

The Body Political: Political Symbolism of Human Remains

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The ways in which different cultures treat human remains are a potential goldmine for information concerning the structures of power that influence people in life and death. Cultural anthropology is often considered a social science wholly concerned with the living, often in opposition to the work with human remains that physical anthropology undertakes. However, human remains also have a place in sociocultural anthropology and are particularly pertinent to political anthropology. This paper explores the political structures of the Western world, particularly those within Europe and post-settler colonial contact with North America, as they affect and are reflected in the post-mortem treatment of the human body. The main focus of this paper is the cultural meaning attributed to putrefaction and decay, the historical origins of the moralization of post-mortem preservation, and the role of human remains in maintaining political power. As such, the tradition of the incorrupt saint is traced from its origins in miraculous preservation to examples in recent history wherein politicians are deliberately preserved and displayed to allow them to maintain a degree of the power in death as they had in life.

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The physical human body is not something that can be completely separated from the person that inhabits it. Throughout one's life, every person participates in a larger culture and society by which they are influenced and that they influence in return. There exists an interconnectedness between the physical body, the social role of human beings, and the culture one inhabits. These all manifest in such a way that nobody can be conceived of as a solely biological object. Upon death, the body transitions to inhabit a unique category in which it is no longer a person but not quite an object; it no longer acts but continues to be acted upon and is still part of the society and culture in which it resides (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 19). The cultural traditions which dictate how human remains are to be treated are all indicative of the beliefs and values that a given culture holds, from funerary rites and grieving ceremonies that celebrate the life and mourn the loss of the deceased to the physical treatment of the body such as embalming, display, cremation, and burial. Human remains are cultural symbols which become vehicles and representations of cultural ideas, and as such, the corpse can also become a symbol of political ideas and ideology.

The particular positionality between the person and object the deceased occupies allows human remains to be used for political means. The idea of the body, the person that once inhabited it, and the ideas the person/body represents or represented in a given culture are constructed deliberately, using existing cultural ideas to transform the corpse into a political symbol that transcends the life of the person it once was.

This paper will examine human remains as political symbols and cultural objects in the Western world by discussing the ongoing history of the politicization of human remains from an anthropological framework. Next, the political 'life after death' that occurs when human remains are invoked in discourses and the role of embalming techniques and exhumations in this process will be examined. Finally, this paper will analyze the contemporary political preservation and display of politicians and the connection between the religious preservation of rulers and secularized government systems. This analysis is particularly relevant to an intersection of physical, cultural, and political anthropology. It aims to situate the cultural practices surrounding the treatment of human remains in the Western world as a process entrenched in political tradition.

Methodology and Research

Several examples of politically implemented corpses are used to illustrate the politicization of human remains. They are analyzed largely chronologically by the time of death and have been chosen specifically due to the circumstances of their post-mortem existences. The first case study is St. Cuthbert, chosen to represent the tradition of the incorrupt saint. St. Cuthbert was chosen specifically due to several attributes, including the age of his corpse, his age at death, and his sustained relevance after death. One of England's best-known and perhaps most popular saints, initially buried in the early medieval period, makes St. Cuthbert a prime candidate for illustrating that the politicization of human remains has a long but continuously relevant history. Additionally, St. Cuthbert did not achieve sainthood through martyrdom or lifetime accomplishments. The fact that his body appeared to remain undecayed for such a long period elevated him to sainthood and made him a treasured relic of the community he was buried by and, eventually, the greater English community.

King Edward I was explicitly chosen to illustrate the politicization of human remains as he did so deliberately, including stipulations in his end-of-life plans for properly implementing his corpse as a political symbol and tool. The fact of he being an English monarch in the time of the divine right of kings allowed King Edward I to act as a bridge between the religious sensibilities that guided the actions and roles of royalty and the deliberate invoking of political power through the corpse.

The other examples of Pope Formosus, Abraham Lincoln, and Vladimir Lenin, who have been politically invoked after death, are chosen for similar reasons: select combinations of notoriety after death that surpasses or eclipses their living actions, long-term preservation, and sustained cultural relevance. Though these cases may not be representative of the treatment, physical or cultural, of other remains, they are specifically relevant in illustrating the greater political and cultural schemas argued.

