The Phantom Image: Seeing the Dead in Ancient Rome. Crowley, Patrick R. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780226648293

In *The Phantom Image: Seeing the Dead in Ancient Rome,* Patrick R. Crowley is less concerned with the evolution of ancient belief in ghosts and the different modalities of their depiction during the Second Sophistic (ca. 50s-230s CE) than in the preconditions that made such belief possible. Crowley suggests a rubric of preconditions divided into "diverse and competing strategies of persuasion" and the "standards of proof" necessary to arrive at an understanding of what constituted ancient "belief," a notion whose contingency on peoples (ancient Greeks and Romans), places (from ancient Underworlds to Roman tombs), and things (an array of funerary paraphernalia including sarcophagi, floor mosaics, and tomb paintings) the author elucidates across four somewhat wandering, if thematically arranged, chapters.

In Chapter One, "A Grammar of Ghosts," Crowley details the challenges evinced by the language used by the ancients to classify ghosts. While both the Greeks and Romans generally identified ghosts with images and pictures, linguistic nuance complicates modern understanding. For example, the Latin words *imago*, *effigies*, and *simulacrum* might be used to designate ghosts or to signify portraits or statues. The Greek context is yet subtler. Borrowing from Vernant, Crowley demonstrates the evolution of lexical sensitivities among the Hellenes through the example of the Homeric *eidōlon* ("ghosts," "images," and "reflections") and *psuchē* ("breath" or "soul"), which were "practically interchangeable" until centuries later, when Platonic innovation hardened their distinctions. These terminological obstacles illustrate the dangers in generalizing ancient "belief." In the end, Crowley agrees with Lessing: researchers can only hope to determine *what* was meant *when* it was written by thinking and seeing in "genuinely historical terms."

In Chapter Two, "The Chthonic Sublime," Crowley explores the chorography of the Underworld to demonstrate how ancients conceptualized, depicted, and constructed its spaces. Readers must first come to grips with the connection between "sublimity" and chthonic chorography, which is nowhere concisely articulated in the chapter. Perhaps this is intentional; "sublimity" seems as conceptually evanescent as the ghostly forms Crowley's study attempts to reveal. A proximate definition comes not in the form of an exacting explanation, but a case study: Lucian's *Charon, or the Inspectors*, which "brings together the thematics of the Underworld, chorography, and the sublime." In this Second Sophistic satire charged with archaizing referents which recall Homeric *paideia*, Hermes and the ferryman Charon recite a few lines from Homer to build a mountain from which to observe the people below. For Crowley, the episode reveals the essence of the sublime chorography of the chthonic: a juxtaposition of extreme contrasts, as typified by the spatial dislocation and vertiginousness of Charon, a god of the Underworld elevated to dizzying mountain heights; and instability and indeterminacy, as, for example, when mourners use libations in an attempt to bridge the delimited boundaries of sacrificial pits with those of "impenetrable" Hades.

The theme of sublimity is best advanced in the concluding section on Roman tombs. Crowley moves to the built environment of the sepulchral chamber and its decoration to capture the performative experience of visitors whose journey repeats the actions of the figures depicted on the walls and floor. Immediately relevant to the question of sublimity is how the images depicted both open the space and confuse visitors. For example, the inhumation *acrosalia* in one of the tombs blend with the program of the floor mosaic, the center of which depicts the rape of Persephone. The *acrosalia* correspond to the place on the floor where Persephone was abducted, bringing the depictive worlds of the dado and the mosaic together in a "collision of real and

virtual spaces." The effect, Crowley argues, would be one of "perceptual dislocation" and destabilization wherein the deceased is identified with Persephone while the bereaved identifies with Demeter and her search for her abducted daughter. The mourner's infernal peregrination coupled with the chamber's phantasmic program seems an effective stratagem to reify "belief."

