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book review of

Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult, Living with the Dead in France, 1750–1870 by Susanne Glover Lindsay

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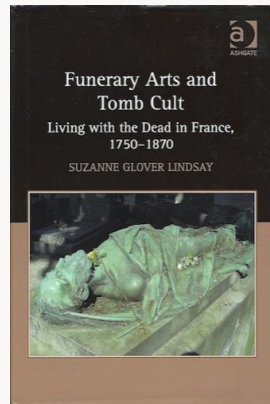
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Susanne Glover Lindsay,
Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult, Living with the Dead in France, 1750–1870.
Farnham/Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2012.
276 pp.; 44 b&w illustrations; bibliography; index.
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Burial sites and cemeteries have long been places where intellectual, political and spiritual inspirations bloom or fester. Who amongst us has not sought such inspiration through a pilgrimage to the graves of our beloved relatives, but also to those of our most cherished heroes, people we never knew in life, but who have inspired us in some way? Nowhere is the celebrity tomb more glorious and glorified than in France. Susanne Glover Lindsay's book, *Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult, Living with the Dead in France, 1750–1870*, explores the evolution of French society's cultural connections with the famous dead, and gives specific focus to funerary processions, civic internments, and the use of the sculptural form of the recumbent effigy for the tombs of national heroes and political figures. Lindsay's text works to establish the important sociopolitical roles of funerary processions, French burial sites, and the sculptures that grace the tombs of some of France's most illustrious historical figures.

The book, a long-sustained labor of love stemming from research for Lindsay's Ph.D. dissertation on David d'Angers' *Tomb of Général Bonchamps* (Bryn Mawr College, 1983), consists of six chapters covering the development of funerary cult in France as well as specific tomb monuments, many (but not all) of which included effigies. Lindsay notes in the introduction that the aim of her book is to "consider the metaphoric death and reincarnation of an older sculptural form in recent France," which was in a state of flux "since the fate of the French recumbent effigy is intertwined with modern France's changing funerary beliefs and practices" (9). Such tombs became sites for social protests and important social markers, especially on nationally celebrated annual holidays such as the Jour des Morts. The introduction also clarifies nicely the various yet specific French terms for recumbent effigies that are most commonly used, such as *gisant* (a fully reclining dying or deceased figure); its half-dead variant the *demigisant* (a dying figure propped up on one arm) or *gisant accoudé* (if resting on an elbow);

and finally the *mourant assisté* (a dying figure who is surrounded or supported by other figures and objects).

Lindsay begins her first chapter with a discussion of urban burial reform in the late 1860s, which included an unrealized plan to move the cemeteries of Paris to burial zones almost twenty miles away. Parisians were not pleased, and a vibrant “tomb cult” developed and was particularly active at holiday processions and in the press. Using this culture as her starting point, the author then covers funerary practice and “tomb cult” activities beginning one hundred years earlier. The practice of burying parishioners in and around their local church, strikingly pointed out by Lindsay, was to “absorb divine grace emanating from the altar or tombs and relics of dead saints, to elicit the prayers of the living, and to reinforce their faith with evidence of their own mortality” (22). Changes to this were forthcoming, Lindsay explains, because of the dead’s effect on urban public health; by 1789 church burial had essentially disappeared in France. While the ability to provide respectful burials for ordinary citizens dwindled, those for “dead worthies” grew, and they were honored in “new public festivals, a prominent state tool for shaping national identity and viable culture” (27). Burial rituals and reburials, as Lindsay shows throughout the text, connected national politics with the heroic deceased. The author introduces subjects here that she fully develops later in the book, including a discussion of Napoléon I’s exhumation and reburial. The public’s engagement with cemeteries and funerary processions is also discussed here, including their relationship with the newly founded garden cemeteries, their heightened senses in this new urban space, and the merging of the necropolis with the metropolis. Lindsay brings the reader full circle and sums up the chapter with a discussion of the large political procession that accompanied the corpse of the journalist Victor Noir to his first burial site in Neuilly (Noir was moved to Père-Lachaise on May 25, 1891).^[1] Save for a few lithographic prints and engravings illustrated here to support some historical points about public engagement with urban cemeteries and the “pristine” corpses of certain political dead figures (Henri IV and Napoléon I), there is little discussion of art in chapter one. The goal here, however, was to lay the historical foundation that would validate the ideas to come in subsequent chapters.

