmentation.

The fragmentation of human bodies

Given the fragmentation pattern on all three sites (complete bodies, bodies with skull detached or missing, isolated skulls, skulls without mandibles, isolated mandibles), it seems that the disintegration of the body was seen as a

gradual process. After decomposition, the burial place was (sometimes repeatedly) revisited, the body manipulated and parts circulated (Borić 2003; 2010a). At Vlasac, in certain cases the partibility of the body was emphasized even more strongly with the use of fire, but only after decomposition had occurred (Borić *et al.* 2009). The transformation from an integral body of a newly deceased to disarticulated ‘ancestral’ body parts was apparently perceived as series of different stages, perhaps similarly to Bloch’s (1989) concept of death as a “long journey”, a continuation of life rather than its end.

If we understand the complete human body as one of the first stages in this journey (‘vulnerable’ bodies of babies perhaps being first), the next stage would be the alteration that emphasizes its integrity and partibility at the same time. The body of individual from Burial 26 was integral in every aspect except in the most important one: not only was the skull detached, but rotated and oriented differently, possibly as a demonstration of its newly acquired autonomy. In the case of another burial from Lepenski Vir (Burial 19, a young female), the separation of the head from the body is emphasized even more strongly: the skull was separated from the postcranial skeleton by a large stone slab (Srejšović 1972, 141).

Furthermore, in case of several headless burials from Lepenski Vir and Vlasac, even this weak connection of the head and the body is broken, as the skulls have been completely missing. In one case from Vlasac, two women (Burials H63 and H60), deposited in a successive burial (consisting of several inhumations and cremations each disturbing the previous one) had their skulls removed and then cremated (Borić *et al.* 2009, Borić 2010a, Borić *et al.* 2014). In addition, in all three sites, disarticulated human skulls and/or mandibles were often deposited on their own. The female mandible found within the hearth construction of House 40 at Lepenski Vir was exceptional in this respect: it was bridged by a stone plaque and placed upside down (Srejšović 1972, 69, fig. 64). Its unusual orientation (along with numerous other episodes of house superimposition and burials cut through floors) suggests that the floor was a domain of the dead and the past, a way of moving vertically in the depths of time (Borić 2003). Disarticulated skulls and mandibles could be seen as yet another step further in the journey to fragmentation: ‘freed’ from the body, they might have emphasized the crucial elements of personhood. Given that skulls and mandibles are the only physical remains of one’s face, eyes and mouth (*cf.* Fowler 2004, 136), their special significance could lie in their ability to see, speak, consume food and draw breath, and therefore interact with the world.

It is therefore highly significant that in one case from Lepenski Vir (in House 21), isolated skulls were placed next to the skull of a complete individual. Here, a burial containing a complete body of an older man (7/I-a), a disarticulated human skull without mandible (7/II-a), and an aurochs skull were interred through the house floor (Srejšović 1969, 137). Human and aurochs skulls were placed on each shoulder of the buried man, almost giving it an appearance of a ‘three-

headed' hybrid; in addition, a red deer skull was placed next to the body of this 'composite' being (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. An older man (Burial 7/I-a) with a disarticulated human skull (Burial 7/II-b) and an aurochs skull placed on his shoulders, and a red deer skull placed next to his body. The burial was cut through the floor of House 21, Lepenski Vir (photo from the archive of the Computer Documentation Centre, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade).

In the context of Balkan prehistory, Chapman (2000) has proposed that fragmentation of objects and circulation of parts was a way of constructing specific social ties, given that parts are 'inalienable' from wholes and/or other persons. According to Borić (2003), circulated body parts in this context should be understood similarly to superimposed hearths and houses, as citations and embodiments of a "deep time metaphor". In addition to those interpretations, it might be argued that the particular position of human skull 7/II-b and the aurochs skull, which have been placed on the shoulders of the complete body of 7/I-a, seems to emphasize the merging identity of the 'ancestor' (or animal) and the newly deceased. In this process, the newly deceased is possibly adopting the perspective of the ancestral/animal being, along with new ways of 'seeing', 'breathing', 'speaking' and other features associated with the head. However, given that fragmentation could perhaps change the way one 'sees' the world (Burial 26, again) the disarticulated parts might not necessarily reflect the memories of the individuals from which they derived. They could have been transformed into other ways of being, and see things differently, because their bodies had changed (*sensu* Viveiros de Castro 1998). Their potency could therefore lie not only in

their ability to reconnect with the past (or present), but to reconnect in a way the integral body is unable to.

