

## BOOK REVIEW

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### A Review of *Lindow Man: The Body in the Bog*

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**REFERENCE:** Stead, I. M., Bourke, J. B., and Brothwell, D., *Lindow Man: The Body in the Bog*, published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Publications, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 14850, 1986, \$25.00, 208 pp.

The saga of Lindow Man begins like a story on the evening news: in 1983, two employees of a peat company working at Lindow Moss, Cheshire, England, unearthed a female skull with adherent tissue and hair. A local man then confessed to murdering his wife in 1960 and burying her dismembered body in the garden of their cottage, a spot not 300 m from where the skull was found. No other body parts were recovered. Though the skull proved to be nearly 2000 years old, the man was nonetheless convicted of his wife's murder, on the basis of other evidence.

The following year, one of the same workers at the same peat bog unearthed a human right foot and lower leg. More skin was observed in an adjacent section edge. The area was carefully excavated, and a block of peat was removed. The remains "appeared ancient" to the coroner, who wisely solicited the assistance of the British Museum. After the peat had been painstakingly cleared away, the body was found to contain the preserved head, arms, and thorax of a man, naked except for a fur band on his left arm and a sinew tight around his neck. Pete Marsh, as he was dubbed by the media, was about to become a celebrity, 2000 years after his grisly death.

This book chronicles the life and death of Lindow Man, as interpreted from an impressive array of evidence. Specialists in nearly two dozen areas of the natural, social, and physical sciences were convened for the analysis. Few forensic corpses have been studied with such intensity, much less prehistoric ones. The story makes for fascinating reading.

Section I deals with the excavation, recording, conservation, and dating of the remains. The primary consideration was preservation; the remains needed to be stabilized for handling. After much experimentation, the remains were essentially freeze-dried. A permanent mount was made with a special display case to keep temperature constant and to prevent microbial growth. The human remains were radiocarbon dated at  $1575 \pm 30$  BP and the surrounding peat at  $2290 \pm 45$  BP, a discrepancy which is discussed but cannot be fully explained; the archaeologists feel that the peat date is more realistic. The remains were documented photogrammetrically, yielding a stereoscopic map. A face was modeled on a plaster reconstruction of the skull. The before and after photos are the book's frontispiece.

Section II discusses the medical and human biological aspects of Lindow Man. He was well muscled, in his mid-20s, 66 in. (168 cm) tall, 60 kg, blood type O and M, with a large head and small mandible and ears. He had dark hair: head, beard, moustache, sideburns,

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and lashes, and probably blue-grey eyes, as befits an Iron Age Celt. His well manicured fingernails suggest a higher social status than the common manual laborer, but not high enough to be free of intestinal parasites.

Using conventional radiography, magnetic resonance imaging, xeroradiography, endoscopy, scanning electron microscopy (SEM), and computed tomography, a good picture of his physical condition and injuries was developed. The body had been transected at the L5 level by peat cutters; the right lower leg and foot were recovered separately. There are two scalp lacerations; one overlies a transverse depressed coronal fracture, the other overlies an occipital fossa fracture. There is a neck dislocation between C3 and C4, and an incision in the right side of the neck, beneath the sinew ligature. Additionally, there is a posterior fracture of the eighth or ninth rib. The hypothesized sequence of events is as follows: "Pete" was struck twice on the head from behind with an ax-like weapon; a cord was knotted around his neck, using a stick in the back to tighten the garrotte to the point of strangulation and vertebral dislocation (the stick is gone, but the kinks in the sinew are permanently preserved); after death, his assailant(s) slit his throat and threw him face down into the bog; the rib fracture may be the result of a forceful knee jab into his back.

Though the keratinous tissues were well preserved, there has been considerable bone demineralization through elemental exchange with the peat. This was measured through gas chromatography and mass spectrometry. No viscera were apparent except for stomach and upper small intestine. Complete oropharyngeal compression prevented postmortem exchange of stomach contents and the immediate environment, both of which are discussed in Section III.

Without informants to recreate the circumstances of Lindow Man's life and death, the team of scientists scrutinized every aspect of the body's internal and external environment. They performed macroscopic and microscopic analyses of gut contents and peat fossils, making interpretations within a context of other bog bodies and Iron Age archaeology. They trace the sequence of ecological events in the bog and reconstitute (figuratively) Pete Marsh's last meal: wholemeal unleavened bread made with two kinds of wheat and barley, and water. That he ate this meal in proximity to his final resting place is suggested by the presence in his gut of heather, used as fuel to bake the bread, and traces of sphagnum moss in his drinking water. Time of year cannot be ascertained, since the grains could have been stored. The presence of mistletoe pollen in the stomach is intriguing: it was a sacred herb of the Druids, said to ensure fecundity.

Section IV, on archaeology and folklore, is crucial to an interpretation of these remains. Pete Marsh is remarkable as the only surviving bog burial to have been discovered in England, but he is not unique. The discovery of bog bodies has been documented in Europe for centuries, and they are an integral part of Celtic oral tradition (the source of today's bogey man). A detailed gazetteer lists the previous recoveries. Against a backdrop of the beheading myths, the most famous of which are Beowulf and Sir Gawain, and the Druidic cult practices, the authors weave a compelling story of ritual sacrifice, involving threefold deaths, blackened bread, and mysterious bogs. Even the isolated skull of Lindow woman is incorporated into the picture.

A total of 53 specialists contributed to this book and many more than that to the analysis of the remains of Lindow Man. Despite many technical discussions, this book is never dry and reads evenly, with a touch of British humor. It is a wonderful synthesis of biology, archaeology, oral tradition, and forensic sciences. Readers will undoubtedly find some chapters more to their liking than others. Photographs and drawings are abundant and very clear, although most photos of the remains lack a scale. The bibliography is extensive in both technical and cultural aspects. As a forensic anthropologist and an archaeologist, I found this book extremely interesting and a nice change from my usual reading material on contemporary mass murders. Bog bodies may not replace mummies in popularity, but their stories are equally absorbing.