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Faces of the Past and the Ethical Display of Bog Bodies in "Kingship and Sacrifice"

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Faces of the Past and the Ethical Display of Bog Bodies in “Kingship and Sacrifice”

Julia Walsh

Chancellor’s Honors Program Undergraduate Thesis

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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Introduction

Bog bodies are a unique natural phenomenon. Localized, mythologized, and often misunderstood, as such they have captivated the cultural imagination for centuries for their blank and uncanny nature, appearing in the works of Seamus Heaney and Hozier alike. They emerge from the depths of peat bogs with eerie countenances – creatures of liminal realms, the past, and the undercarriage of ancient natural formations. It is easy to buy into the aura of sensationalism and perceive bog bodies as inhuman. The dehumanization of human remains is a storied tradition across the globe, especially in museum settings. An ongoing global movement has been underway for decades to treat human remains on display with dignity under frameworks of ethical display. This means returning the narrative life to the human remains through emphasis on their individual histories, the lives and deaths of the people they were and their lived world. My research was focused on how this framework was applied in a positive and effective manner in the permanent exhibit of bog bodies “Kingship and Sacrifice” at the National Museum of Ireland – Archaeology, Dublin, Ireland.

I studied abroad in Dublin in 2018, and while living there I visited “Kingship and Sacrifice” for the first time as an eager tourist. The bog bodies’ histories as probable Celtic kings and their incredible preservation levels fascinated me and occupied my mind long after the visit. In 2019 I approached the exhibit again, but this time as a researcher analyzing the framework of ethical display and how it effects the narrative layers at work in the exhibit between audience, institution, and the bodies themselves. There are multiple perspectives at play and each intersect with the other to create a space where the visitor’s autonomous decision making is key to engaging with the narrative.

Choice was not afforded to the men who became the bog bodies. According to the “kingship and sacrifice” theory of Eammon P. Kelly on which the exhibit is built upon, they were Iron Age sacrificial victims, killed due to their status as failed kings. In a mirror of their deaths, choice is incorporated in almost every element of the exhibit design for the visitors, but not for the human remains. The curatorial perspective (as researchers into the pasts of the bodies and their culture) supplements the lack of written tradition for any once existent Celtic reburial wishes by treating them as revered common cultural ancestors. With no record of lineage due to the anonymity of their remains, the bog bodies stand in for all Celtic ancestors and are treated with the dignity and respect given to such a position. For a nation and a culture which has been subjugated to colonization for hundreds of years, reclamation and celebration of Irish Celtic heritage under their own sovereignty is vital to creating a national identity for the Republic of Ireland, a nation not even one hundred years old.

The ability to connect, face to face as it is, with human remnants of a suppressed cultural heritage was designed with the intent of audience members finding both common identity and national identity within the display of the bodies. Museum rhetoric has a core focus within the critical framework of national museums as sites of civic engagement and national identity formation, and my interpretation of that focus centers on how the bog bodies re-center Irish national identity within a collective narrative that stretches between the Iron Age to the 21st century. That collective, comprehensive, and distinct narrative of Irish identity thrives due to the humanity re-afforded to the bodies through the ethical framework of display. Education, research, and a cultural importance all find strong and common root within this framework, which demonstrates the importance of museums and archives prioritizing dignity and ethical considerations for the human remains in their care. I trace these branches through the history of

bog lands in Ireland and their composition, and the history of the Celtic people's interactions with bogs and sovereignty; the background, history, and importance of the National Museum of Ireland as an institution; the exhibit background, overview, and my rhetorical analysis.

Chapter One – Background

Methodology

My methodological approach was to illuminate the histories of the bog bodies themselves first and foremost from the environment, both cultural and physical. I wanted to give a firm context for the NMI and its background as an institution to tie into how it exhibits the bodies in an ethical framework of display. The rhetorical analysis of the exhibit is based in the sub-fields of body rhetoric, museum rhetoric, and audience interpretation. The body rhetoric examined goes into how different types of bodies move through and inhabit the exhibit space, as the living visitors engage with the inert and ancient dead. Museum rhetoric dives into the formation of the Irish national identity through the context of displaying members of an ancestral group and how that is done without over-simplifying the past culture. Audience interpretation relies upon my personal analysis of the site with and without the context of the curatorial intent.

Global context is explored through the overview of the history of bog body exhibits in North-western Europe, from NMI's own history with Gallagher Man to the international renown of Lindow Man and Tollund Man of Denmark. The global context is necessary for situating "Kingship and Sacrifice's" position in this small group, and acts as a necessary comparison in terms of ethics of display and its rhetorical message.

The justification for my modes of research lies upon the distinct nature of the exhibit and my history with it. I had previously visited the exhibit in the Spring of 2018, but only as a visitor

rather than a researcher, and only in hindsight did I realize its potential for rhetorical analysis. I returned a year later as a researcher and was able to revisit with an academic context. My rationale for on-site research is that it was essential to the core of my work as it allowed me to engage with different aspects of the exhibit in an analytical way I had not done before which provided me with valuable data.