The Incorrupt and Undecayed

The tradition of the corpse becoming a political symbol has roots in many cultures across history, but possibly most notably in the West in the religious tradition of the incorrupt saint (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 19). In medieval Europe, death was an intimately known part of daily life, far from the degrees of separation that one enjoys in many societies today. The process of decay a corpse undergoes is a fact of death, but it was believed that one could become immune from disease and degradation even in death if one had gained favour with God by living a life of purity and virtue (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 19). Thus, the incorruptible saint remains as clean and pristine after death as they had been in life (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 19). Disease, decay, filth, and rot were considered unclean spiritually and physically. The sanitary pitfalls of medieval life became entangled with morality so that the unclean and diseased were not only considered 'harmful' as unsafe, unsanitary and possibly contagious but also considered 'harmful' as sinful (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 19). The incorrupt saint can be considered the cultural idea of the time, which entangled power and corpses. From the body decaying and putrefying and the dangers associated with disease and decay, cultural ideas ascribing power to these processes or lack thereof become naturalized and a discourse is produced that functions as truth (Foucault 2003, 23). From this discursive truth, the tradition of the incorruptible saint became an ingrained part of medieval European culture. However, the incorrupt saint is set apart from other preserved remains in that its state of non-decay is supposedly inexplicable by preservation techniques, either deliberate or natural such as those observed in ancient Egyptian mummies or bog bodies. Accounts of incorrupt corpses claim intact bodies and ones that retain living qualities such as soft flesh and flexible joints (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 20–21).

It must be noted that accounts of saints remaining undecayed must be taken with a degree of skepticism. Indoor interment, humidity, temperature, and many micro factors which influence insect and bacterial cultures all impact rates of decay (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 14–15). Accounts of incorruptibility must also be examined as politically motivated. Scientific methods that might have rigorously examined the supposed incorrupt corpse did not exist to be employed in medieval times. Yet, some investigated the bodies of saints without the approval of the Catholic church. However, inquiries into the true nature of supposedly incorrupt saints' remains are just as entangled in the religious politics that governed the culture of the time and place.

Saints are revered for their accomplishments in life and the circumstances of their martyrdom, but St. Cuthbert is perhaps best known for his post-mortem accomplishments. St. Cuthbert was not martyred, as he died of illness in the year 687, and was initially buried in Lindisfarne by monks of the area who convinced him to consent to this burial location rather than his initial choice of the location of his hermitage on Farne Island (O'Brien 2016, 236). When Cuthbert was exhumed eleven years later in 698 to be moved to a new shrine, it was then that he was discovered to be "as fresh and intact as if he were still alive" (O'Brien 2016, 236). Several exhumations

were performed in the centuries following, initially to move the remains along with other precious relics to new locations and eventually purely to observe whether the body remained intact and undecayed. In 1104 the body was examined and declared to be in the same condition as it had been four centuries ago. Once again, another four centuries later, in 1542, even after the shrine had been destroyed during the Henrician reformation and St. Cuthbert had been disinterred resultantly (O'Brien 2016, 237). It was not until the nineteenth century that exhumations of St. Cuthbert yielded different results.

The investigation of the shrine of St. Cuthbert in 1827 revealed that the once immaculate corpse had been reduced to bones (O'Brien 2016, 237). Though a saint doesn't need to remain undecayed forever (or even for the entire body to remain pristine) to be declared incorrupt, in this case, a body that was previously a symbol of faith became a symbol of the church's power over not only life and death the discourses surrounding life and death that religious doctrine dominated. When St. Cuthbert's shrine was investigated in 1827, the saint, said to have flexible joints and still-growing hair and nails, was not inside the coffin. In St. Cuthbert's shrine, the investigators found what was later revealed to be the bones of several people in the well-preserved regalia of a bishop (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 23-24). This discovery was declared to "completely disprov[e] that tale of centuries, invented for interested purposes in a superstitious age" (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 23-24), and thus St. Cuthbert became not only a religious symbol of God's power over death but a political symbol representing the discursive power harnessed by the church. It is possible that St. Cuthbert's coffin was opened throughout the centuries between his first reburial in A.D. 698 and the unofficial investigation in 1827 and that the original saint was steadily replaced with body parts of the more recently deceased to upkeep the appearance of ceasing to decay. Still, were it not for a politically driven investigation, it would not have been revealed that this occurred. Power is produced and reproduced in every interaction, and that includes interactions with the dead as those deceased are no longer able to act and yet are still acted upon: they have become an object of culture, a symbol that stands for what those living have decided to ascribe to the remains (Foucault 1978, 93). This case illustrates that human remains, incorrupt or otherwise, are symbols of political ideology; in death, St. Cuthbert represented the death-defying power and authority of God and the Catholic church, and even later in death St. Cuthbert (or the lack thereof) represented that like his own remains, the power of the church is subject to erosion over time. Where there is power, there is resistance, and as the corpse is a symbol of maintaining power, it can also become a symbol of power that is counter to what it once stood for (Foucault 1978, 95).

