GHOSTS OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM: A TRUE STORY OF COLONIAL LOOT AND RESTLESS OBJECTS

By Noah Angell. Monoray. 2024. 256 pp. £20. ISBN 9781800961340

Noah Angell's *Ghosts of the British Museum* is an engaging and meticulously researched exploration of the phantoms and the mysterious stories intertwined with one of the world's most iconic cultural institutions. Angell delves deep into the hidden narratives and ghostly lore of the British Museum, offering readers a unique blend of historical context, folklore, and thoughts on what it could be like given the opportunity to conduct a paranormal investigation there.

Angell structures his book with each chapter focusing on different types of hauntings or specific areas within the museum. This organizational format not only allows for a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter but also

invites readers to experience the museum's various haunted facets in a more immersive and engaging manner.

Historical and cultural context

One of the book's primary strengths lies in its examination of ghostly encounters within the broader history of the museum and its collections. Angell explores the origins of various artefacts and their potential connections to paranormal phenomena. For example, he delves into the histories of objects that might carry residual energies or memories of their past owners, providing a basis for the ghostly activities reported. Further expanding the thought that if ghosts still carry their religious beliefs into the afterlife, is all forgiven and forgotten when housed in the same building with artefacts considered their opposition? This approach not only enriches the ghost stories but also offers a deeper appreciation of the museum's extensive and diverse collections.

Angell's meticulous research is evident throughout the book. He draws on a wide array of sources, including archival documents, interviews with museum staff and visitors, and existing literature on paranormal activity. This thorough documentation lends credibility to elements of the stories, making them all the more intriguing for readers.

Narrative and storytelling

Angell's talent in storytelling provides a blend of historical facts with personal anecdotes and ghostly legends, creating a narrative that is both informative and intriguing. His writing style is engaging and accessible, making complex historical and cultural details easy to digest. The book is peppered with vivid descriptions and atmospheric details that transport readers into the eerie world of the museum after hours.

Each chapter reads like a carefully crafted short story, complete with characters, settings, and a plot that unfolds. Angell's ability to weave together multiple narratives while maintaining a coherent and compelling overarching theme is commendable. This narrative approach not only makes the book a page-turner but also allows readers to connect with the material on a deeper emotional level.

Visual and aesthetic elements

In addition to its rich textual content, *Ghosts of the British Museum* is also a visually engaging book. Angell includes illustrations of artefacts and the blueprint map of the museum itself (within the cover), which enhances the reader's experience and provides a sense of place. These visual elements are thoughtfully integrated into the text, complementing the stories and helping to bring them to life. The inclusion of such visuals not only makes the book more appealing but also aids in the reader's understanding and appreciation of the museum's haunted history.

Speculative approach

Angell's willingness to entertain various interpretations of paranormal phenomena is also one of the book's strengths. His speculative approach to certain stories, where concrete conclusions are often elusive, might leave some readers feeling frustrated. However, this open-endedness is also part of the book's charm, as it encourages readers to form their own opinions and engage in further exploration of the mysteries presented.

Angell does not shy away from presenting multiple perspectives and possible explanations for the hauntings he describes. This balanced approach, where there is a certain level of scepticism and belief coexisting, is particularly appealing. It demonstrates a respect for both scientific inquiry and the human fascination with the unknown, making the book a thoughtful contribution to the topic of the paranormal.

There is, however, a sense of sadness in some parts of the book. Angell describes times in history when peaceful negotiations were certainly not utilized in obtaining many artefacts that are still stored well out of the public eye. And the reasons given for their storage are equally challenging.

The book also encourages a deeper contemplation of the relationship between history, memory, and the paranormal. Angell's exploration of how historical events and cultural artefacts might influence ghostly phenomena offers fresh insights into the potential nature of hauntings. It invites readers to consider the ways in which the past can continue to impact the present, and how the physical and metaphysical worlds might intertwine.

Conclusion

Angell's *Ghosts of the British Museum* is a thought-provoking exploration of one of the world's most storied cultural institutions. His skilful storytelling, combined with rigorous research and a balanced approach to the paranormal, makes this book a great read for anyone interested in ghost stories, cultural history, and surface-level psychical research. Angell not only sheds light on the ghostly inhabitants of the British Museum but also encourages readers to ponder the deeper connections between history, memory, and the paranormal.

Ghosts of the British Museum offers both a rich source of ghostly lore and methods used for conducting thoughtful and balanced investigations into the paranormal. Angell's work demonstrates the enduring allure of ghost stories and the ways in which they continue to captivate the imagination, and the possibility to challenge our understanding of the world around us.

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