A consideration that must be taken into account for the project and the exhibit itself is that there is one sole and prolific researcher in the field of Irish bog bodies, Eamonn P. Kelly, the former Head of Irish Antiquities Division of NMI whose theories on kingship and sacrifice are upon which the exhibit is based. There are little to no criticisms, rebuttals, or critical examinations of his work in the public research sphere. My own research into the field yielded no serious contesting evidence to his theories, and as such I take no critical stand in my project against them. This project is not focused on the underlying theories themselves outside of context for the exhibit and its rhetorical intent, but it is worth noting that as they are, they are the standard for the small field.

Initially I intended to conduct my personal research for this project through available published research and email interviews, but I was able to add a deeper dimension to the work by doing on-site analysis and personally interview the current co-Keeper of “Kingship and Sacrifice” Isabella Mulhall. Before I conducted my on-site research in April 2019, I created my following research questions to guide my on-site work:

1. How does a framework of ethical treatment toward human remains on public display build a connection between the audience and the narrative of the exhibit?
2. How does the physical design and written interpretation reinforce ethical framework?

3. Can human remains on display function as both objects and respected remnants of past life?

The work I undertook in the project is highly specific given that bog bodies have such a relatively small range as natural phenomena, but the underlying tenants of the exhibit itself and their effects on the intended messages bear merit under certain ideal criteria. Generalizing the concepts to the wider international field of human remains on display in public museums is not strictly possible given that NMI is in the unique position of being a branch of an indigenous sovereign nation having care and ownership over their ancestral remains. Across the world, especially in post-colonial countries similar to Ireland, indigenous peoples do not have control or a say in how their ancestral remains are displayed to the public. Ireland is in a privileged position to be able to do so, especially in regards to the fact that Britain has no hold left on the Republic, unlike the majority of colonized nations. As mentioned earlier, the underlying core tenants of dignity above all else in the display guidelines are part of the exhibit's work that can be generalized, with special care to underline that a large part of why those tenants exist and are enforced is because of the complete cultural sovereignty which holds them.

Bog lands - Composition and the Celts

The shape of Ireland's peat bogs¹ began to form 9,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age during the Pleistocene Era, when the melt water from the glacial sheets in the central plain of the island created shallow lakes which became covered with fen vegetation; and two thousand years later those lakes slowly became raised blanket bogs as peat accumulated within them (O'Sullivan 150.) The peat accumulation was formed by thousands of years of the decayed

¹ Before heavy industrial cutting began in the mid-20th century, 16% of Ireland's surface was comprised of peat bog land (O'Sullivan 150.)

organic remains of plants, trees, and animals. It is a natural preserver of soft tissues due to several unique components of its micro-geology. Peat bogs have anaerobic conditions, and are composed of 85 to 98% water which is high in acidity due to an integral part of the fen vegetation, sphagnum bog moss, which while alive grow on top of layers of decomposing moss and is composed of up to 80% water, and while decaying forms a polysaccharide, sphagnum, which does two things (Meredith 319.) One, it releases a humic acid that removes calcium in the organic remains and preserves their skin with melanoidin; and two, the sphagnum halts decay of the organic remains (including skin, hair, organs, and organic remains in the stomach) as it “reacts with the digestive enzymes of putrefying bacteria” (Giles 1-2.) Additionally, the water acidity in the bog is increased by the antibiotics and hydrogens ions excreted by the sphagnum moss, which also slows down the process of decay (Gladwin 29-32.) The slow process of decay in a highly anaerobic environment creates the ideal conditions for naturally mummifying human and animal remains, as well as preserving other organic based objects made of wood, skin, metal, leather, and wool (Giles 1-2.)

In her book *Bodies in the Bog and the Archeological Imagination*, Dr. Karin Sanders aptly describes peat bogs as “darkrooms of nature” which create “photo-sculpture” out of the organic remains left within them (25.) Those descriptions creatively capture the level of detail preserved in the bog bodies recovered from bogs across North-western Europe. In Ireland alone, approximately one hundred bog bodies have been discovered and recovered since the 18th century (Giles 5.) Due to these attributes, the four bog bodies on display in “Kingship and Sacrifice” have a unique ability to educate modern society on of the culture and lives of the Iron Age Celtic peoples who deposited their bodies in these “darkrooms of nature.”

The Iron Age Celtic people were divided into approximately 150 kingdoms, until the end of Gaelic sovereignty at the end of the 16th century. Kingship was sacred for the Celts as the sovereign was treated as the gods' emissary and intermediary on Earth. The king's position as such was solidified with his ritual marriage to the local sovereignty or earth goddess as a symbolic representation of his unity with the land. Ireland as a whole was represented by the goddess Ériu, for whom the island was named, but the kings were linked specifically to the goddess upon whose bounded domain they ruled. For example, in the territory of Munster, that goddess was Sadbh, who was united with the High King of Tara, Ireland's highest level of sovereignty. The sacred link between the king and the deity of the land meant that the king was held as responsible for appeasing the goddess. This was called *firinne flatha* in Gaelic, which translates to "truth of sovereign" and reflected how the felicity of the king's relationship to the goddess was responsible for the good of his people (Kelly "The Cruel Goddess" 132-137.)

