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The art of decorating (transforming) one's body since Prehistoric times, more specifically since Mesolithic.

Or « A strange weave of space and time » (Walter Benjamin 1931, 35).

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Abstract

« Man in his natural state is a pure spirit as he is distinct from the animal precisely in that he has a culture » (Leiris 1951, 30).

The body transformation techniques are multiple: tattoo, scarification, piercing, implants, painting, etc.

Motif variation from a region to another attests of a real « territory », a specialization of visible skin-area of an individual as a member of a community or a specific cultural group.

Prehistoric paintings and carvings from Late Mesolithic or Early Neolithic show a multitude of details such as corporal modifications/alterations and ornamental clothing that appear very similar to populations from modern times and even to traditional cultures. In this way, they seem to confirm the hypothesis of a perennality (unchanging) in the art (construction) of being a man in these societies since Mesolithic, even since Paleolithic until the early of twentieth century.

Key words

Integumentary signs -Body modification - identity construction - Dental mutilation- Piercing-Labret-

Introduction

Since the 1980s we have witnessing a cultural wave of body marking (scarification, implant, mutilation etc ...) which are emerging as a new way to adorn one's body. The contemporary body is the centre of all identity issues in the field of humanities and fine arts. These integumentary signs (tribal scars which were formerly objects of denial and are today sublimated by fashion designers Jean Paul Gaultier, John Galliano, and the actor Sylvester Stallone have now become fashionable and these contemporary adornments are imitating those of « traditional societies ».

What were the terms of identity construction in traditional or even prehistoric society passing through initiation rites, indisputable legacy of elders' words and traditional uses ?

According to the anthropological / sociological approach, rituals mutilations may notably include :

circumcision, sub-incision (incision of the internal part of the penis up to the urethra), excision of the clitoris, extraction or filing of teeth, deformation of the skull, the perforation of earlobes or the nasal septum or Tattooing, as well as ephemeral changes such as make up, hair styles or painting.

Ritual mutilations are extremely widespread and diverse, however, as B. Malinowski noted, they do present a great similarity. Ritual mutilations are intimately linked to religion, initiation or communities and facilitate the

identification of the subject by society as a whole.

Most peoples of the world have been concerned by ritual mutilations notably the Celts, Eskimos, Egyptians, Japanese, Berbers ... Many texts from ancient times relate the traditions which used these physical modifications.

In recent years, the discovery of proto historical mummies with well-preserved skins has corroborated written testimonials, (including those of the fifth century Greek historian Herodotus on Scythian tattoos after the discovery of Pazyryk mummies). *Cf. Planche-Illustrations A, Fig. 1, 2.*

This seems to support the interpretations proposed by prehistorians concerning engravings on certain prehistoric statuettes and also certain prehistoric paintings from different continents showing physical modifications very similar to those in current primitive cultures. These rituals would appear to date back to Aurignacian culture. *Cf. Planche-Illustrations A, Fig. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.*

The discovery of Ötzi in 1991 in the Italian- Austrian Alps showed irrefutably the use of protohistoric therapeutic/prophylactic tattoos in the Chalcolithic period between 3350 and 3100 BC. in Europe (where neolithisation had been established for at least a thousand years). From what we know at present, it would seem that this tradition ended here in Western Europe but we find it in later times in other geographical areas. *Cf. Planche-Illustrations A, Fig. 3.*

The tattooed Mummy from Peru (dating from around AD 450) establishes the continuity of markings in ancient times. *Cf. Planche-Illustrations A, Fig. 4.*

Basing myself on recent archeological data, on irrefutable evidence (like the Otzi mummy) as well as evidence brought by anthropologists and ethnologists who studied traditional civilizations in modern times, I intend to establish the filiation of this body « humanization » with signs /marks of culture back to Mesolithic times. Can I demonstrate the hypothesis of a continuity in the specific answer of each culture ? Can I confirm the hypothesis of a perennality (unchanging) in the art (construction) of being a man in these societies since Mesolithic, (even since Paleolithic) until the early of twentieth century ?

