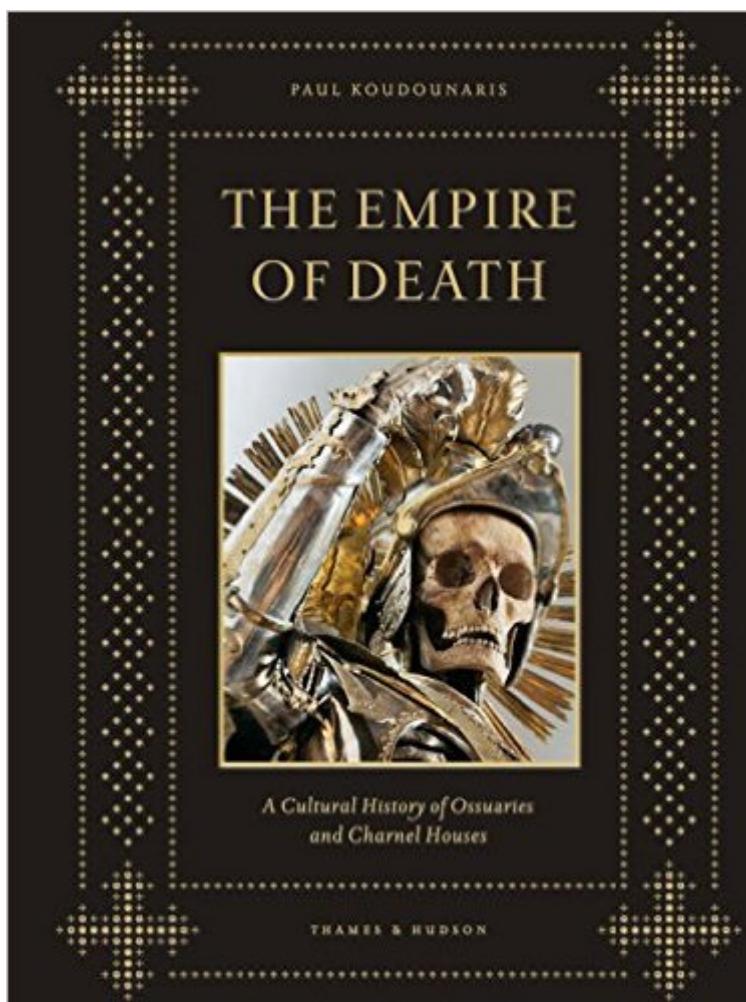


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The Empire Of Death: A Cultural History Of Ossuaries And Charnel Houses



Synopsis

From bone fetishism in the ancient world to painted skulls in Austria and Bavaria: an unusual and compelling work of cultural history. It is sometimes said that death is the last taboo, but it was not always so. For centuries, religious establishments constructed decorated ossuaries and charnel houses that stand as masterpieces of art created from human bone. These unique structures have been pushed into the footnotes of history; they were part of a dialogue with death that is now silent. The sites in this specially photographed and brilliantly original study range from the Monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Palermo, where the living would visit mummified or skeletal remains and lovingly dress them; to the Paris catacombs; to fantastic bone-encrusted creations in Austria, Cambodia, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Italy, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and elsewhere. Paul Koudounaris photographed more than seventy sites for this book. He analyzes the role of these remarkable memorials within the cultures that created them, as well as the mythology and folklore that developed around them, and skillfully traces a remarkable human endeavor. 290 photographs, 260 in color

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“... an astounding achievement, both as a literary and photographic work. - Fangoria“Koudounaris gracefully transcends mere ghastliness and ghoulishness to challenge cultural perceptions of death, both current and centuries old. The result is not only a highly original work of great visual beauty and rigorous scholarship but also a surprisingly intimate

and tender meditation on what the author calls 'the dialogue with the dead.' - Bloomsbury Review "The photos of the skulls alone justify the purchase." - Talk

Paul Koudounaris received his doctorate from the art history department at UCLA. His previous books include *The Empire of Death and Heavenly Bodies*. He lives in Los Angeles.

I am so happy that I ordered this book. It is full of stunning photography and the binding is very elegant. This was a perfect addition to my collection of books about Ossuaries. Typically these kinds of books are either coffee-table books burdened by mediocre writing and poor scholarship, or textbooks with wonderful historical perspective but few images. The text by Koudounaris entirely worth reading, though the format sacrifices ease of reading for visual appeal. Some of the sites in this book are rarely photographed or written about, so it is really a wonderful resource in addition to a beautiful book for display. It also includes map locations and very clear cross referencing in the appendices. To be honest, the photographs are so beautiful that it would be worth buying for those alone.

This is a remarkable book. It is beautifully produced and manages to span the realms of the coffee table grimoire and the insightful scholarly work. Paul Koudounaris speaks authoritatively and succinctly, revealing a world of life and hope that has been effectively extinguished in modern society. There is an unsettling message that resonates through every page; by marginalizing and concealing our beloved dead, we take some of the vivacity from our own lives. Plus, you get a built-in ribbon bookmark. *The Empire of Death* will likely change the way you think about death, even if you had a relatively amicable relationship before.

A really beautiful and substantial book in the hand. This book is less picture heavy and much more literature heavy than most books about the catacombs. If you are looking for an enormous photobook that is MOSTLY photos this is not your best bet. If you want lots of information interspersed with gorgeous photos and drawings its a win.!

I wanted a book that would give historical and interesting facts on places of death and our treatment of the dead. That is just what was delivered and more. The photos are large, high quality and provoked a range of emotions from me including shock, dread, awe, curiosity, and the desire to learn more. I agree with another reviewer that, despite its "coffee table" appearance, the information

in this book is very well researched. Also, the material is in-depth without being academic or dense and seems to build on itself to form a chronology of the history/facts covered. Two, perhaps, unexpected consequences of my reading this: 1. My acceptance of death as a normal part of being human has already increased as a result of what I have read and I am definitely more open to its discussion. 2. I recognize a need for society to demystify death and break down the taboos so as to better prepare ourselves, thus living more deliberately.

A lovely photography book that picks up and goes a bit deeper than Paul Koudounaris' excellent previous book, "Heavenly Bodies" - the images are hypnotic and so full of radiant 'life' and beauty, artistry and veneration, that while being drawn in to the superb imagery one can never forget exactly what we are seeing - the glorification of the inevitable. The book itself is a work of art - heavy, golden decorative patterns adorn the thick covers, while the pages are exquisite glossy heavy bond. At 224 pages, this is a work of love and craftsmanship. And, without many of these images, where would all those Death Metal bands get their album covers?

Amazing book at a great price! Love the color plates inside, a very interesting read.

Oh, my goodness! Fascinating. Absolutely fascinating. Thanks!

I was led to this book by one of the best articles I've ever read - [...] Even if you've read the book, check out the article, as there are a couple of stories in there that aren't in the book. Koudounaris' research into the macabre and history of charnel houses is very in-depth. The photos are excellent, and while the prose could be slightly more entertaining. I've already rated this at 5 stars, but if he had incorporated more stories in the style found in the article, I would have tried to rate it at 6/5.

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