The Divine Right to Preservation

Though the incorruptibility of a saint was supposed to be the result of a miracle and proof of God's power over life and death, the symbology of remaining intact after death became far more important than the actuality of any such divine intervention. Though some remains were likely delayed in decomposing due to fortuitous burial

In circumstances, human intervention (such as in the case of St. Cuthbert) is required to keep up the appearance of remaining intact and undecayed after death. The practice of embalming has existed in some form for the majority of human history, and once it became culturally ingrained that being favoured by God and holding divine influence was related to not decaying after death, embalming in Europe was on track to become as widespread a practice as Christianity itself (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 25). The divine right of kings dictated that sovereign rule was the result of God appointing a person by having them born into the line of descent for the throne. Thus the miraculous preservation of the saints trickled over into the treatment of royal remains to similarly assert and maintain the ultimate interrelated authority of God and kingship (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 26). The sovereign ruler is allowed the legitimate exercise of life-ending decisions, is able to execute subjects or send them to war, and thus holds an indirect rule over life and death. As such, in death, the treatment of their body reflects the power they wielded during life (Foucault 1978, 135). Royal remains were so symbolically powerful that, for a church, being able to claim a corpse and bury a King in a specific abbey or cathedral was a great privilege. As such, different sects of Christianity competed to claim corpses throughout the twelfth century (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 26).

Though embalming was initially primarily a practical measure to allow the bodies of the elite and powerful to be transported before burial or stave off decay long enough that lengthy funerals could take place, this was not without political potential (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 26). The power of the sovereign is not divine in actuality, but rather, the power kings wield derives from the continued participation of those ruled to uphold the system of rule exercised from every point of society and in every interaction. As such, interactions with the corpse of a ruler are merely another avenue in which symbolic power is ingrained in societal interactions (Foucault 1978, 94). Though a deceased ruler can no longer exercise power or govern, their body can still symbolize domination and uphold societal power structures (Foucault 2003, 27).

King Edward, I was a ruler who exercised power beyond his lifespan. Born in 1239 as the heir to a kingdom in the midst of unrest and uncertainty, King Edward I bore great responsibility from the moment he was born (Morris 2015, 43). This responsibility later manifested in the fact that King Edward I's England was at war for a great portion of his adult life, and when his health began to fail him in the early 14th century, his end-of-life planning had to consider the fate of the invasion of Scotland that was underway (Morris 2015, 376–377). When King Edward I died in 1307, he requested that his body be carried by the English army battling Scotland until victory was secured, refusing to be buried until England secured victory. Though he was aware that carrying a corpse would provide no tactical advantage for his troops, there was a tacit understanding that the symbolic power in his remains would be powerful (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 27). Thus, the use of the remains of royals in military and political endeavours illustrates that power is not merely or even mostly the ability to exert force to maintain domination but that power is primarily a symbolic domain that is upheld by the willing participation of those dominated. Domination was carried out by King Edward I beyond the grave as those who served under him not only consented but weaponized the domination he represented against those they fought.

Post-Preservation Politics

Though embalming and artificial preservation techniques were still in relative infancy in Europe at this time, techniques using herbal salves and the removal of organs were enough to ensure that the remains of the powerful and royal would be in good enough condition to last their symbolic tenure as a sovereign corpse. However, like the once supposedly incorrupt St.Cuthbert, there is an expiry-after-expiration date on all bodies, no matter how beloved or powerful. When the tomb of King Edward I was opened in 1774, his body was not nearly as intact as the royal garb and jewelry he was adorned in, an expected result of being dead for 467 years even after being embalmed and wrapped tightly in cloth (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 28). Though it may be expected that even a king's corpse is not expected to remain politically relevant forever and thus decay can be accepted as it is expected, the possibility of exhumation adds a wrinkle to the process of remains being used politically and eventually retired to decay in peace. Once a coffin is reopened, the remains inside re-enter the political and social climate and begin another symbolic life after death (Harries 2021, 220). Power is ever-changing, and the powers that dominate a culture may be combated in such a way that a once revered corpse becomes a political object with a very different meaning than it initially had when first embalmed and laid to rest (Foucault 1978, 96).