It is in chapter two where the reader is introduced to tomb sculptures (but not necessarily effigies) and funerary processions from the second half of the eighteenth century. Lindsay begins by stating that “effigies of the deceased in death indeed disappeared from France’s eighteenth-century tombs as nowhere in Europe. [. . .] full length statues of the dead [. . .] appeared rarely after 1760” (57). This will strike the reader as odd, since the author purports that this is a book about French effigies from 1750 to 1870. She uses this line of thought, however, to set the stage for their resurgence in the nineteenth-century. The first two tomb sculptures that Lindsay discusses are not effigies: Guillaume II Coustou’s *Funerary Monument to the Dauphin and Dauphine* (marble, 1766–77, Cathédrale St.-Etienne, Sens) is topped instead with urns, and Jean-Baptiste Pigalle’s impressive *Funerary Monument to Maréchal Saxe* (marble, 1751–76, Eglise St.-Thomas, Strasbourg) is capped with a full standing, life-sized sculpture of Saxe appearing very much alive. *Gisants* were being used at the time in France to mark the burial places of dead pets, were seen as examples of the “barbarous Gothic” (67), and were associated with necrophilia, thus banishing them from the burial grounds of dead worthies. There was also an objection at the time to likenesses in tomb sculpture, and such images were omitted to provide a “protective distance from issues surrounding physical death” (66). It is at this very moment that the former Church of Ste.-Geneviève was converted into the Panthéon, which was designed to encourage “a new intimacy between the living and France’s chosen eminent

dead” (69). The idea of the recumbent effigy was, however, much more visible at this time through funerary processions, in particular those of Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau (1749–91) and Francois-Marie Arouet, known as Voltaire (1694–1778), the first two men to be buried at the Panthéon. Effigies were used during their funerary processions, and even public displays of actual recumbent corpses were utilized, such as at the burial procession of Louis-Michel Lepelletier (1760–93). Through an analysis of these processions, Lindsay shows that the effigy form was there and not there, present at public spectacles of mourning but absent inside the indoor burials of France’s illustrious dead.

Chapter three examines David d’Angers’ *Tomb of Général Bonchamps* (marble, 1816–25, Eglise St.-Pierre, Saint-Florent-le-Vieil), which marks the beginning of Lindsay’s discussion of sculptural effigies. She identifies the Bonchamps monument as the first nineteenth century *demigisant* and as the inspiration for the resurgence of the effigy format. Bonchamps, who fought for the Royalists and against the republican army in October 1793, asked for clemency for 5,000 prisoners while he lay dying. David d’Angers’ father was among those prisoners, and Lindsay suggests that this was the personal reason that he wanted to obtain the commission to create Bonchamps’ tomb (97). Lindsay provides a deeply researched discussion of the history of the commission, design, installation and site of the tomb (96-104), as well as its critical reception at the Salon of 1824 (105–11). She includes a brief overview of the Musée des Monuments Français (1795–1816), founded by Alexandre Lenoir, in which royal tomb effigies, most recovered from churches damaged during the French Revolution, were restored and displayed. Certainly the exhibition of the Bonchamps monument at the Salon of 1824, as well as the (albeit short-lived) existence of the Musée des Monuments Français, contributed to the revival of the recumbent effigy sculptural form at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The effigy tombs for the royal family of Louis-Philippe I (1773–1850), the subject of chapter four, are identified as the first recumbent effigies on French royal tombs since the sixteenth century (119). Louis-Philippe commissioned effigy tombs for both of his younger brothers, Antoine, duc de Montpensier (1775–1807) and Charles, comte de Beaujolais (1779–1808). The comte de Beaujolais, buried in Malta, was memorialized with a *demigisant* in contemporary dress sculpted by James Pradier (1790–1852), while the duc de Montpensier, buried at Westminster Abbey, received a more traditional *gisant* draped in a royal cloak sculptured by Richard Westmacott the elder (1775–1856). Lindsay discusses the reasons for the differences in the tomb sculptures made for the two brothers (129), and the influence of the history of English tomb sculpture and its political connections with royal lineage. Lindsay then moves to a discussion of the Chapelle Royal St.-Louis at Dreux, where many members of the Orléans family are laid to rest. The Chapelle Royal ultimately became “a royal mausoleum for [Louis-Philippe’s] dynasty” (133). Dreux was far enough away from Paris to avoid close proximity to the people, and thus could prevent the type of destruction seen at the Abbey Church of St.-Denis.

Louis-Philippe commissioned two additional *gisants*, one for his daughter, the sculptor Princess Marie d’Orléans and one for his son, Ferdinand-Philippe, duc d’Orléans. The author entices the viewer with a discussion of Ary Scheffer’s (1795–1858) role in designing Marie d’Orléans’ tomb, and with a lithograph from 1839 showing an early proposal for the tomb by Achille Devéria (1800–57), but she does not discuss the final tomb because it was completed in 1894 by Hector Joseph Lemaire (1846–1933), which was outside of the date parameters of her

study. The surviving royal family's flight into exile in England in 1848 prevented the tomb from being finished immediately, but others that were completed at Dreux just before their escape are discussed, such as August Barre's *Tomb of the Duchesse Douairière*; Pradier's *Tomb of Mlle de Montpensier* and his *Tomb of the Duc de Penthièvre*; and Pierre Loison's *Tomb of the Duc d'Orléans*, after designs by Scheffer (all marble, all completed in 1847). Henri de Triqueti's *Cenotaph of the Duc d'Orléans* (marble, 1842), modeled after designs by Scheffer and located in the Chapelle Notre-Dame de Compassion in Paris, the site of his death, is given a minor notice. There is not much discussion of Romanticism (or any styles for that matter) here, and an analysis of how the reception of tomb sculpture compared with that of other types of sculptures shown at the Paris Salon exhibitions and in the press is lacking.