« Body is the « general instrument of world understanding », as Maurice Merleau-Ponty put it, which is probably why every society, with its' own style, has tried to give it (the body) a specific answer. » (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 272)

The maximum word limit is 5000 words, thereby : as part of this text I will not be relying solely on the physical evidence of human archaeological findings.

Do we have irrefutable archaeological evidence confirming the hypothesis of a continued practice of mutilations which would seem to date back to the origins of human kind?

Development

In the Mesolithic period, from what we know at present, the oldest evidence comes from Africa. This concerns the practice of piercing a part of the body to insert an ornament, (commonly known nowadays as piercing) as well as dental mutilation. These types of mutilation have also been observed at later periods in different parts of the world.

Since prehistoric times especially in Sao populations (Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad), the mutilations identified in Africa have been: lip and ear piercing, filing/sharpening of teeth and tooth extraction. (Galay A. and al, 1982 ; Cabanès, 2014 ; Carpentier M., 2011).

As of now , I intend to see at first lip piercing and in a second time sharpening of teeth and tooth extraction.

1. The piercing

The oldest evidence comes from the Mesolithic/Neolithic habitat of El-Barga.

According to the publication by Mathieu Honneger on the Mesolithic habitat (around 7300 BC.) and the Neolithic habitat (6960-5500 cal BC.) of El-Barga which is situated around 15 km from the Nile. (four dating were performed : ETH-28405 6605 ± 60 BC., ETH--28406 6785 ±60 BC., ETH-27207 960 ± 65 BC., ETH-27208 7045±70 BC.). (Honneger M., 2005)

In the cemetery (Mesolithic period/early Neolithic), counting nearly 100 graves, the tomb of a woman wearing a labret was discovered in the tombs south of El Barga. Other tombs contained stone labrets, found near the mouths of the individuals. This confirms that the labrets were indeed inserted into the upper or lower lips. Labrets are particularly rare in Egyptian prehistory and proto history . *Cf. Planche-Illustrations B, Fig. 2, 3.*

This discovery could confirm J. Courtin's quartz objects (Courtin J., 1965), described as Labrets, found in Borkou (Northern Chad) and attributed to the final Neolithic period. These are similar to the Neolithic polished quartz labrets of the Tilemsi Valley (Mali) described by J. Gaussen (Gaussen J., 1962). *Cf. Planche-Illustrations B, Fig.1.*

These modifications still persist today, as shown by these labrets worn by the peoples of the Omo Valley (Ethiopia). Mursi, Nyangatom, Dasanetch (on the border Kenyan /Sudan) etc. In Tchad, the current labrets are still very popular among the people of the Logone : Massa, Mousseye, Toubouri, Moundang. In Cameroon, quartz labrets are still worn by Kirdi. *Cf. Planche-Illustrations B, Fig. 4, 5.*

These examples establish the link between prehistoric times and the twentieth century.

Otherwise, in pre-Columbian north Chile : The burials from the site of Solcor 3 (AD 400–900) included a complete skeleton associated with two quartz labrets (Torres-Rouff C., 2003).

Turning now to the second part of our development.

2. Dental mutilation.

These dental practices date back to the late prehistoric times. Dentals mutilations were usually carried out on adolescents and were customary in Africa and America but they are found in other geographic areas. The teeth were inlaid with precious stones or damaged for religious rites, for aesthetic reasons and even broken or filed down certainly for therapeutic reasons.

2.1-Filing and sharpening.

Tooth filing and sharpening are very old techniques (Chippaux C., 1982). During the twentieth century and the colonial period, many writers, explorers and ethnologists have described these forms of dental mutilation.

D. Livingstone already wrote in 1859 that Mangas women (Eastern African) sharpened their teeth like cat ears.

M. Baudouin wrote that these women had an alligator smile (Baudouin M., 1924).

As recently as the early twentieth century, peoples of the Upper Nile (Nuer) carried out dental mutilations and the Bafia in Cameroon pierced their ears and filed their teeth.