Animal bodies and persons

Unlike human bodies, no animal in the Danube Gorges sites has been found whole in anatomical position, or accompanied with adornments and grave goods (perforated cyprinid teeth, marine shells, tools). However, it should be noted that in certain cases large portions of animal carcasses (of a bear and of a wild boar) were left on house floors, while the tendons and ligaments were still holding the body together (Dimitrijević 2000). In addition, Bökönyi (1972, 188) briefly notes that remains of dogs in anatomical position were often found on Lepenski Vir house floors; unfortunately this has not been documented in more detail and a significant part of the faunal assemblage had not been collected and saved for further study (Dimitrijević 2008).

However, in a setting where partibility of the human body was a deeply embedded concept and fragmentation was practiced throughout the whole temporal sequence, it becomes clear that integrity of the body should not count as the only criteria for a 'structured' and 'meaningful' deposition (i.e. 'burial'). It might be argued that in most cases animals did not play the role of the 'newly deceased' (i.e. were not deposited intact, in their 'first stages' of the journey to fragmentation), which does not imply that their isolated body parts were not acting in a similar manner to those of humans. Body parts of various animals have been found associated with humans in all three sites, alongside both complete, fragmented and burnt human bodies, belonging to individuals of various age and sex. The choice of animal species, their body parts and their treatment varied too, but was far from accidental. I believe it reflected certain culturally specific taxonomies, which were based on animal properties (or effects): how they look, move, feel or what they do.

Aurochs (Bos primigenius)

The aurochs was the largest terrestrial animal known to the inhabitants of the Danube Gorges, and its hunting must have required well-organized expeditions (Bökönyi 1978, 44). According to Borić (2010b, 54–8), the significance of this animal could have been especially articulated after c. 6300 cal. BC, during forager-farmer transformations which started taking place after the appearance of first Early Neolithic communities in the Balkans. Although aurochs remains appear on all three sites, they were associated with human burials at Lepenski Vir only, related to the transformational Mesolithic-Neolithic phase of the settlement.

The aurochs skull accompanying individuals 7/I-a (the intact human body) and 7/II-b (disarticulated human skull) in House 21 (Fig. 2) was originally interpreted as a “hunting trophy” (Срејовић 1969, 138), and more recently, as a “powerful apotropaic efficacy” (Borić 2003, 65–6) and a symbolic representative of the emerging “Neolithic cultural repertoire” (Borić 2010b, 55–8). However, there is another significant aspect of this context that should be noted – the apparent instability of the animal-human bodily boundary. As already noted, I believe that it is highly significant that both disarticulated skulls (human and animal) have been placed on the shoulders of the complete individual, thus creating a ‘hybrid’ or ‘composite’ being. Whereas the individual 7/I-a was placed parallel to the river and oriented S–N (head directed towards the upstream direction), the disarticulated human and animal skull are facing the opposite, downstream direction (as if looking backwards, or perhaps – looking ‘inward’). Given the similar fragmentation and orientation pattern of the skulls, there seems to be a strong emphasis on ‘similarity of differences’, a similar way of relating to the world through the same body part of different beings. Perhaps, in this case, they are ‘seeing’ something that a single and/or intact body cannot.

Whereas in this case the relationship between human and animal corporeal aspects was a composite one, stressing different perspectives of humans and animals and different perspectives of bodies and parts, the adult individual from Burial 89a seems to have undergone the process of transformation. Here, fragmented aurochs skull has been placed above the head of the individual (Borić 2010b, 58, fig. 3, Bonsall *et. al* 2008, 200), in such manner that the animal’s horns were forming a semi-circle around the human skull, becoming a shared feature of the human and the animal. Perhaps this burial could be understood as another manifestation of shape-shifting and transformation of the body (similarly to human-fish boulders), in attempt to acquire some of the animal’s qualities. Given the size, strength and the ‘outside’ domain (the forest steppe) of aurochs, human-animal interaction in this particular context could have been especially impactful. Furthermore, it might be argued that the ‘blurry’ bodily boundaries witnessed in burial contexts 7/I-a and 89a seem to express the animal’s agency and agentic potential in ontological transformations, rather than its passive, symbolic role.

