

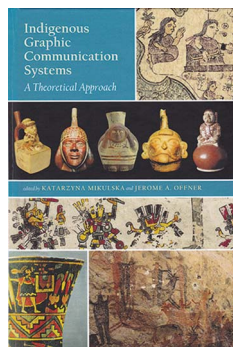
the question of belief, focusing on depictions of the doubting apostle, Thomas. In this chapter, Crowley explores the use of imagery in representations of this Gospel story, such as that on a late fourth-century sarcophagus, and the ways in which the depictions address broader questions about the materiality of Christ in his encounter with Thomas after the crucifixion. Thomas's need for tactile confirmation of the reality of Jesus forms the basis of the reality of the resurrection—Thomas needed reassurance that Jesus was not simply a ghost.

The Epilogue concludes that “the more the very existence of ghosts was debated in ancient discourses, the more they appear in depictions in tomb painting, floor mosaics, and mythological sarcophagi” (p. 228). For Crowley, however, this is more than a straightforward mirroring of belief, instead it reflects “the imagistic relays that connect the visual operations of seeing and the visual operations of depiction” (p. 229).

Communicating in the ancient world

Our next three volumes are concerned with communications between the living, and, more broadly, how we can approach an understanding of ancient systems of communication while so far removed from the peoples who used them.

KATARZYNA MIKULSKA & JEROME A. OFFNER (ed.). 2019. *Indigenous graphic communication systems: a theoretical approach*. Louisville: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-876-6 hardback \$93.



Mikulska and Offner's volume aims to challenge longstanding views of communication systems in Central Mesoamerica and Andean South America, namely that only a few pre-writing communication systems existed in this region and none that could be considered a true writing system. Contributors to this volume have come together to attempt “comprehension of the indigenous graphic communication systems of the Americas” (p. 16), an area of investigation that the editors feel has thus far eluded theoretical investigation. This volume, then, aims to open a new dialogue about what writing actually is, from a global perspective.

The book boasts 14 international contributors, representing balanced transatlantic collaboration, across its four sections: ‘Semasiographs and semasiography’, a definition of which is conveying meaning through signs, pictures or icons (p. 182); ‘Metaphor orality and space’; ‘Reconnoitering the periphery’; and ‘Going into detail’. The introduction by Katarzyna Mikulska provides a detailed history of the problems with the study of Indigenous American graphic expression and a theoretical exploration of what constitutes writing. Mikulska points to pioneering recent studies by Elizabeth Hill Boone and Gary Urton (2012) and Stephen Houston (2008) that have begun to advance the subject, showing how this volume builds on that work.

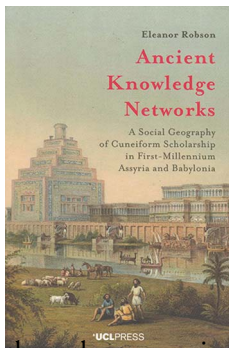
Wright-Carr's contribution presents a theoretical framework that can be used to classify central Mexican graphic signs or graphs. Using studies of four graphs from pre-Hispanic

Mexica sculpture and a colonial-period Otomi codex, the author identifies a dual function of these visual languages. The Tizoc stone and the Huichapan Codex reveal that graphs could be verbalised by any of the Indigenous groups who shared the culture of the region, and the same signs could represent linguistic structures in a specific language, essentially creating glotto-graphic (language-based or vocalised) signs.

Jerome Offner's chapter considers the problems of an occidental approach to graphic communication systems that originated in different social and cultural processes. The chapter draws out the importance of the underpinning principles of a graphic communication system in understanding the nuance and context of the graphics. Examining the Nahua graphic communication of a pre-Columbian Mesoamerica region, Offner shows how a full understanding of the graphics in the Codex Xolotl requires cultural knowledge of the underpinning political organisation and kinship. Offner finds that "a culturally embedded and expected semasiographic operative principle within that system united orality, performance, and graphic expression into a robust system for transmitting information across time and space and across generations" (p. 198), but it depended on cultural knowledge to be understood in its proper context.

The afterword, also by Offner, returns to the challenges of approaching Mesoamerican Indigenous graphic systems through a Western lens. Offner reflects on the new perspectives that the contributions bring to this topic and how they have helped to narrow "the gulf of incomprehension between indigenous and Western concepts of history, historiography, and social and political analysis" (p. 378).

ELEANOR ROBSON. 2019. *Ancient knowledge networks: a social geography of cuneiform scholarship in first-millennium Assyria and Babylonia*. London: UCL Press; 978-1-78735-594-1 open-access pdf.



Despite the wealth of studies of cuneiform scripts, beginning with the earliest days of archaeological research, the next volume demonstrates a fresh approach and perspective on these communication systems. In *Ancient knowledge networks: a social geography of cuneiform scholarship in first-millennium Assyria and Babylonia*, Eleanor Robson focuses on Assyrian and Babylonian networks of knowledge to understand the transfer of ideas in a book that the author describes as "an experiment in writing about 'Mesopotamian science'" (p. 1). The volume attempts to move away from the use of value-laden labels that have in the past defined people and ideas through preconceived and sometimes anachronistic concepts, instead considering the collective 'scholarship' of cuneiform culture. Chapter 2 challenges the lack of historicisation, which has resulted in an idea of universality that has masked the diversity of geographic and chronological contexts of Assyrian and Babylonian intellectual culture. Robson deconstructs the canonised idea of a "stream of tradition" (p. 26), and suggests new methodologies and sources that allow a more detailed historicisation and understanding of the subject, such as revisiting