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RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS**

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ANCIENT HISTORY: RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

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Karin Sanders, *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2009; xx + 317 pp., 63 b/w illustrations; ISBN 978-0-226-73404-0; \$57.95.

Inspired by the Danish archaeologist P.V. Glob's pioneering book *The Bog People*, and later by the "bog poems" of the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, Karin Sanders, Professor of Scandinavian at the University of California, Berkeley, has written a remarkable work. Her book, unlike Glob's, is not an archaeological or historical analysis of the bog bodies, but a 'reception study', a rich and fascinating exploration of the impact these eerily preserved remains have made since their disinterment. The reader is taken on an extraordinary "cultural journey" through the 'afterlife' of the bog bodies in written texts, visual representations and museum displays.

Sanders' book opens up a fascinating world of poetic and artistic imagination, philosophical and psychological speculation and erotic fantasy. Writers as diverse as Sigmund Freud, William Carlos Williams and Margaret Atwood (in *Playboy* no less!) have engaged with bog bodies in a variety of ways. The reaction of visual artists is almost equally remarkable, and a generous number of black and white figures serves to illustrate many of their works and to reinforce the author's analysis. Arresting as her subject matter is, it would be misleading, however, to claim that Sanders' book is easy reading: it is informed at every step by abstruse theorizing and frequently couched in dense postmodernist jargon, to which the reviewer is highly allergic.

Reference to bog bodies goes back to "our" era, of course, with Tacitus' observation in his *Germania* (Ch.12) that "cowards, the unwarlike and those besmirched in body (*corpore infames*) are immersed in the muddy swamp with a [wooden] frame thrown over them". But speculation about the reason for their presence is not Sanders' purpose. In her introduction, "Remarkable Remains", Sanders (S) summarily disposes of the question of what the finds represent: "Today, most archaeological interpretations have centered on three possibilities: the bodies are remains of people ... placed in the bogs as transgressors to be punished, as sacrifices to the gods, or as a combination of the two." (6). Her interest is in their 'afterlife'. Bog bodies are deeply uncanny; they have "temporal peculiarities"; they are 'frozen in time' and subvert normal temporality. They are ambiguous—they are both human like us, but also inanimate objects; they acquire names, but they are place names, such as 'Yde Girl'; 'Tollund Man'. The bogs themselves are liminal: solid and soft, wet and dry; dark and dangerous, but also mysterious and alluring. No wonder they evoke such a range of imaginative responses.

In a section "Archaeological Imaginations" (14 ff.) S takes us into a different quagmire, that of theoretical discussion, Bakhtin's 'chronotopes' and the like. This will form a pattern in the book: an intriguing discussion of a variety of responses to bog bodies followed by (often dense) theoretical analysis, that of others and of S herself. To be fair, some of the most intractable verbiage is not the author's. An example? "Only a semiotics focused on the production of meaning in covality can theorise the structural similarity between touching and seeing that is important here. For seeing is a semiotically informed act of indexicality, of reaching into space." (155). But one can find much to enjoy in the book without struggling to comprehend such passages. There's many an arresting idea and incisive sentence by way of compensation.

In Ch. 1, S pictures bogs as "Nature's Own Darkroom", with powers similar to those of photography. "Photographs ... mak(e) the dead alive and the living dead." (33). "Both bog and photography can ... be seen as laboratories for prosthetic memories." (25). Tollund Man's body was not preserved after the exhumation and examination, only his head—the body on display in the Museum is a reconstruction—so that our most "authentic" access to him is through photographs (30). S contends that without photographs most of the artistic representations she discusses "would never have seen the light of day". (33). Heaney, for instance, first "met" the most famous bog bodies via the photos in Glob's book. A discussion of "postcard aesthetics", incorporating some observations of Roland Barthes, leads to one on the ethics of display: "Glossing Trauma". As with the question of authenticity, this will be a recurrent topic in the book. This wide-ranging chapter ends with sections on "The Danger of Projection" (such as "projecting national traits onto the faces of bog finds"; 40) and "Landscape Nostalgia".

Ch. 2, "The Archaeological Uncanny", focuses upon Freud and his theory of repression, his sexualisation of the uncanny, "das Umheimliche", and his surprising dismissal of the bog bodies' importance, surprising because, as "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light", they might seem to be "tailor-made for his theory of the uncanny"(48).

It is fascinating to read that Jung's interest in the bog bodies so unnerved Freud that he fainted, later explaining to Jung that this signified that Jung had death wishes toward him! S goes on to explore Freud's archaeological interests and surmises, "North versus South" (53 f.), that the Nordic crudeness of the bog bodies, contrasted with the noble marbles of classical antiquity, was too primitive for him. "Leather Skin and Marble Bodies" (56 ff.) compares marble sculptures, casts from Pompeii and bog bodies, and

concludes that the latter offers a greater “presentness and realness” than the former two.

Ch.3, “Uses and Abuses: Bog Body Politics”, commences with a speech of Heinrich Himmler lamenting the widespread homosexuality in German society, and citing the bog bodies as examples of homosexuals removed from society, clearly drawing on Tacitus’ *Germania*. (Unfortunately S garbles Tacitus’ Latin throughout: *corpores infames*, presumably from a misunderstanding of *corpore infames*; but I cannot account for *paludimus*, p. 7.) The chapter then explores the relationship between archaeology and nation-building more generally, examining how archaeology has been politicised in service of the state. S dissects several novels featuring bog bodies by authors of different nationalities: “bog bodies serve as tropes of atrocity and humanity connected to the Holocaust” (76). Under “Undiluted Danish” she shows how they also serve to question national identities. Bog bodies are triggers of debate about racial purity and eugenics.