Red deer (Cervus elaphus)

Red deer was the most commonly hunted terrestrial mammal in the Danube Gorges, which suggests a great degree of familiarity with the species, its behaviour and anatomy. On the basis of archaeozoological evidence, it was also

an animal whose whole body was considered to be of importance. However, similarly to other ‘special’ (burial or other) depositional practices observed in various regions of Europe in the Mesolithic (*cf.* Conneller 2004, Street 1991, Borić 2010b), it was the skulls of adult stags with developed antlers, or isolated antlers (both shed and broken off) that were usually chosen to accompany human remains or to be deposited on house floors.

As we have seen from the example from House 21, a red deer skull was included in the burial, but unlike the aurochs skull, it was placed next to the body of the deceased (Fig. 2) (Срејовић 1969, 137). In other instances from Lepenski Vir, a deer skull was placed next to disarticulated remains of several individuals (House 61) (Borić 2010b, 55), and deer skulls and/or antlers were often deposited on house floors on their own (Bökönyi 1972, 189, see also Dimitrijević 2008).

These practices might offer another window into the ways Danube Gorges ontologies and taxonomies were constructed. Were there difficulties, obstacles or possibly even dangers (*cf.* Willerslev 2004) in ‘adopting’ the deer’s point of view? The evidence is limited, but the example of House 21 shows that at least on that particular occasion deer and aurochs were perceived as different forms of being. However at Vlasac, in the aforementioned successive burial of several inhumations and cremations, the latest inhumation (of an older woman) was superimposed by a child and red deer skull placed symmetrically to each other (Borić *et al.* 2014, 24–5). Could this kind of deposition suggest that this particular deer (or deer in general) were active participants in their interactions with humans, agents that are not only being ‘looked at’, but have the power to ‘look back’? (*cf.* Derrida 2002). In addition, a red deer skull deposited on the floor of House 22 at Lepenski Vir was turned upside down, *facing* the floor (Fig. 3). Drawing on similar deposition of human mandible from House 40 (Sreјović 1972, fig. 64), this skull also seems to emphasize the ability to look back into the depths of time (Borić 2003, 65), which could suggest that animals too possessed memories and a temporal perspective.

Red deer skulls can be further made partible by removal of antler, which could be seen as ‘naturally’ parting with the animal’s skull, perhaps similarly to human skulls and mandibles during decay. Another important feature of antler is its regenerative potential: antlers are shed only to be replaced with a stronger and a bigger pair each season. Thus, a stag with antlers might have been perceived as a “quite different entity to one without” (*cf.* Fowler 2004, 149), underlying the constant instability of bodies. Although it is unclear whether inhabitants of the Gorges would be familiar with this aspect of deer anatomy, given that this implies engagements with particular animals in different stages of antler growth³,

³ I thank Nick Overton for this remark.

Clutton-Brock (1999) notes that deer are highly territorial and drop their antlers in more or less the same place each year. Significant quantities of shed antler in all three sites could suggest that humans could have been aware of these places, perhaps following groups of stags and snatching antlers as soon as they fell (*cf.* Clutton-Brock 1999, 13–14).



Fig. 3. Red deer skull placed upside down, House 22, Lepenski Vir (photo from the archive of the Computer Documentation Centre, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade).

Isolated antlers (both shed and broken off) frequently appear associated with human bodies, or deposited on their own on house floors. They have been associated with both intact and headless bodies, disarticulated body parts, isolated skulls (Srejšović 1972, 120, Срејовић и Летица 1978, Radovanović 1996a, 185; 1996b; 2000, Jovanović 2008, 298, Borić 2010b, 55), and even cremated human remains (Borić *et al.* 2009), which could emphasize the partible nature of both antler and human body. In addition, antler disposal on house floors in the events of house abandonment could manifest beliefs or hopes that the house will ‘live’ again and the household regenerate (*cf.* Срејовић 1969, 137, Dimitrijević 2008, 128–9).

In another example of transformation (similar to individual 89a with aurochs horns) (Borić 2010b, fig. 3), a woman (Burial 93) was accompanied with antler,

placed next to her skull (Fig. 4). Both burials were located in the rear area of the Lepenski Vir settlement (Fig. 1) (Radovanović 2000, 337). However, whereas both individuals 89a and 93 were transformed, it would seem they were transformed in different ways, and into different categories of being. While aurochs horns are permanent and can be removed from the animal only post-mortem, the woman was accompanied by shed antler, suggesting a more flexible relationship. Apart from its regenerative potential, which calls for a concept of ‘future’, shed antlers could perhaps enable the wearer to shift between identities and perspectives more freely.



Fig. 4. A woman (Burial 93) with red deer antler, in the rear area of the Lepenski Vir settlement (photo from the archive of the Computer Documentation Centre, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade).