According to Eamonn P. Kelly, former head Keeper of the Irish Antiquities Division of NMI, "A good kingship was reflected in nature, in the harvest, and the health and wealth of the people," and if the bounties of a good harvest and fertility did not come, the king was held responsible and sacrificed to appease the goddess before starting the cycle anew with a new king ("The Bog Bodies Project: Latest Research" 14.) To ritually kill a king the people who he had failed as a sacred mediator inflicted the "three-fold death" upon him. Kelly describes this as specialized form of sacrifice which reflected the common three-fold nature of Irish goddess like Sadbh through three times of killing methods: hanging (or strangulation), drowning (or poisoning), and death by wounding (by axe, sword, or bludgeon) (9.) While it is not clear if the sacrificial deaths occurred next to bogs, modern researchers ascertained that the bodies were

placed there as there were considered to be gateways to the Other World of the gods and goddesses.

The ancient Irish viewed bog lands as liminal spaces, nebulous boundaries between the physical world and the Other World, home to the supernatural, the gods, and death; and in them they returned the bodies of their failed kings. Beyond being watery graves, the bogs also served as boundary markers for the kingdoms. As sites of uncanniness and places difficult if not impossible to cross, bogs along with other natural formations like rivers and mountains. In an interview on the subject, Kelly noted, “The boundary gave form to the territorial goddess and rituals performed there would have had greater prospects of success,” (Bentley 37.) Two of “Kingship and Sacrifice’s” bog bodies sites of discovery give credence to Kelly’s remark. Cashel Man was discovered on what once was the border of *Fearann Ua Leathlobhair* near the inauguration site of the ancient kingdom of *Laoighis’* kings *Cros Dubh*, and Oldcroghan Man was discovered on the boundary of *Fearann Ua Leathlobhair* near where the kings of *Uí Failge* were inaugurated at Croghan Hill (Kelly “The bog body from Cashel Bog, Co. Laois.”¹¹) The combined location of boundary and bog was powerful to the Celtic rites of kingship, and the close proximity to the inauguration sites shows a link between the beginning and end of the kings’ sacred bond to the local goddesses of sovereignty.

Discovery & Analysis of Bog Bodies

Bog bodies have historically been discovered by accident. Ireland was once a heavily forested island and timber was the major source of fuel and incendiary supplies, but when the Irish began to hide in their local woods from the invading British forces during the post-Stewart era the colonists began to raze the forests to keep the indigenous population under their control. Peat bogs became the new preliminary source for fuel in Ireland and peat cutting became a major

industry for the next four hundred years (Bentley 35.) Peat cutting led to the increased discovery of human remains, and added to the written historical record of such discoveries of which there have been over eighty since 1750. When industrial peat cutting under state company Bord na Móna² grew after WWII, and mechanization began to replace the local workers with handheld tools, more bog bodies and other archaeological objects began to be discovered, often in caught in the machine parts (Ó Floinn 95.)

When a bog body is discovered, such as in the case of Cashel Man found by Jason Phelan (a Bord na Móna worker) while using a milling machine in Cashel Bog in County Laois on August 10, 2011, a rigorous forensic analytical process begins (Kelly “The bog body from Cashel Bog, Co. Laois” 1.) First the local Gardaí is called in case the body is a missing person, as bogs have been used as sites to hide recent murders, such as from the 20th century Northern Troubles (Giles 1-2.) Next forensic pathologists and the NMI Bog Body Research Team are called to determine the approximate age of the remains. If they are over one hundred years old, the jurisdiction over the remains falls to the NMI as the national conservator and repository of Irish archaeological artifacts, which includes bog bodies per the National Monuments Act (“NMI Human Remains Policy” 2.) Assistant Keeper of the Irish Antiquities Division, Isabella Mulhall, outlined the strategy that the Research team she leads adheres to when analyzing a new find:

1. They conduct non-destructive anatomical and pathological exams.
2. They do imaging with CD scans, MRIs, and FRX.
3. They take minute samples for radio carbon, paleo, and dermatological.

² Bord na Móna is the largest peat fuel provider in Ireland and produces five million tonnes of peat a year (O’Sullivan 153.)

4. They begin the conservation process for exhibition (Personal interview.)

An example of the process' results can be seen in the discoveries made from examining Cashel Man and the objects found with him. The NMI Conservation Laboratory discovered that his arm was broken before or recently after death, as was his spine, in two places. There were identifiable axe wounds on his back as well. The Laboratory also conducted radiocarbon dating for his body and the hazel stakes bordering it, with first being from approximately 2141-1960 BC and the second from approximately 2033- 1888 BC. This age range gave Cashel Man the unique distinction as being the oldest fleshed body found in Europe to date, and gave evidence through his death wounds, placement, and votive objects that Celtic kingship sacrifices dated back to the Bronze Age, a thousand and a half years earlier than previously thought (Kelly "The bog body from Cashel Bog, Co. Laois." 9-11.)