These mutilations occurred since the prehistoric times. In Africa, the oldest traces of filing were found on a fossil skull, dating probably from the Neolithic period, in Olduvai (North Eastern Tanzania),(Baudouin M., 1924 ;

Saul Dufou O., 2003).

B.C. Finucane reports the earliest securely dated evidence for intentional dental modification in West Africa. Human remains representing « 11 individuals were recovered from the sites of Karkarichikat Nord (KN05) and Karkarichikat Sud Mainly (KS05) in the lower Tilemsi Valley of eastern Mali. The modified anterior maxillary dentitions of four individuals were recovered from KN05. The dental modification involved the removal of the mesial and distal angles of the incisor, as well as the mesial angles of the canine. Radiocarbon dates from the site indicate that the remains pertain to the Late Stone Age (4500–4200 BC.) » (Finucane B. C., 2008, 1) *Cf. Planche-Illustrations C. Fig. 13.*

Megalithic sites: Siné-Ngayène and Daré-Diouldé (Senegal) dated between AD 594-790. The author Thlimans described the removal of the mesial angle of the upper central incisors. (Thlimans G. and al, 1980).

These modifications to the shape and surface of teeth have been observed in many peoples of the African continent and these practices still persist : Bambara, Mandjak, Bassari peoples of Senegal (Bajolet M., 1933 ; Gaye F., 1995), Bantu, Pygmy peoples of Congo (Molloumba F. and al, 2008), Babinga of Gabon (Fleuriot A., 1942), Lobis, Mossis peoples of Burkina Faso (Huard P., 1938), Himbas, Herero of Namibie (Dervaux H., 2006). *Cf. Planche-Illustrations C Fig. 4, 5, 12.*

We have here a link between tooth filing and sharpening of African prehistoric period and the persistence of this practice right up to proto history and current primitive cultures.

Besides in Japon, several skulls dating from the Jomon period have been found with a mutilated dentition. On a Koganei jawbone, dating from the time Mid Jomon in Japon (5000 BC.), G. Corbière observed the carving of the upper central incisors which were serrated in 3 points as well as the extraction of incisors and mandible canines. (Corbière G., 2003) *Cf. planche-Illustrations C. Fig. 2.*

These practices were common practice among the Andean civilizations. In Mexico, two types of procedures have been noted : the first consists in filing the incisors, all or some of them and the second consists in inlaying them with jade or obsidian pearls. The two techniques are sometimes combined (Carpentier M., 2011) . *Cf. Planche-Illustrations C. Fig.1, 3, 9.*

As regards Europe, this practice was exceptional in the Neolithic and early Metal Ages (based on the current state of knowledge).

M. Baudouin writes *L'Abbé Breuil* described remains of a human jaw with sharp incisors (4500 BC.), located in a dolmen north of Spain. (Baudouin M., 1924).

A case of partial dental mutilation affecting the two upper central incisors was discovered in the prehistoric site of “Cova del Frare” (Matadepera, Barcelona) dating from 2000 -1500 BC. (Aracelli M. and al, 1980). *Cf. planche-Illustrations C. Fig. 7.*

As well, a male skull from prehistoric Gran Canaria population has been analyzed. The most remarkable fact is that this skull has the three incisors cuts (Necropolis n°2, Andén del Tabacaleta, Tejada (GRO-1191 AD 285) (Garralda MD., 1982). *Cf. planche-Illustrations C. Fig. 6.*

C. Arcini (quoted by par Carpentier M., 2011) described the horizontal grooves on the surfaces of incisors (and sometimes also on canines) on men discovered in four Viking Age graveyards in Sweden (AD 800- 1010). *Cf. Planche-Illustrations C. Fig. 8.*

We have one last point to analyze.

2.2- Dental Avulsion.