The dualism of red deer and aurochs has been particularly articulated by Borić (2010b), who has emphasized their different, and yet possibly analogous role in cultural repertoires of Mesolithic and Neolithic worldviews. Structured deposition of body parts of both species (on occasion, closely associated as in burial context from House 21) at Lepenski Vir could signal that this was the locus where these different worldviews met (Borić 2010b, 54–8). However, whereas we must not exclude the important symbolic roles these animals might have played in the context of Mesolithic-Neolithic transformations, the manner of their deposition and the manipulation of their body parts strongly suggest that they were primarily conceptualized as persons, with internal worlds and bodies exchangeable with those of humans.

Dog (Canis familiaris)

Unlike animals of the river, forest and steppe, dogs were the only animals that were closely associated with human settlements. Presence of newborn and juvenile pup remains from Late Mesolithic contexts from Vlasac (Dimitrijević *et al.*, in preparation) and Transformational phase contexts from Lepenski Vir (Dimitrijević 2008) and Padina (Clason 1980) suggests that females were giving birth on sites. Dogs might have even had access to the houses at Lepenski Vir, as occurrences of gnawed bones on house floors suggest; in addition, bones with both cut marks and traces of gnawing could indicate shared meals (Dimitrijević 2008, 127). According to Bökönyi (1975) (see also Dimitrijević and Vuković 2015), there is strong evidence to support local domestication of dogs at Vlasac, witnessed by a significant number of “transitional individuals”. In biological terms, these dogs were only a step away from tamed wolves: they were quite large, and their teeth were almost the same size as in wolves. However, their main distinction from their wild progenitor (at least in terms of osteology) was a much shorter jaw, which caused overcrowding of the teeth. Dogs could have been perceived as a completely ‘new’ kind of animal (which Radovanović (1999) describes as “neither person nor beast”): they were possibly socialized as guard dogs and hunting companions, and the only animals that shared the domestic space and food with humans; yet they too were skinned, butchered and possibly eaten. However, as Fowler (2004, 152) notes, humans get killed and consumed by animals, too; therefore this relationship is not necessarily perceived as exploitive. According to Radovanović (1999), the occurrence of both scattered, butchered, gnawed dog remains and dog ‘burials’ could be understood as an outcome of different relationships formed with different animals, similarly to different relationships humans form with each other.

Bökönyi (1972, 188) briefly comments that “intact skeletons or whole body parts” of dogs were often found on house floors of Lepenski Vir, which he relates to dog sacrifice. In a recent analysis of the surviving sample of the Lepenski Vir fauna, Dimitrijević (2008) stresses the abundance of dog bones from houses, noting that particular houses contained different body parts from the same individual, or remains from several dogs. In addition to dog remains deposited next to Burials 54e, d in the stone construction built on top of House 65 (Срејовић 1969, 138, Radovanović 2000, 336), remains of a woman (Burial 81) and a dog have been discovered in the upstream periphery of the Vlasac settlement (Срејовић и Летица 1978, 65). Radovanović (1999) has interpreted these contexts as burials, stressing specific human-canid relationships in the Danube Gorges, changing from “mutual tolerance” and “alliance” of humans and wolves, to deep bonds formed between humans and domesticated dogs some time after mid-7th millennium BC.

The female and dog burial from Vlasac are published in the form of field sketch (Срејовић и Летица 1978, fig. 96), which shows that dog's skull and neck are missing. The relation of the animal body to the human burial is described as "not far from the feet of the deceased", but it remains unclear whether the animal was buried in its own right or in association with the woman (Radovanović 1999, 74). As already noted, deposition of both headless individuals and disarticulated skulls was widely practiced throughout the Danube Gorges sequence; however, this is the only example of a headless animal. In addition, an isolated dog skull sprinkled with ochre was found during revisory excavations of the Vlasac terrace (Borić, *pers. comm.*). These rare examples of dogs being treated 'something like' humans might suggest an uncertainty about the nature of the animal, the instability of the human-animal boundary, or the possibility of plural ontologies at play (*cf.* Harris and Robb 2012). At the same time, the orientation of both bodies from Vlasac (the woman oriented N–S and dog oriented W–E) could manifest their different experience of being in the world.