Chapter Two - Rhetoric of the NMI

The ethical framework of display for human remains begins in the internal institutional policies. There are rigorous guidelines for handling the research and potential exhibition of human remains. An internal aspect of such is NMI's "Human Remains Policy" which was officially adopted by their Management Committee in 2006, and it outlines their standards of care for the human remains in their keep. The Irish Antiquities Division holds the majority of the human remains, for archaeological, anthropological, medical research, and for display and knowledge creation. Ethical treatment is a core tenant of their practice, and to quote, "The National Museum of Ireland is committed to treating all human remains in the museum's collections with respect and with due regard for their dignity as human beings," and, "The NMI undertakes to display human remains respectfully and in a dignified manner with a view to communicating scientific and education information to the public." The Policy guidelines are

rigidly adhered by institutional oversight through individual departments doing case by case considerations, consulting the local communities where the remains were found and taking their recommendations for reburial if given, and following international standards. The balance NMI tries to strike between dignified treatment and educational value is furthermore upheld by their adherence to international guidelines such as the European Conventions on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta Convention) and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (1-3.)

The protocols, procedures, and institutional mandates of a museum shape its rhetorical effect as much as their exhibits do. Before an analysis of exhibit specific framework, a historical context of NMI as an institution is needed. The National Museum of Ireland began in 1890 when the Royal Irish Academy's Irish antiquities collection transferred to the new Dublin Museum of Science and Art which had been founded in 1877 under government act (Bourke xxvii.) In the following century, a distinct "Irish" identity began to form during 1910s and 1920s as the Republic gained sovereignty from Britain through the establishment of the Free State. As the four divisions of the NMI grew over the course of the 20th century the legal protections of their collections expanded as well to fit the growing needs of the new nation. The National Monuments Act (NMA) was passed in 1930 and it defined what is and what is not under legal protection in Irish archives and museums, and it included human remains as archaeological objects under those protections ("National Museum of Ireland: Policy on Human Remains" 3.)

Institutional policies regarding the collection of archaeological objects include the "National Museum of Ireland: Acquisitions & Disposal Policy" which was adopted by the NMI on May 29, 2008. It states the institution's vision and mission, which are quoted in full below:

“A world-class museum that promotes the widest understanding of Ireland’s distinctive culture and place in the world.”

“Collect, preserve and exhibit Ireland’s portable material heritage. Promote the collections and make them accessible to audiences at home and abroad. Be an authoritative voice on Irish heritage and cultural issues. Take the lead in education, research, and scholarship on everything pertaining to the collections” (2.)

The document states that the collections, their preservation and exhibition, are the NMI’s core purpose and that as a body they are guided by their vision and mission statements. The important roles of education and cultural heritage protection also guide how the museum acts as the national repository for over four million objects in its care. To preserve more aspects of cultural heritage, a 1994 Amendment to the NMA expanded the definition of an archaeological object,

“...any chattel whether in a manufactured or partly manufactured or an unmanufactured state which by reason of the archaeological interest attaching thereto or of its association with any Irish historical event or person has a value substantially greater than its intrinsic (including artistic) value, and the said expression includes ancient human, animal, or plant remains,” (2-5.)

Objects are then acquired if they fit under the following categories, “Be of national importance, have potential for display, be of research and educational use, and be an artifact which will fill a gap in the collection,” (8.) Under these considerations, the specific curatorial department under analysis, the Irish Antiquities Division (IAD), can be examined as a sub-section of the larger institutional framework focusing on preservation, education, and research. The IAD has an estimated 1.65 million objects in its collections and reserves (5.) These objects are acquired by the department for their status as Irish or foreign archaeological objects. The Irish archaeological objects fall under a specific criteria as related to cultural heritage and research, “[as part of the]

development of Irish civilisation from prehistoric times until end of Middle Ages and beyond.”

In addition, to retain their institutional values on a global scale, the IAD maintains its collections and archives’ significance in international standing by upholding their extent, diversity, and quality (21.) The specifics regarding the sub-genre of human remains as archaeological objects is a contested territory due to the ethical issues of display, but there are rigorous guidelines in place to ensure their treatment and their NMA protective status.

Chapter Three - An Overview of the Exhibit Space

The “Kingship and Sacrifice” exhibit entrance branches off of the main Treasury, home to Ireland’s *Ór*, which dominates the middle of the Kildaire street building. The exhibit sign is large and dark red, on a white wall, and has the title in raised and burnished golden letters, first in English and then in Irish Gaelic *Íogacht & Íobart* with a horizontal slice of replica peat bog turf placed above it. To the left of the signage wall is another which has a panel introducing the exhibit’s thesis of the kingship and sacrifice theories. The following exhibit room is broken up into three main sections: the introductory panels, the bog bodies’ display chambers, and the exit conclusion.

The introductory panels begin to the left of the sign, and continue behind the entrance, with a map of Ireland and its barony boundary lines from the British occupation – which mirror in most cases Iron Age Celtic kingdom boundary lines upon which the bog bodies were placed. This section also begins a series of text and image panels from “The Annals of the Four Masters” from Medieval Ireland which chronicle pre-Christian Irish sovereignty rituals, rites, and rules. These panels provide contextual background information for the social and political world that the men who were once the bog bodies occupied thousands of years ago. This section also

includes panels which describe Irish peat bogs, their composition and importance, as well as panels which introduce the concepts of Celtic kingship and sacrifice.