According to professors J. Granat et . L. Heim (*Musée de l'Homme*) this form of dental mutilation was observed for the first time in the Epipalaeolithic period in the Maghreb in the Iberomaurusians (circa 10000 BC.) where they were generally limited to the upper middle incisors and in the Capsians (Algeria and Tunisia 6800 – 4500 BC.), where they were rarer and concerned the maxillary and mandible incisors. It is reasonable to think that avulsion was carried out at the time when the permanent teeth were appearing, when the roots are not yet well formed. (Granat J., 1990).

Other examples have been found in India and China. Today we can observe in remote areas in Vietnam, isolated cases still perpetuating this mutilation. (Dervaux H., 2006)

It is rarer in pre-Columbian America and Australia. And yet the writer and ethnographer V. Forbin described in 1926 that Australian natives practiced removal of upper central incisors (Forbin V., 1926).

Besides, in Europe, this practice was exceptional in the Neolithic and early Metal Ages. In the ethnographic literature, a case of median incisor removal on jaw was described by M. Baudouin in Vaudancourt dolmen (Oise, France) (Baudouin M., 1924).

According G. Delluc, the oldest skulls have been unearthed in Algeria: « Cro-Magnoïde » skulls (Mechta el-Arbi, El Omaria - Médéa et Khenget el-Mouhaâd, Algeria). These skulls have also undergone avulsions (Delluc G., 2010).

The first archaeological evidence dates back (9600- 5500 cal BC.) Capsien supérieur, from Algeria and comes from a snail farm, in the municipality of Canrobert, around 70 km south-east of Constantine (Qacentina). This skull was discovered in 1954 next to Capsian industry by G. Laplace who was on a dig. From the dental point of view, the skull had undergone deliberate avulsion of the maxillary and mandible, central and lateral incisors. (Granat J., 1990) *Cf. Planche-Illustrations C, Fig. 10.*

Until the end of the nineteenth century, these dental mutilations were still common in Nigeria and Congo, Angola. *Cf. Planche-Illustrations C, Fig. 11.*

We have here a link between dental avulsion of African prehistoric period and the persistence of this practice right up to proto history and current primitive cultures.

As a way to conclude

Conclusion

We undertook to establish a corpus of tangible evidence of prehistoric body modifications. Our work is under construction, this article therefore not intended to synthesis.

Tangible evidence is tenuous for the period that interests us, Mesolithic. It is more consequent in the Neolithic. During proto-historical times the documentation is much more important on all continents, demonstrating the variety of the body transformation technics, demonstrating the particular answer of each culture and each place. Body paintings make an ephemeral exception but we have proof of it thanks to painted scenes on the rock walls and on anthropomorphic sculptures.

In the light of recent archaeological findings, we can say that since prehistoric times, « Man has humanised his body

with signs of his culture, whether it be by embedding objects in his flesh, by painting his skin, by his way of dressing, by his hair style, his body hair (...) He who remains in his natural state does not distinguish himself from the brute ». To quote C. Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss C., 2001, 50)

Could contemporary fashion of integumentary signs - deprived of their original meaning-, plastic surgery be a way to re-invent new Western social identities as P. Liotard suggests (Liotard P., 2003), and thereby establishing a continuity ?

« Adorned bodies, modified bodies, ways of being Human since homo sapiens »

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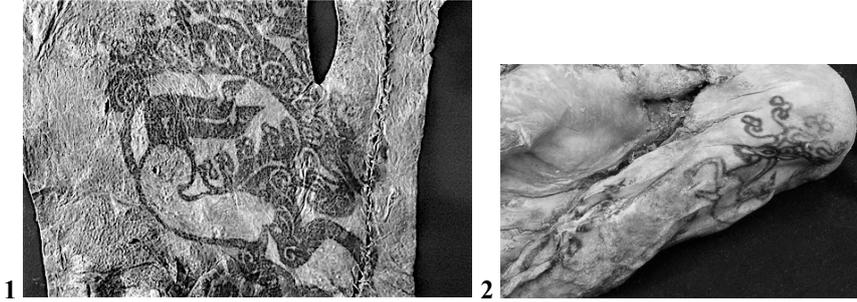
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Fig. 12) Carpentier M., (2011), 38.