The remains of the powerful and influential are not merely bodies but exist as a sort of reversal of the body politic; rather than a state being represented as a physical body, the physical body is represented as an extension of a state or power. In this sense, the corpse as an object of political symbolism is the body political. As the body political may be resurrected to be invoked at any time, the physical body must exist in some form to be exhumed to facilitate this symbolic resurrection. The exhumed body occupies a dual role, remaining representative of both what it was at the time of death and what it became by being brought back into society as a physical link to the world of the past. The conflict of inevitable decay and the desire to display human remains is a politically entrenched conundrum that has motivated much of the corpse-altering practices throughout European history.

Perhaps one of the most comically exaggerated examples of a corpse being politically invoked is the infamous dead pope trial of A.D. 897, in which the deceased Pope Formosus was exhumed nine months after burial on the order of his successor Pope Stephen VII to stand trial, propped up wearing full pontifical vestments and represented by an appointed deacon (Muhammad and Tubbs 2016, 141). This event came at a time period in which the traditional authority of the papal position was changing, and papal authority was burdened with power over and dependence on the secular crown. The ceremony in which a new royal authority is ordained by the reigning Pope at the coronation was an important symbolic act at the time, representing the flow of power from God to the church to the divinely appointed line of royal descent (Muhammad and Tubbs, 2016, 140). The trial of a dead pope both broke precedent and was somewhat of a logical conclusion to the bio-power instilled in the delineation of religious and secular powers: though the position of being Pope is intended to be immune from condemnation, Stephen VII condemned the former Pope most flamboyantly and opened

himself to condemnation in return (Muhammad and Tubbs 2016, 141). The line of power from God to the Pope, to the sovereign ruler, and to the people is intended to be a top-down structure, but the resulting condemnation of Stephen VII's actions illustrates the irregular bottom-up nature of power structures. Once the crack in the structure of domination is revealed, the consent of those subjugated is able to be withdrawn or, at the very least, can no longer be guaranteed (Foucault 1978, 94–95). The late Pope was found guilty of perjury, coveting the papal throne, violating the laws of the Catholic church, and was subsequently penalized by having the three fingers he used to conduct blessings removed, being stripped of his title and vestments, and being reburied as a commoner (Muhammad and Tubbs 2016, 140).

Additionally, all actions he took in an official papal capacity during his life were declared illegitimate (Muhammad and Tubbs 2016, 140). Though the late Pope's new grave was unmarked, theoretically rendering him politically null, his posthumous trial gave him a new political life and symbology that survives in some form to this day. Though Stephen VII intended to disgrace Formosus and condemn him to obscurity, in actuality, he guaranteed Pope Formosus' immortality. However, Formosus is not so much a symbol of papal power and more a symbol of how power can be rendered absurd and made obsolete when taken to extremes. It was the absurdity of Stephen VII's actions that were the cause of his downfall. The posthumous trial was considered shameful in Rome, and those that followed Formosus and had been ordained under his authority rebelled against Stephen VII, who was stripped of his title and imprisoned as a result (Muhammad and Tubbs 2016, 140). Thus, it is not enough to uphold and exercise authority and power. Those in power must act in accordance with the cultural precedent and, in effect, answer to the human remains that came before them.

Politicians and the Political Body

The European tradition of the preserved and displayed symbolic corpse is rooted in religion and the authority of both God and the crown, but in many ways, these traditions have persisted largely unaltered in more recent secular history. Embalming became a common practice in America as a means of preserving the remains of soldiers killed in the Civil War so that the bodies could be transported by train to be received by their families, and by this time, embalming was far more advanced than it had been in the times of King Edward I (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 31). The embalming process of draining the blood and filling the circulatory system with preservative chemical cocktails began in this time period, and the widespread embalming of soldiers' bodies may have been what normalized chemical embalming in North America and rooted it as traditional in the modern funeral industry.