The exhibit room is horizontal, and after the introductory section the main exhibit chambers are laid out across it in a right to left placement pattern. There are four display chambers with various extra informational material spread around them, including two interactive video modules in the center of the room which give short but in-depth coverage of the forensic analysis process which the NMI Bog Bodies Research Team and the Conservation Laboratory undertook to do radiocarbon dating, medical examinations, and paleo-dietary exams to analyze the contents of their stomachs. The touch-screen of the modules allow viewers to zoom in on the bodies' organs as the information is narrated. Other additional materials include a replica of one of the bog bodies' heads, an artist's interpretation based on the 3-D analysis of the skull, large photos of bog lands to give unaccustomed visitors a visual representation of the discovery sites, and display cases of the archaeological objects found in the bogs. The objects include feasting utensils such as goblets, votives of wooden figurines and containers of bog butter, and royal weapons and regalia – all related to kingship rites and duties. Next to each display case of the objects are descriptive labels, in addition to display panels continuing the Annals narrative.

Each of the display chamber is identical in form, a tall and wide white walled enclosure that wraps around itself like a snail shell to provide privacy for the final resting places of the bog bodies. Before entering the chamber visitors are invited to read the description of the bog body inside. A history of the rediscovery is given, as are the findings of the scientific analyses and the links to the kingship sacrifices. Notable is the use of Irish Gaelic in these and all written descriptions in the exhibit and in the museum as a whole as the standard practice is to first give

the descriptions in Irish Gaelic and then in English as part of nationwide push to preserve the Irish Gaelic language. Then, below the written description is a sketch of the bog body inside the chamber as a visual component. The entrance is gently sloped and curls into the heart of the chamber, so that from the outside one cannot see in. The entrance also includes a sentinel replica of the oak figurines found as theorized votive offerings for the sovereignty goddess within the bogs. The insides of the chambers are sparse, with only the display case and a wooden bench for visitors to sit. The display case is in the heart of the chamber, tall enough so people can have a complete view of the body within it which rests in the center of the case, like a casket at a wake. The lighting within the chamber is dim but bright enough that all details of the body within the case can be seen. Other than the white walls of the chamber the color scheme is dark with dark wooden floors, polished brown benches, and green mats upon which the bodies rest. The color scheme of the entire exhibit is of dark red, browns, blacks and greens. They are meant to evoke the natural colors of the bog lands to further enhance the educational environment and to fully immerse the visitor in the world of the bog.

The conclusion to the exhibit is brief, occupying the exit corridor out of the room. It finished up the Annals narrative, and gives final words on the themes of kingship and sacrifice for the Celtic peoples. A global context is given with a brief overview of the expanded Northwestern European bog bodies' field, including the famous Tollund Man from Denmark pictured in a photograph.

Profiles of the Bog Bodies

Gallagh Man was the first of the bog bodies on display to be discovered in. He was found in 1821 near Castleblakeney, Co. Galway, and was completely removed from the bog in 1829. Later analysis concluded that he had died between 470 and 120 B.C. He is almost completely

intact unlike the other bodies and was found wearing a deerskin cloak tied with willow rods. Gallagher Man was the first of the four bodies to be displayed in NMI – Archaeology and was the cornerstone of the exhibition. Oldcroghan Man and Clonycaven Man were discovered within months of each other in 2003. Oldcroghan Man was found first at the edge of Croghan bog in Co. Offaly. Cashel Man is both the oldest European bog body to date and the latest to be found out of the four, dating back to Bronze Age Ireland and being found in 2011 (“Violence in the Bog.”)

Chapter Four - Rhetoric in the Museum Space & Ethics of Display

The bog bodies of “Kingship and Sacrifice” have no claims of ownership other than that of the state, so it is left to their cultural descendants to take care of them. As previously mentioned, the NMI seeks for the bog bodies to be able to provide a public form of education on the lives and beliefs of the Iron Age Celts, which is vital to preserving a culture whose traditions were orally carried, and can furthermore supplement a narrative which the NMI strives to uphold in all of its facets – a cohesive Irish identity unbounded by temporal or spatial restraints.

Fascination over the Celtic era is one of the largest facets of the modern Irish tourism industry, which fits within the ancient and proud mythology the nation sells to an international market. Celtic fascination carries over to the providers of the supply as well, but for reasons more complex than attracting tourists. The British controlled Ireland for centuries and the free state of the Republic of Ireland is just under one hundred years old. This colonial control was predicated upon erasing the indigenous Irish culture, the Gaelic order which had flourished in Ireland for thousands of years. The Irish Gaelic language, indigenous beliefs and practices, and the socio-political structures were all both eradicated and discriminated against under colonial rule. In response, the post-colonial cultural landscape of Ireland of the past century has been

shaped in part by a desire to reclaim suppressed heritage, and “Kingship and Sacrifice” is an extension of that.