The subject of Napoléon's exhumation at St. Helena and the return of his remains to Paris (called the *retour des cendres* [return of the ashes]) in 1840 is treated in chapter five. This theme was introduced in chapter one, and it might have served the reader better had it stayed there. While Lindsay covers Napoléon's funerary procession and his reburial at the Chapel of St.-Louis-des-Invalides astutely, his tomb, by Louis Visconti (1791–1853), does not contain an effigy, nor was any such sculptural type planned for it, and no effigy was used in his reburial procession. In fact, the author points out that the use of an effigy for his tomb would have been, according to a member of the Conseil d'Etat, "too trivial for his greatness" (159). Therefore, as chapter five is only concerned with the return and reburial ceremonies connected with Napoléon's remains, and is not about a recumbent effigy type, or a public cemetery, the material treated here seems misplaced. Additional burials of military heroes and members of Napoléon's family interred at Les Invalides are not considered. Yet the strength of this chapter lies in the fact that the reader learns why Louis-Philippe decided to have Napoléon's remains returned to Paris in the first place, and how it had negative political consequences for his reign. Lindsay does end chapter five with two recumbent effigies of Napoléon by François Rude (1784–1855): a small model made around the time of the former emperor's reburial (*Dead Napoléon*, bronze, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon) and his large and well-known park sculpture, *Napoléon Awakening to Immortality* (bronze, 1844–47, Parc Noiset, Fixin). The discussion of Rude's images of the dead or sleeping Napoléon creates a nice segue into chapter six, which concerns Rude's bronze *gisant* of Éléonore-Louis Godefroy Cavaignac (1801–45).

In chapter six, Lindsay brings together her analysis of effigy sculptures, political heroes, public burial processions, and the sociopolitical role of the urban cemetery sculpture through a discussion of François Rude and Ernest Christophe's *Tomb of Godefroy Cavaignac* (bronze, 1847, Montmartre Cemetery, Paris). Cavaignac was a lawyer, journalist and a popular liberal reformer whose death occurred on the eve of great political change in France. Lindsay discusses his funeral procession, which was heavily attended, but calm and controlled. It is in this chapter where the idea of the outdoor burial was established as a symbol of liberty and as a reconnection with nature. Cavaignac's burial was a communal effort, funded by public subscription, decided on by a committee, and created with the diverse talents of the artists and founders who completed the bronze (188–89). A good point established here is that while indoor burials were reserved for the elite, outdoor burials were for the people, where, although wealthier citizens received better plots, "the broad range of society buried its dead there, near its hearth, and went there to commune, mourn, meditate and learn" (199). The entire book, but especially this chapter, suffers from the lack of comparative and detail-oriented images, and Lindsay's rigid attachment to the dates 1750 to 1870 prevents her from discussing in greater

depth the highly political *gisant* of Alphonse Baudin by Aimé Millet (1819–91) placed near Cavaignac in the same cemetery in 1872. Nevertheless, she skillfully brings together all of her main themes in this one chapter, which is rich with connections to what came before.

Aside from my minor points of contention noted above, Lindsay's book makes a significant contribution to the recent body of literature on the subject of French funerary art and culture, such as Antoinette Le Normand-Romain's *Mémoire de marbre, la sculpture funéraire en marbre, la sculpture funéraire en France, 1804–1914* (Mairie de Paris/Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, 1995); Avner Ben-Amos's *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789–1996* (Oxford, 2000); and Joseph Clarke's *Commemorating the Dead in Revolutionary France, Revolution and Remembrance, 1789–1799* (Cambridge, 2007). Her focus on the effigy format as a social and political symbol is essential to the understanding the how large scale memorial sculpture functioned politically during the first half of the long nineteenth century, and her discussion of the cemetery and the church/mausoleum is crucial to understanding the important political charge that remains palpable in those spaces. Most importantly, Lindsay lays the groundwork for future studies that will focus on the continued role of the effigy and the cemetery as tools of a revolutionary modern world. *Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult, Living with the Dead in France, 1750–1870* is a key study for anyone interested in the role of art for tomb sculptures, a field of study which is rich and flourishing in current art historical studies.

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Notes

[1] Lindsay notes on page 56, note 161, that “According to the administration of Père-Lachaise, Noir was buried at his current site (92nd Div.) in 1870, information to be clarified.” However, I had clarified all dates in connection with Noir's death, burial, and reburial in my own essay on Victor Noir in 2010. See Caterina Y. Pierre, “The pleasure and piety of touch in Aimé-Jules Dalou's *Tomb of Victor Noir*,” *Sculpture Journal* 19, no. 2 (2010): 173–85.