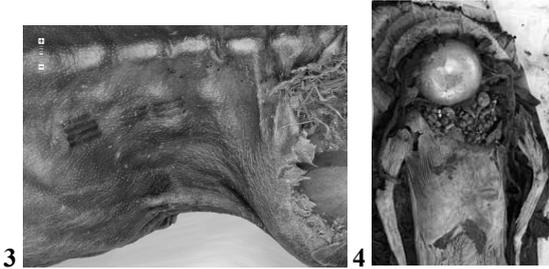
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Planche-Illustrations A

Syrie : Les Scythes Fig. 1) Mummy (Pazyryk, 500-300 BC.) ; Fig. 2) Mummy, (Ukok, 500 BC.)



Tattooed Mummy : Fig. 3) Tattoo of Otzi (5300 BC.) ; Fig. 4) Moche d'El Brujo, Pérou, (AD 450)



Examples : tattooed or scarified statuette-object-Painting

Fig.5) The with the lion's mask Hohle Fels (Aurignacien, About 30 000 years ago) ; Fig.6) Venus Höhle Fels (jura souabe) 30 000 - 40 000 years ago Mammouth ivory ; Fig.7) Double phallus, Grotte d'Abzac, Dordogne, France, 25 000 years ago ; Fig.8) Tattooed statue, Upper Egypt ,predynastic Period (End of Egyptian prehistory),Nagada II, 3500-4000 BC.; Fig.9) Nubian female bust (Sudan, Pré Kerma) « Groupe A » around 3500 BC. ; Fig.10) Neolithic painting, Tassili n'Ajjer, Afrique to 7500 BC. Protoberbère bovidien.

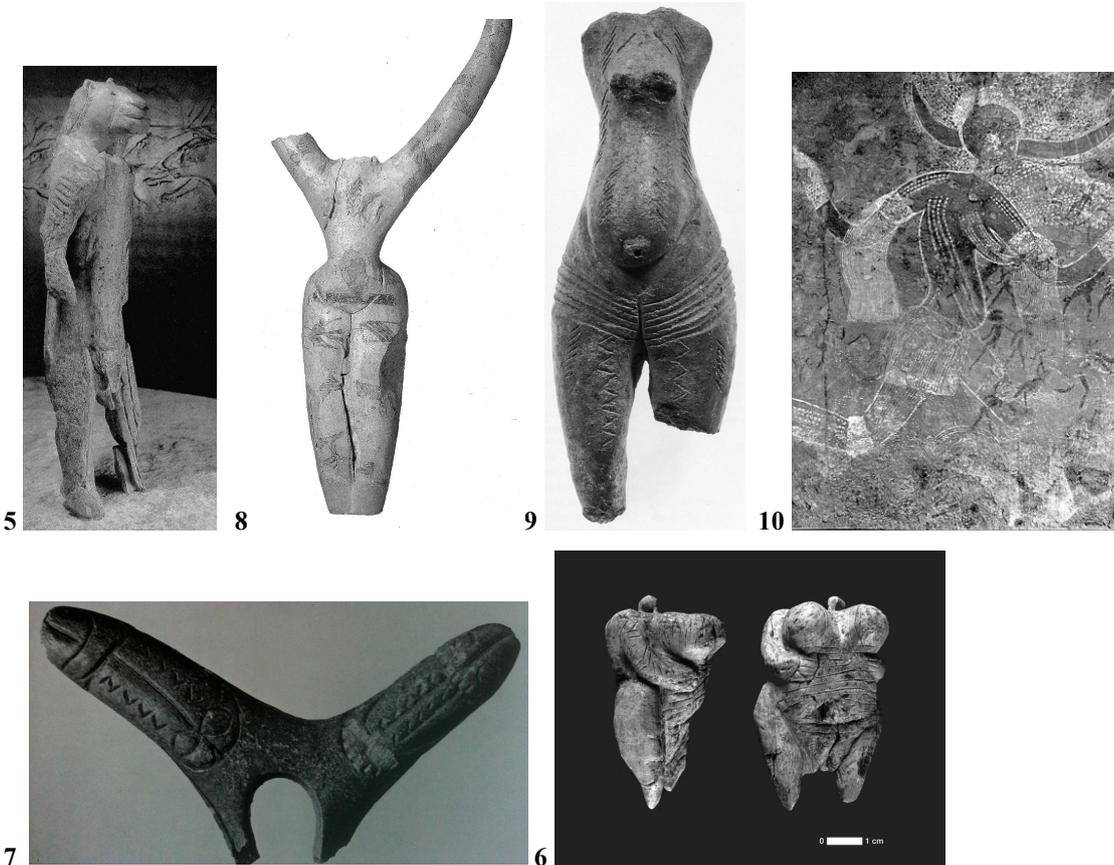
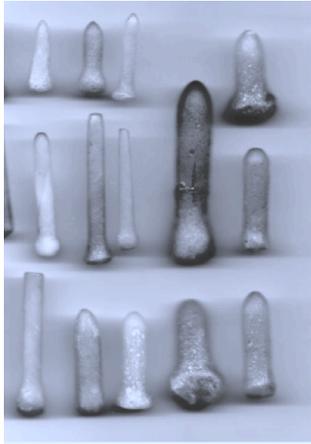