According to rhetorical museology scholar M. Elizabeth Weiser in her book *Museum Rhetoric: Building Civic Identity in National Spaces*, “Successful museums embrace ambiguity, composing out of the communal imaginary a collective narrative with which, to remain relevant, they must invite individuals to engage,” (19.) This is a useful lens through which the NMI exhibit can be viewed, specifically in how they frame the narrative of the Iron Age Celts as part of the continuous and collective narrative of Irish identity with which they want their visitors to engage. The NMI’s curatorial intent falls in line with this concept as I learned from interviewing Isabella Mulhall. She emphasized a crucial component of how they engage individuals – the highlighting the bodies as physical touchstones to the past through an ethical framework of display. By identifying with the faces of their ancestors, Irish visitors can find civic engagement within the cultural heritage of the national identity.

The physicality of the bog bodies has an innate visceral effect on the viewer. The bogs’ conditions have tanned their skin into a leather like consistency. Facial features are frozen in death masks. Hair is preserved as it was at the time of death, but changed to a burnished copper color through the same tanning process of the skin. In the case of “Kingship and Sacrifice,” some of the bodies’ death wounds are visible and can possibly be alarming. The bodies could be considered ghoulish for these reasons, but the curators actively avoid sensationalizing them as such by making them “digestible” to the public through a conscientiously respectful exhibition. In my interview with her, Mulhall commented on what draws visitors in to the exhibit – curiosity over human remains, and how she and her team worked to bring dignity to the display rather than enable the darker side of that curiosity. She emphasized how their curatorial and design work

was done with the intention of focusing on the humanity of the remains through an atmosphere of quiet reflection and conversation within the display chamber, while providing the contextual information in the exhibit hall outside to not intrude on the space for the bodies themselves. The design of the chambers was an important if not the most important aspect of creating the right atmosphere and ethical framework for the exhibit (Personal Interview.)

The inside of the display chambers is the locus of the exhibit's critical framework of ethical display, where multiple layers of interpretation coalesce to bring the past face to face with the present. Below is a diagram of the inside of a display chamber, and it numerically outlines the intersections of those layers within the physical space which correspond with the interpretative perspectives of the viewer/audience, the bog body and its display, and the physical space.

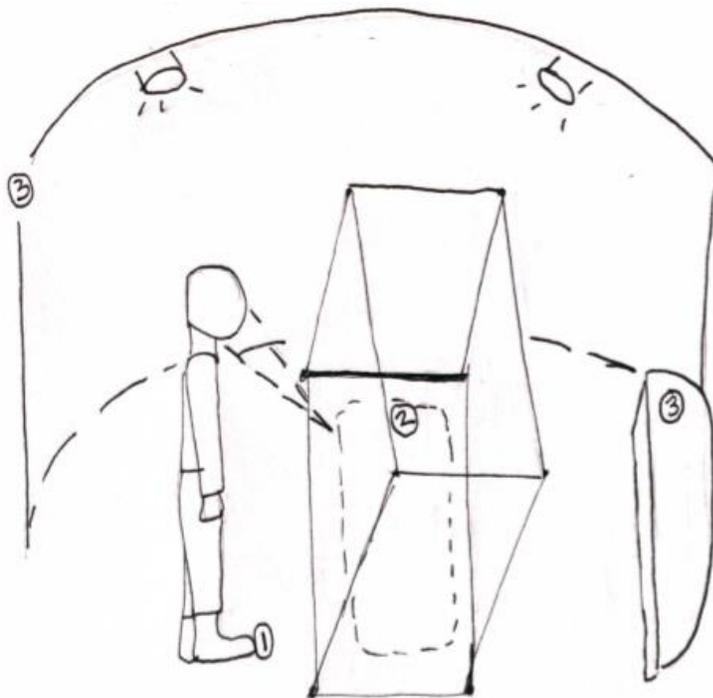


Fig. 1 *Display Chamber Diagram*

The layers of perspective and interpretation hinge upon the bog bodies themselves. The viewers (as represented in Fig.1's label one) come in with pre-conceived ideas about bog bodies and Celtic culture, which was anticipated by the curatorial staff. A vast array of diverse visitors engage with the exhibit, Mulhall said, and each one brings their own histories and ideas with them which create the lens through which they view the bog bodies on display (Personal interview.) My personal experiences as a visitor corroborate her words. When I first visited in March 2018, I viewed the bog bodies as extensions of my past interactions with Egyptian mummy displays; but upon my second visit in 2019, with better personal context for the exhibit and a research intent, I was able to analyze the ethical exhibit framework as a part of the bodies' continuing narrative. My first interpretation in 2018 built upon my past interactions with human remains on public display, while my second in 2019 combined my increased contextual knowledge of bog bodies with an analytical eye turned toward examining if the ethical framework contributes to a more nuanced audience engagement and interpretation of the bodies. The second visit allowed me to return to build upon the rudimentary layer of the narrative I had encountered, and I engaged with the display not just as a researcher but also as a viewer who had built upon my previous knowledge to and made deeper connections to the narrative. These two visits were vastly different experiences due to my personal perspective, as intended by the designers and staff. The team's goal for visitor engagement was for them to leave with curiosity and questions, so that if they returned with additional information they could hone in what they had learned and experience the different levels of the viewing experience (Personal interview.)