The line of power that dictated the treatment and preservation of royal and holy corpses was interrupted in the founding of the American empire. No longer did a King rule by divine right, but a president was appointed by democratic vote to serve the people for a period of time before being replaced by retiring or being voted out. This political system was precedent-breaking, not only in the obvious departure from monarchies but in the change in bio-power that came with it. The American Civil War

was not waged in the name of the sovereign and protecting the power of the throne but rather on behalf of an entire population and the future of the nation (Foucault 1978, 137). The power over life and death was once considered solely within the domain of God and those appointed to represent the will of God, such that even taking one's own life was a crime as it was usurping the power of God and the representative sovereign to decide death (Foucault 1978, 138). Though the president may have the power to start wars and make the country participate, the firm grip over life and death a king had through divine right was loosened by the democratic process, and American culture surrounding death and preservation was changing as a result.

Abraham Lincoln is perhaps one of the best-known presidents in American history. During his tenure as president during the American Civil War, 1867 saw both the end of the war and Lincoln's infamous assassination, both events which shocked the nation and have since been immortalized in history. Though the processes of life and death had been somewhat democratized, the traditions of the old were still thoroughly woven into the fabric of democratic politics. President Lincoln's body was embalmed and displayed in the White House and Capitol, and then taken on a twelve-day train journey to his hometown in Illinois in a similar fashion to the transportation of the bodies of fallen soldiers (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 31). However, unlike the soldiers of the recently ended war, Lincoln's body was taken off the train in many cities for elaborate funeral ceremonies and viewings for thousands of mourners across the United States (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 31). While this long and elaborate affair may have been expected and even planned for, it did not end when Lincoln's body was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery. Lincoln was exhumed for the construction of a memorial and moved to a temporary vault, at which point the coffin was opened to verify the corpse's identity during transfer, and the corpse was viewed for this purpose once more in 1871 when reburied (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 32-33).

Though the American empire is one that is often defined by its departure from the traditions of monarchies as of its independence in the 18th century, the treatment of the first assassinated head of state indicates that there was not as strong a cultural departure as there was a political one. The corpse is capable of being a powerful political symbol, and even more so when the person it once was was a political symbol or occupied a political role in life; when a population is constantly reminded of a corpse's presence through its display or its tomb, coffin, or grave being aesthetically prominent, the corpse and its political associations live on in current memory more successfully than remains that are not commemorated and made visible as such (Harries 2021, 223).

The contemporary political symbology of the corpses of the powerful is perhaps best illustrated by possibly the most famous embalmed politician of the last hundred years: Vladimir Lenin. Lenin held a great amount of power during his life, and much of it was symbolic, as his likeness is one of the most propagandized icons of the Soviet era, along with the hammer and sickle flag. The USSR was a notably secular state and denounced religion as an institution that stood against Marxist principles. However, contention over how to best utilize Lenin's body began in the months before his death, and his embalming and display as a replacement for the religiously relicized corpse was proposed by members of his political party (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 33).

Like Lincoln, Lenin had hoped for a simple burial, but the symbolic political power both men represented eclipsed their identities and wishes. This led to both Lincoln and Lenin being 'temporarily' embalmed for a display to allow mourners to view the body of the beloved leaders (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 33-34). Unlike Lincoln, however, Lenin never got his burial. Despite the fact that his widow and close friends opposed his public display and that he was beginning to show signs of decomposition after a few weeks on public display, his remains are still an attraction almost 100 years after his death (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 35). The tireless efforts to maintain Lenin's corpse require a laboratory dedicated solely to his preservation and a team of professionals that are tasked with taking care of the crumbling corpse to the best of modern scientific capabilities. These extreme methods to preserve Lenin for yet another generation would not be continuing into the 21st century if it were not for the power of political tradition.