Planche-Illustrations B

Wear labret continuity from prehistory to history

Fig.1) Hyaline quartz labret (Final Neolithic) North Tchad, Borkou-enedi-Tibesti region, near Largeau ; **Fig.2)** El-Barga Labrets (6960-5500 BC.) ; **Fig.3)** Women grave: labret found in position. Southern sector, El Barga ; **Fig.4)** People of the Omo valley ; **Fig.5)** Tamberma woman, Togo.



1



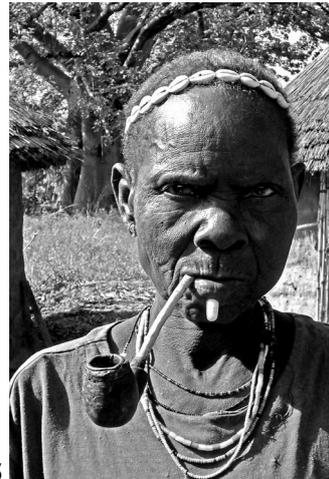
2



3



4



5

Planche-Illustrations C

Dental mutilation : Filing and sharpening, dental avulsion continuity from prehistory to history

Fig.1) Jaw : incisors filing Mixtèque, Mexique Postclassique (AD 900 -1521) ; **Fig.2)** Koganei jawbone, (Baudouin, 1924 ; Corbière, 2003) Neolithic period; **Fig.3)** Pre-Columbian Maxillary (Tzintzuntzan (Michoacan) (Saul Duffoo O. 2010) ; **Fig.4)** Young woman pygmy, in the northwest Congo 2007 (Molloumba and al.(2008) ; **Fig.5)** Dental mutilations Congo twentieth century; **Fig.6)** Incisive mutilation Gran Canarian (AD 285) (Garralda M.D., 1982); **Fig.7)** Mid-superior incisives ; distal side : Arrows indicate the position of mutilation (AraccelliM., 1980); **Fig.8)** horizontal grooves on the surfaces of incisors (and sometimes also on canines) on men discovered in four Viking Age graveyards in Sweden (AD 800- 1010) ; **Fig.9)** Mandible, Classical period (fifth- fourth BC.) Jaina Island (Nord East state of Campeche, Mexique) (Dufoo, 2010) ; **Fig.10)** Faïd souar ii (Proto - Méditerranéen, around 7000 BC.) ; **Fig.11)** Mumuila woman (Angola) : upper central incisors are extrated (avulsion) ; **Fig.12)** Himba woman : mesial angles of the incisors are cut diagonally ; **Fig.13)** Fragmentary maxilla of skeleton 2. Karkarichinkat Nord, Mali : modification of incisors and canine (4500-4200 cal BC.) (Finucane B.C. and al, 2008).