Choice is integral to the level of audience engagement, and is left in the hands of the visitors. The subtle spiral entrance into the walled display chamber makes it so a visitor has to

choose whether they want to view the bog body inside or not. This choice ties into the physical nature of the bodies, and the staff created this enclosed space so that any exhibit visitor who is sensitive to such things can opt out of the experience (Personal interview.) The deliberate inclusion of choice extends into the chamber, which as previously mentioned was designed for respectful reflection. This is reflected in the interior of the chamber with its dim but visible lighting, white walls, dark earth tones, and faux wood paneling on the interior bench – all of which call to mind both a Catholic church and a Celtic burial mound, of which both a visitor can find objects and displays pertaining to both in the other halls of the building. The sacred undertones of two important pieces of Irish religious history contribute to the respectful nature of the space, but are subtle enough to perhaps only be noticed by visitors who have a past familiarity with both. The pre-knowledge and lived experiences affecting the visitor's perceptual experience as a moving body within the space ties into the aspects of the physical design as exemplified in label number three of Fig. 1.

The bog bodies themselves, centered in the glass display cases between the chamber openings and the benches, are of course at the heart of the exhibit - and they speak for themselves, through the translation of the curatorial interpreters. In promotional remarks upon the opening of the exhibit in 2006, the state Minister for Arts John O'Donoghue said that "Kingship and Sacrifice" will "enable the public to literally come face-to-face with their ancestors," and in addition he echoed the most common descriptor of the bog bodies as being "ambassadors of the past" (Ahlstrom.) The ability to gaze upon the impeccably and naturally preserved human bodies of people who lived thousands of years before us can be a revelatory action, but without the knowledge of where they came from, how old they are, how they lived, and how they died, it is easy to reduce the bodies to pure spectacle. The spectacle is denied here

as the ethical framework of displaying human remains is upheld through the careful interpretation of the bodies' histories into understandable voices rising up from the past. By couching the display chambers in a hall of contextual information, the staff adds an extra dimension to their intent of viewer choice leading the audience experience. The display panels and various other informational interpretation relating to the bog bodies' histories, discoveries, and scientific analyses provide the narrative voice for the remains, but the visitor must choose to read and engage with the materials before entering the chamber to fully comprehend the revelatory nature of being face to face with an ancestor. There is the possibility that the visitor makes the choice to not engage at a meaningful level with the exhibit, which gives the meaning-making process some ambiguity despite the intense contextual interpretation available. By choosing not to engage and comprehend, the visitor would be side-stepping the narrative process laid out in the curatorial work, which does not diminish its ethical importance, but merely the experience of the viewer who made this choice. The earlier diagram expresses the full and ideal comprehensive experience in the dotted lines connecting labeled figure one (the viewer) and three (the bog body and display.) The constructed environment represented in the diagram is rhetorical in nature and as such centers around a purposeful message which is intended to persuade the viewer of a connection between them and the bog bodies as parts of the same Irish narrative of community, sovereignty, and sacred history (Weiser 29.)

The Limitations of the Exhibit

The exhibit has a single perspective in Kelly's boundary based theory of kingship and sacrifice. As the foremost scholar in the field of Irish bog bodies, there is not much published research to dispute his claims of these particular bog bodies being royal sacrificial victims. His theory rests upon the claim that the bodies were discovered on Iron Age boundary lines, which

would confirm the sacrificial intent of giving the disposed of kings to the sovereignty goddesses in their liminal territories of the boundary demarcations. Melanie Giles, a researcher from the University of Manchester, argues that Kelly's theory rests too much upon the assumption that the majority of medieval era Irish boundaries were based upon more ancient Celtic ones. The introduction to the museum exhibit includes maps of medieval barony boundaries which Kelly claims are continuous of Iron Age ones. Giles posits that the medieval boundary lines are simply geographical coincidence since many Irish boundaries have been traced using the "character of the landscape," i.e. natural landmarks such as bogs or other bodies of water, and that ultimately Kelly's theory needs more concrete evidence due to that fact (29.) Giles' critique is a needed perspective to Kelly's theory. As the source material for the entire exhibit, it is vital for a critical analysis to re-examine the theory and the bog bodies' place within it as evidence. The bog bodies were chosen for the display for their alleged boundary placements more so than their death wounds and votive objects, of which there are dozens of a similar nature, so it is necessary as an engaged viewer to take into consideration that it is possible that the bog bodies' narratives are being misrepresented. The critical limitations of the exhibit shine through here given that its sole purpose is to uphold Kelly's theory; and given that ethical display of human remains the NMI tries to uphold is based upon correct representation it is a possibility that there is a complication to the ethics of the situation if the misrepresentation is eventually confirmed, but as it is with no in-depth competing theories on the bog bodies Giles' critique is a critical footnote to the evaluation.

