

couple of decades after the so-called Triumph of Orthodoxy in order to examine the establishment and strengthening of iconophile doctrines. There are also many long sentences and paragraphs, which affect the reading experience. Nevertheless, it is clear that *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850: A History* has set the point of departure for all future studies of Byzantium in the iconoclastic era. One does not have to agree with everything in this book, but it has to be taken into account.

Juho Wilskman

VERITY PLATT: *Facing the Gods. Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature, and Religion*. Greek Culture in the Roman World Series. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2011. ISBN 978-0-521-86171-7 (hb). XVIII, 482 pp. USD 130.

The subject of this book is divine epiphany and its complex and manifold relation to its representation in Graeco-Roman art and literature. The work developed from Platt's PhD dissertation on the same subject.

The author gives proof of her wide knowledge of the subject and the different approaches with which this can be addressed by analysing the representation of the gods and its reception among viewers or readers over a long period of time, from the archaic period in Greece to the Roman Imperial period. Different means of representation are discussed both in the visual arts and in literature.

Throughout the work, Platt stresses the cognitive tension inherent in the representation of the epiphanic experience in ancient art and literature. This problematic relation derives partly from the fact that in Antiquity images of the gods, or even the images of them evoked in the human mind by literary works, were often equated with the divinity itself. As stressed by Platt, this aspect is of great importance if one considers the difficult mediation in representing a supernatural entity, the godhead, in an anthropomorphic form, whether this might be in the form of a statue or, perhaps even more often, in the literary *ekphrasis* of a work of art portraying a divinity. Moreover, aspects such as the contribution of the skills and imagination of single human agents, such as sculptors or painters, were felt even in ancient sources to be problematic issues when determining the degree of human influence behind the truthfulness of epiphanic experience generated by the contact with Graeco-Roman art and literature.

The book begins with an introductory chapter which analyses an *ekphrasis* by Philostratus in his *Imagines* (2,1–3). The *ekphrasis* here is a description of a painting portraying an ivory statue of Aphrodite being worshipped by a group of maidens. In this chapter, Platt discusses the problematic relation between the actual divinity and its representation through a human agent. In what follows, the book is divided into three parts, following a chronological pattern, and these are then further subdivided into chapters concerned with different aspects of the representation of the gods. The first part focuses on the Archaic and Hellenistic periods in Greece. The second part concentrates on the period of the Second Sophistic. The third part is concerned with the representation of epiphanies on Roman sarcophagi of the 2nd–3rd century. CE.

In the first part of the work, comprising chapters 1–4, Platt makes several important and innovative observations concerning epiphanic representations in Greek art and literature from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period. Particularly interesting is her description of the different responses which different sculptural and representational means created in the viewer when faced with statues of the divinities. By pointing out that aniconic or archaic *xoana* conveyed a more immediate epiphanic value, Platt successfully uncovers the difficulties connected with rendering the most profound essence of divinity through the naturalism of the statuary of the Classical period, which was much affected by the increasing technical capabilities of sculptors. Concerning the Hellenistic period, Platt provides examples from poetry from a wide range of authors, from Callimachus to Apollonius of Rhodes, including also the ekphrastic epigrams of the *Greek Anthology*. She makes an important point in reminding us that the poetry of the Hellenistic period was not, or was not only, a product of the erudition of the scholars of the Hellenistic courts, but that it also contained religious elements when dealing with the representation of divinity in literature.

The second part of the book, including chapters 5–7, is dedicated to the different aspects of the encounters between human and divine which appear in the writings of various authors of the Second Sophistic. The approach taken by the author towards the Second Sophistic is refreshing and welcome, since it incidentally shows the diversification and depth of the interests and agendas delivered to us by the authors of that period concerning the encounter with the gods, which was not confined only to a nostalgic antiquarianism. Platt thus illustrates how, for example, Pausanias' travel through Greece is not only a journey among the lands of Hellas and its histories and traditions but also a means of demonstrating how "the sacred landscape of Greece is not simply a catalogue of monuments, but a living religious system that (...) is safeguarded by the very powers it celebrates" (p. 219), and how the Hellenic land was dotted with epiphanic experiences in the form of temples, statues, places of cult, old myths and tradition related to the single divine interventions in human affairs. Interesting, too, is the distinction between the believer's view of an oneiric epiphany of gods in Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales*, and the more mantic and semiological approach taken towards the apparition of divinities in dreams by Apollodorus of Daldis in the *Oneirocritica*.

In the third part, concerned with the representation of divinities on Roman sarcophagi of 2nd–3rd century CE, Platt interestingly shows that in the 3rd century the allegorizing of the mythological themes portrayed on the surface of the sarcophagi, or even the absence of portraits of the gods, signals the shift towards the representational modes of Late Antique art later also exploited by Christian art.

Platt tackles the representation of the gods in Graeco-Roman art and literature in an impressive fashion, as the book offers innovative theories and groundbreaking insights concerning this complex matter. The author manages this by approaching the subject from different angles and by applying her wide knowledge of ancient literature, art history and Graeco-Roman religion.

The quality of this volume tends to overshadow the fact that at places the language of the author is so conceptual that it might be somewhat forbidding for readers less familiar with the subject. Despite this, Verity Platt's book can be considered a useful reference work in the study of this subject. Its multidisciplinary approach can awaken the interest of the art historian as well as the scholar interested in ancient literature. It is safe to state that this work is a must for those studying this topic.