An isolated dog mandible was associated with disarticulated human remains (Burial 70) in House 36 at Lepenski Vir (Stefanović and Borić 2008, note 6)⁴. In addition, Dimitrijević (2008) reports that dog mandibles (from both adult dogs and puppies) have been found in houses at Lepenski Vir, possibly in the acts of house abandonment, which could speak in favour of Radovanović's hypothesis that this part stood as a metaphor for the animal itself. Since no wolf bones have ever been found associated with humans or structurally deposited on building floors, one might speculate that human-dog relationships were especially significant because the dog was a 'new' kind of animal (Radovanović 1999), one which lived in the settlement and possibly in the house. Perhaps the choice of dog mandibles had not been accidental; the animal's smaller head and jaws could emphasize the 'domesticated' or socialized nature of the dog. Among other features developed through human-canid interactions, Clutton-Brock (1999, 49–61) notes that the dog's ability to vocalize (by barking, baying, yapping) and mimic human facial expressions ('smiling' dogs) are not developed by wolves in the wild. Dog mandibles in this respect could be perceived similarly to human mandibles, due to their potential to communicate and convey emotion.

⁴ In addition, Sreјović and Letica (Sreјović and Letica 1978, 62) and Radovanović (1999) mention two other burial contexts with dog mandibles from Vlasac (burials 25 and 27). However, the mandible found in Burial 27 had in fact belonged to a pine marten (*Martes martes*) (Borić 2002, Appendix 6, also examined by the author of this paper), whereas the mandible from Burial 25 had not been saved for further study.

Conclusions

It can be argued that consciousness, visual perception and interaction with the environment were fundamental in construction of personhood in the context of Mesolithic-Neolithic Danube Gorges. The manner in which houses and bodies were laid out, as well as the features of the stone boulders manifest the importance of being aware of different stages in human and 'natural' life-cycles. This awareness was achieved through subjective experience of using one's 'eyes', as well as through memory (by manipulating 'ancestral' body parts). Even with apparent changes in the burial position in the diachronic perspective (seated and extended burials), the dead were continuously positioned as 'spectators'. The ability to 'see' was also emphasized in the large protruding eyes of the representational boulders, and even body parts (like the detached skull of the individual 26) could disunite from the body and adopt a different perspective.

I argue that a state of consciousness and a particular perception of the world were attributed to animals as well, and in certain occasions, these perspectives were desirable or necessary to experience. This does not imply that animals were straightforwardly conceptualized as humans in 'bestial body forms', but rather, opens possibilities of worlds inhabited by both human and non-human persons whose interactions allowed humans to "slip contextually in and out of different ontological attitudes" (*cf.* Harris and Robb 2012, 676). In the mortuary domain, the treatment of humans and animals differed predominantly in the fact that animals seldom if ever played the role of what I call the 'newly deceased' – i.e. bodies deposited intact, left to disintegrate at their own pace and on occasions accompanied with grave goods and adornments. Yet, occasional exceptions including a dog skull sprinkled with ochre, a headless (otherwise intact) dog body (Radovanović 1999) and wild boar and bear body portions left on house floors (Dimitrijević 2000) (perhaps, to decay 'naturally') witness that there might have been multiple ontological possibilities at play, allowing certain animals at specific times, under specific circumstances or as an outcome of specific relations to be treated as humans or similarly to them.

Furthermore, originally intact human bodies on occasion served as resources for exploiting body parts, entering a domain that humans and animals shared. The fragmentation pattern of both human and animal bodies suggests a strong emphasis on body parts related to the head (skulls, mandibles, antler, horns). Apart from being the only physical remains of orifices associated with the personal experience of the world (eyes, mouths) (*cf.* Fowler 2004, 136), skulls and mandibles are the most distinctive indicator of species (red deer has detachable antlers, but the aurochs has permanent horns, dog jaws are much smaller than wolves', etc). To go back to Viveiros De Castro (1998, 481), the body therefore simultaneously acts as the great differentiator, and yet, through manipulation,

it is transformable and in the constant state of becoming. If a change of perspective is to occur, it had to be preceded by a change in the body or a change of its effects; in this case, through both hybridization and metamorphosis (see also Borić 2005; 2007). Possibly, human and animal ‘assemblages of effects’ were therefore encapsulated in their most distinctive body parts, which became ‘free’ and exchangeable through decomposition/dismemberment and acquired the ability to ‘see’ beyond the ‘boundaries’ imposed by the intact human body.