Conclusion

The essence of "Kingship and Sacrifice" is of emphatic connection, between the past and present, the foreign and the familiar, and the living and dead. It exists and is supported by the

conscious choice of the curatorial staff to present the bog bodies not as spectacles, but rather common cultural ancestors. The framework of ethical display is present through the physical design of the display chambers, the exhibit hall, and the aesthetic choices. It is present in the written and visual interpretations and histories. It is present in the audience engagement as both visitors and descendants of the culture on display. There are complications due to the lack of voices in the field of Irish bog bodies, but it does not detract from the work of the rhetorical frame nor does it impede upon the audience engagement.

Ancient human remains do not have many rights. They have protections as archaeological objects or remnants of past life, but rarely are the perspectives of the people who they once were taken into complete and distinct primacy when exhibits are designed around them. Even NMI and “Kingship and Sacrifice” do not follow this to that extreme. Instead the curatorial staff reinterprets their lives and deaths for a modern audience and creates a narrative out of their murders to tie them to the foreign nature of the future. These are your ancestors, the exhibit emphasizes, these are their faces, and these are their bones. They look at you not from the fog of the past, but from behind glass, right in front of you. This reality, even more so than their preserved qualities, is visceral and immediate. It jars the senses and reminds the viewers of their place within the collective narrative that is Irish history. They see a body not unlike their own, from a land that is their own. These qualities are presented not to shock, but to create connection. The Bog Body Research Team and the IAD curatorial staff created this connection out of the untranslated silence that the bodies when left alone create, because within it the past and present coalesce for a future of the collective and the individual narratives of the Irish identity.

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Appendix A – Research Poster

Ambassadors of the Past – the Ethical Display of Bog Bodies in “Kingship and Sacrifice”
Julia Walsh, Chancellor’s Honors Program

Abstract

- The National Museum of Ireland – Archaeology (NMI) is the final resting place for four bog bodies (naturally mummified human remains.) For my Chancellor’s Honors Program senior thesis I analyzed the visual and cultural rhetoric of the bog bodies’ permanent exhibit “Kingship and Sacrifice.” My research focused on the following questions:

1. How does a framework of ethical treatment toward human remains on public display build a connection between the audience and the narrative of the exhibit?
2. How does the physical design and written interpretation reinforce ethical framework?
3. Can human remains on display function as both objects and respected remnants of past life?

Background

- “Kingship and Sacrifice,” displays four sets of human remains which are naturally preserved bog bodies from the Irish countryside. They are named as Old Croghan Man, Clonycavan Man, Gallagh Man, and Cashel Man.
- The exhibit hypothesizes that the four bog bodies on display were either failed candidates for tribal kingship or failed kings who were ritually sacrificed to fertility goddesses, as indicated by their diets, wounds, and attire (Kelly 2006.)



• Fig. 1 Clonycavan Man



• Fig. 2 Old Croghan Man



• Fig. 3 Old Croghan Man's viewing chamber with a written description & sketch of the bog body at the entryway for viewing.

Methodology

- Onsite research at NMI in Dublin, Ireland included:

1. Exhibit documentation
2. Interview with curator Isabella Mulhall
3. Collection of resources

Conclusions

- “Kingship and Sacrifice” creates a connection between the audience and the bog bodies through emphasis on the lives and deaths of the men through dignified physical design, as seen in the tomb like display structures, and respectful treatment of the human remains through detailed written description and rhetorical framing.
- The exhibit frames the bog bodies as “ambassadors of the past” because of their status as great scientific and historical worth due to their status as rare bodily remnants of Iron Age Celtic life and culture.

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Appendix B – Isabella Mulhall Interview Questions

1. What is your role with The National Museum of Ireland – Archaeology and the NMI Bog Bodies Research Project, and how did it begin?
2. What, in your background (educational, professional, or biographical), prepared you for and/ or complements the requirements of your present position here, and your work on the bog bodies research project and exhibit?
3. How would you describe the inception of the exhibit and its initial goals?
4. For whom was the exhibit originally designed? Who, in your observation, are the kinds of visitors who come here now? Has that changed since the opening of the exhibit?
5. How would you, in your experience here, describe the function of the exhibit for those visitors, at first and then now? How are those tied to past and present institutional goals?
6. Specifically, how and why was the current exhibit created and constructed as it is? In what ways has it changed since the opening?
7. How would you place the exhibit within the larger framework narratives of the NMI-Archaeology and the institution as a whole?
8. How did you and your team approach ethically framing the display of human remains in the exhibit? What role, if any, do you believe that the bog bodies lack of discernable ancestral claim has on their place as objects on display?

9. How, in your opinion, does the exhibit subvert the sensationalistic appeal of mummified human remains on display? What has the visitor response to their display in this regard looked like over the years?
10. Can you expand on the museum's descriptive phrase 'ambassadors to the past' for the bog bodies? What, in your opinion, are they representing, and why is a connection between Iron Age and modern day Ireland important to reinforce?
11. Is there, if any, a discernable difference in audience interpretation of the exhibit between Irish and international visitors?
12. How would you describe the impact of the bog bodies' unique, distinguishable features has on the audience interactions with the exhibit? What role, if any, do you think this has on meaning-making?
13. As a curator, how would you describe the relationship between Ireland's tourism industry and cultural heritage movements in the NMI?
14. How would you describe the exhibit's place within NMI's broader position as a public space for creating national identification?