In Chapter Three, "Spectral Subjectivity," Crowley posits that shrouded figural representations in Second Sophistic funerary contexts do not conform to "conventional ghostly iconography." Rather, they introduce a new way of depicting ghosts by turning them inside out, externalizing an "economy of grief, sorrow, and mourning." Crowley contends that the enshrouded figures found in contemporary programmatic schemes do not simply represent the deceased. They are instead the visual manifestations of invisible psychological and ethical conditions, chief among these being shame (Gr. *aidōs*, L. *pudor*). To support his argument, Crowley turns to Second Sophistic Roman sarcophagi and their sculptural programs, which were routinely populated by mythological characters, such as Agamemnon of the Classical *Oresteia*, distinguished foremost by their *aidōs* or *pudor*.

For Crowley, the shame of these figures has been externalized in the obscuration and disposition of their apparitional selves. Agamemnon, whose semi-occluded specter appears on the Orestes sarcophagus in the Vatican, is double-shamed; having sacrificed his daughter, Iphigeneia, to secure Achaean victory over the Trojans on the one hand, and being murdered by his vengeful wife, Clytemnestra, for his role in the death of their daughter on the other. Like Iphigeneia, who was bound tightly in her own robes as she was being sacrificed, Agamemnon was tangled in a mass of thick robes, constricted and unable to move as he was stabbed. Thus, Crowley suggests, the *aidōs* of the hooded figure of Agamemnon which appears on the sarcophagus is depicted through "the metaphorics of bodily restraint, swaddled…in a thick

encasement of fabric that constricts his posture and movement." Agamemnon is so tightly wound that his head is forcibly downcast in an emphatic bearing of dispositional *aidōs*, evidence for Crowley that the hooded ghost transposed "into the world of myth the emotional structure of mourning."

In Chapter Four, "Phantoms in the Flesh," Crowley returns to the question of "standards of proof" as registering in fifth-century iconography of the Doubting Thomas scene. Crowley argues that this episode can help expose ancient Christian belief in the nature of the incarnated Christ: was Jesus *really* raised from the dead, or was it just a ghost or phantom that appeared to the apostles? Crowley demonstrates that settling on the nature of Christ in this episode depends on the basic question of what constitutes "evidence." Was "seeing believing?" If so, was Thomas's visceral probing of post-Resurrected Jesus's wound necessary? Or was "seeing feeling"—that is, the registering of materiality through "embodied perception"—the crystallizing element of belief? For the Thomas scene invokes both vision and touch, complementary modes of perception.

Yet sensory perception does not necessarily equate to "knowledge" or "truth," as Crowley notes. How could the ancients *know* whether Christ was raised from the dead or merely a ghost? Early Greek philosophers recognized that we could experience impressions of things that are true and things that may not be true. The transformation, Crowley contends, comes only when we can figure out how to distinguish between them. The Stoics posited *phantasia katalepitke* (a "clear and distinct impression"), as a "criterion of truth insofar as it distinguished not only seeing from believing, but also believing from knowing." Later, Christian apologists from Origen to Tertullian took up the same question, but Crowley claims that it was not until Augustine that a paradigm shift occurred that enables an understanding not only of some of the

preconditions of early Christian belief, but also the origins of the Thomas iconography: that is, an understanding that belief is nothing other than "thinking with assent," and so a "function of both the intellect and the will." It is this which allows us (and Thomas) to discriminate between illusory images and thus "believe."

The Phantom Image is a meticulously researched art history which brings together an impressive range of archaeological and historical evidence in an examination of the preconditions of ancient "belief." That much of the evidence marshalled by Crowley has never been considered within an analytical framework of ghostly iconography speaks to the innovation and ambition of the author's project. His intentional temporal focus on the Second Sophistic is inspired; the deliberately archaizing motifs employed by Second Sophistic writers, sculptors, and painters provides a much needed through-line in the work. Further, it provides a useful connective comparative tissue that helps ground his fourth chapter, which is primarily focused on the fifth-century Christian context. It is worth emphasizing, however, that *The Phantom Image* lacks a unifying argument. While Crowley proposes arguments in certain chapters, others tend to meander. It is no less problematic that in some of the chapters with arguments certain sections seem out of place. Still, historians will find the work useful; if not for its arguments, then for the source material and comparative techniques used to mine them. In addition, despite eschewing the notion in the Introduction, *The Phantom Image* would make a satisfactory companion to studies on early *mentalités*, such as Le Goff's *Medieval Civilization* and Schmitt's *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*.

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