In another novel incorporating an imagined life story of Tollund Man the Danes are given a romantic history involving encounters with Rome: S argues it is the writer’s response to Denmark’s inclusion in the European Union and the threat to its sovereignty that this posed (81-84). The chapter concludes with the poems of Seamus Heaney, who *inter alia* uses the bog as a place of Irish national identity: the Ulster conflict is explained as self-sacrifice for the preservation of the land.

Ch. 4, “Erotic Digging” opens with the discovery in 1835 of a female bog body who was “still voluptuous when found”. She was identified as the Norwegian Queen Gunhild, and while there was criticism of the identification and the arbitrary connection between literary texts and material artifacts she became a celebrity. S quotes Glob’s account of her character as depicted in the historical record: she was witty and clever, cruel and malevolent. “A host of literary scholars, antiquarians, poets, and dramatists quickly saw her remains as a chance for eroticizing the past” (92). S then takes us through Gunhild’s afterlife in literature, from German and French Romanticism to a Danish novel of 2002 in which she finds herself in a nursing home built on a bog!

Tacitus is the trigger for a section on adultery (“Adulterous Archaeologists”—in fiction, of course!). Tacitus’ description of the fate of unfaithful women has been reshaped to meet the sensibilities of a different era in a horror novel, a short story (Atwood’s) and a poem, all written in the late C20 (102 ff.). Adultery, voyeurism, necrophilia and even masturbatory

archaeological digging make this a luridly entertaining chapter. The Windeby Girl (now re-gendered as Windeby Boy), wins the prize as the most eroticized of the bog bodies. Amongst others, it has inspired some of Heaney’s more erotic poems. With “Bad Bog Babes”—Lori Anderson Moseman’s poetry— we enter the C21 with a vengeance, interactive cyber-poems and all (117 ff.).

“Bog Body Art” (Ch. 5) lagged behind literature until the advent of photography. The German artist Joseph Beuys was one of the first to see the artistic potential of bog bodies, and in 1952 he built an ‘installation’ entitled “Grauballe Man” (127 ff.). An astonishing range of paintings, serigraphs, sculptures, ceramics and photographs have followed, generously illustrated (in black and white) here. They raise a multiplicity of questions and issues, but the latter are frequently couched in dense prose by the critics (I have given an example earlier in my review), and this reader finds the visual images much more approachable than the theorising of artists and critics. But one can agree with S when she speaks of “the tension between presentation and representation (being) both muffled and intensified” when an archaeological artefact is “or rather has been” a human being. The combination of identification and alienation gives bog bodies, like mummy portraits, a different resonance for us (147). Today, visual art is more radical than of yore, and S plausibly suggests that bog bodies have played a role in reclaiming the ugly figure for art (163-164). She raises the further question of the extent to which they “test the boundaries of the use of dead bodies in modern art” (164). She speaks of the irony of reconstructing bog body faces: these are artificial, but produce the effect of reality.

Ch. 6, “Museum Thresholds and the Ethics of Display”, “turn(s) from the museums of art to the museums of archaeology” (168). Here a number of bog bodies have found a new home, to remain, one would hope, ‘frozen in time’ forever. But they confront many dangers. They have already been decontextualised. How are they to be displayed? Questions of ‘authenticity’ are raised. The distinction between archaeological specimens and ‘fine art’ can easily become blurred. What are the ethics of displaying dead human bodies? Visitors’ reactions vary sharply—especially as some museums now engage in ‘event making’: archaeology becomes a crime show. Can artistry in interpretation be defended on the ground that it “challenges the positivist paradigm of processual archaeology and promotes the relevance and validity of inductive reasoning over deductive reasoning” (183)? Is the virtual museum a curiosity cabinet once more? What is being explained, what merely displayed? (192).

Ch. 7, "Making Faces", raises once more the question of authenticity. Faces are critical to our identity: can a reconstruction of a face for an archaeological specimen be 'authentic'? There is a paradox: the human face in plastic form can lose the humanness it strives to show (198). In this chapter S discusses the techniques and philosophy of facial reconstruction of bog bodies. The archaeologist and medical artist who collaborated to reconstruct the rather 'peculiar' face of the Yde Girl acknowledge the subjective element in the process, but defend it by pointing out that in this it is not essentially different from any other kind of archaeological or historical reconstruction (204-205). But S puts her finger on a vital difference, one which perhaps explains the scepticism which is sometimes directed to such facial reconstructions: unlike in a written report, where language enables you to qualify your judgments, you can't hedge in a visual reconstruction (213). Nonetheless, she concludes, they "offer us the ultimate prosthetic memory" (217).

A curious and curiously personal postscript rounds out a most unusual and intriguing book.

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J.G. Manning, *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt Under the Ptolemies 305–30 BC*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2009; xvi + 264 pp, index, bibliography and index of sources. ISBN 978-0-691-14262-3; \$61.00.

As a subject area, the Ptolemaic period is particularly complex and, at times, overwhelming. One must contend not only with the complicated dynastic history, but also the unique culture that developed from increased contact between Greeks and Egyptians. Into this mix, introduce the great abundance of source material in Greek, Hieroglyphic, Hieratic and Demotic and the temptation to launch into in-depth study leaves one wondering where to begin.

J.G. Manning's *The Last Pharaohs* is a comprehensive study of economics and governance in the Ptolemaic period.