Following on the assumption that personhood in the Danube Gorges context emerged through a complex interplay of visual perception and experience of being in the world conveyed through the body, as well as through relations between different bodies and the environment, the treatment of animal body parts could suggest that animals were considered persons with their own memories, emotions, sensations and worldviews, and in certain occasions, these different perspectives humans strived to experience. Even though, on occasion, some of these animals were treated or conceptualized ‘somewhat like humans’, social interaction was not limited to human or ‘humanlike’ beings alone, but extended to include a variety of non-human persons with complex internal worlds. Therefore, Radovanović’s concept of “neither person nor beast”, could perhaps be reformulated as neither humans nor passive automata, but persons in their own right.

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Koncepti tela i osobnosti u mezolitu-neolitu Đerdapa: interpretacija životinjskih ostataka iz ljudskih grobova

Poslednjih godina, u humanističkim disciplinama je sve aktuelnija tema ne-ljudske dejstvenosti; bilo proučavanjem značenja koja se pridaju predmetima, životinjama i prirodnim pojavama, ili kroz dekonstrukciju ontoloških razlika između „ljudi” i „stvari”. U okviru drugog pristupa, diskutovano je o ideji da ne-ljudski agenti imaju moć da dejstvuju kao „učesnici” u društvenoj interakciji (npr. dejstvena moć materijalnih svojstava predmeta ili životinjskog ponašanja). Ovaj rad se bavi praksom polaganja životinjskih ostataka u ljudske grobove u mezolitu-neolitu Đerdapa, koristeći kao teorijski okvir perspektivizam, tj. ideju o različitim načinima na koje se može biti osoba u zavisnosti od telesnih i javnih karakteristika. U Đerdapu, izbor životinjskih vrsta i njihovih skeletnih delova koji su polagani u grobove je varirao, ali nije bio nasumačan. Pre bi se moglo reći da je odražavao određene kulturno specifične „taksonomije”, koje su se zasnivale na različitim svojstvima životinja: kako izgledaju, kako se kreću ili ponašaju. Česti su bili slučajevi deponovanja jelenskih rogova, koji su imali moć regeneracije svake godine, ili psećih vilica (fizičkih ostataka „usta”) koje su imale moć da „komuniciraju”. Cilj rada je ispitivanje različitih načina na koje

su ljudi „pozajmljivali” neke aspekte životinjske telesnosti (koji su bili povezani sa određenim viđenjem i doživljajem sveta) koristeći životinjske kosti.

Ključne reči: životinjska dejstvenost, osobnost, telesnost, perspektivizam, mezolit-neolit, Đerdap, Lepenski Vir, Vlasac, ljudsko-životinjski odnosi, grobovi

Concepts du corps et de la singularité dans le mésolithique-néolithique de Đerdap: Interprétation des vestiges animaux provenant des tombes humaines

Ces dernières années, dans les disciplines humanistes, le thème de l'efficacité non-humaine est de plus en plus d'actualité, que ce soit à travers l'étude des significations données aux objets, animaux et aux phénomènes naturels, ou que ce soit à travers la déconstruction des différences ontologiques entre les „hommes” et les „choses”. Dans le cadre de la deuxième approche, nous avons discuté l'idée d'après laquelle les agents non-humains auraient le pouvoir d'agir en tant que 'participants' dans l'interaction sociale (par exemple, la puissance efficace des caractéristiques matérielles des objets ou des comportements animaux). Ce travail traite la pratique du placement des vestiges animaux dans des tombes humaines au cours du mésolithique-néolithique de Đerdap, avec le perspectivisme comme cadre théorique, c'est-à-dire l'idée sur les différentes manières d'être un individu en fonction des caractéristiques corporelles et apparentes. À Đerdap, le choix des espèces animales et de leurs parties du squelette qui avaient été posées dans les tombes, avait varié, mais n'était pas fortuit. Il est plutôt possible de dire qu'il reflétait certaines „taxonomies” culturellement spécifiques, fondées sur les différentes caractéristiques des animaux: leur apparence, leur façon de se mouvoir ou de se comporter. Des cas de placement de cornes de cerfs ayant le pouvoir de se régénérer chaque année ou des mâchoires de chiens (vestiges physiques de la „bouche”) ayant le pouvoir de 'communiquer', étaient fréquents. L'objectif du travail est d'explorer différentes manières dont les hommes 'empruntaient' certains aspects de la corporalité animale (liés avec une certaine vision et expérience du monde) en utilisant les os des animaux.

Mots clés: efficacité animale, singularité, corporalité, perspectivisme, mésolithique-néolithique, Đerdap, Lepenski Vir, Vlasac, rapports entre humains et animaux, tombes

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