Though knowledge is assumed to refer to that which is objectively and demonstrably true, there are many forms of knowledge, some of which are subjugated and others which become dominant in part due to their usefulness as political instruments of power (Foucault 2003, 10). In this sense, knowledge is a process of tradition that affirms structures of domination, which in turn legitimizes the knowledge that they produce and produces them in a cyclical fashion. Within this wheel of knowledge and power, the corpse is stuck between the spokes as a means of securing power in death, if not for an individual, then for a system. Lenin's preservation is a departure from the assertion of the incorrupt saint: there is no case made on behalf of his corpse that divine power has preserved him, but his preservation is very much in line with other aspects of the religious preservations of history. By the time Lenin lived and died, the links between corpse preservation, power, and remains having power beyond their mortal abilities or accomplishments had already become woven into the cultural fabric of the Western world (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 37). The extended preservation and display of corpses became popular funerary rituals for communist leaders in the 20th century after the precedent set by Lenin's body, and the trend took off precisely because of the power in doing so. For a politician with a cult of personality, post-mortem preservation is a means of continuing to reign in the hearts and minds of a people after succumbing to the eventuality of mortality (Chamberlain and Pearson 2001, 39).

Applications and Implications in Contemporary Anthropology

Current research in anthropology is exceptionally broad, bridging the physical and sociocultural sides of the discipline in many ways. However, many of the recent anthropological inquiries into the political implications of human remains concern the direct results of political conflicts, such as victims of war or genocide, or the politics of repatriation or exhumation of remains to belong to specific groups who lay claim to often ancient remains (Harries 2021, 220). To specifically connect theoretical anthropological ideas of interference in political systems after death with the actuality of the preservation of the remains of the powerful is a potentially under-realized area of study. That being said, the political power of specific human remains is beginning to draw attention in anthropology, as despite the secularization of the Western world, the

symbolic power of religious figures still holds power for many. In 2011 an effigy of Saint John Paul II was toured to 92 dioceses in Mexico as a means of easing tensions brought about by the war on drugs (Norget 2021, 357). Though the effigy only held a small vial of the saint's blood and was otherwise constructed of wax, this tour was a direct political response to unrest using human remains as a political tool. Tours and pilgrimages remain popular well into the 21st century as the remains of saints are popular not only for personal and religious motivations but as actions with political designs. Despite the motivations of any individual viewing the remains of a saint, the remains are part of larger political and religious schemas ((Norget 2021, 359).

Just as the choice to display human remains may be politically motivated and implemented, the choice not to display human remains is similarly political. To remove human remains from the public sphere is often to remove them from public discussion, a contentious occurrence when remains are politicized (Harries 2021, 220). Hence, ownership and control over remains have recently become a relevant topic in anthropology, bridging the sociocultural and the archaeological with the political. The intent in adding to these discussions and the body of anthropological work on the subject is to draw in aspects of the theoretical discussion of the political role of human remains and to connect the histories of politicized remains chronologically to better illustrate the transformative role of religion in the preservation and politicization of human remains in the Western world. As anthropology becomes further concerned with the convergence of the physical, archaeological, political, and sociocultural, there can be no shortage of work that examines how these concepts are relevant to an ongoing history of preservation, display, and resulting power. Though there may be limitations presented by this specific focus, there remains value in indicating how and where the anthropological, theoretical, and political meet in terms of the preserved corpse.

In Conclusion

Though strides have been made to scratch the surface of the worldwide and historically ongoing processes of preserving and displaying the dead for political purposes, there remains much that can be examined. From ancient remains to the modern open-casket funeral, the processes surrounding death cannot be assumed to be apolitical and must be regarded as part of a larger sociocultural and historical context. Some human remains are more politicized than others, such as the bodies of the powerful and influential. However, processes of power and domination are so ingrained that not even in death is a person exempt from having a place in the interactions and power dynamics of any given society, even centuries post-mortem. In this way, there truly is a life after death as even if buried for hundreds of years, at a moment's notice, a corpse may be exhumed and rediscovered and thus brought into the world anew to be interpreted and used in any number of political discourses. This is a cultural aspect that ought to be analyzed and critiqued as it will surely continue in one form or another in any number of societies. As the current time period is one often anthropologically characterized as defined by the rapid spread of culture and information, it is possible we have yet to see

corpses that have global cultural impacts that the likes of St. Cuthbert could not have striven to. As time goes on, the popularity of various eco-friendly post-mortem solutions has risen dramatically, and many people, including those of influence and status, are voluntarily opting to be surrendered to the earth in ways that even archaeologists may not be able to recover in the centuries and millennia to come. Only time will tell how the political life after the death of preserved bodies will continue, but the cultural impact of the politicization of human remains will likely persist in some form long into the foreseeable future.

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