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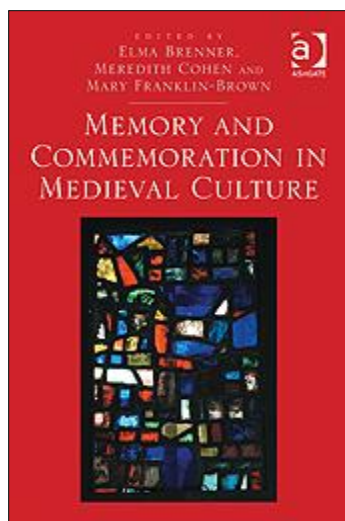


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Book review: Brenner, Elma, Meredith Cohen, and Mary Franklin-Brown, eds. *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013*

By Luke A. Fidler (Northwestern University, Department of Art History)

The study of medieval memory has been reinvigorated in recent decades by the work of scholars such as Mary Carruthers, Patrick Geary, and Jean-Claude Schmitt.¹ Their research has prompted medieval historians to inspect more closely the means by which medieval texts and objects construct relationships between the past, present, and future. Here, one might also consider the recent writing on *memoria* in German-language scholarship.² This wide-

* Thanks to Jason D. LaFountain, McCullough Kelly-Willis, and Anthony Opal who read and commented on drafts of this review.

¹ For representative publications, see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Les revenants: les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

² See, for example, Rainer Berndt, ed., *Wider das Vergessen und für das Seelenheil. Memoria und Totengedenken im Mittelalter* (Münster, Aschendorff, 2013); Michael Borgolte, *Stiftung und Memoria*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2012) Carsten Dilba, *Memoria Reginae: das Memorialprogramm für Eleonore von Kastilien* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2009); and Tanja Michalsky, *Memoria und Repräsentation: die Grabmäler des Königshauses Anjou in Italien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000). I thank Claudia Steinhardt-Hirsch for her suggestions in this area.

ranging volume makes an important and timely contribution to the burgeoning field of memory studies.

Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture collects sixteen essays from the fourth annual symposium of the International Medieval Society, Paris. They are grouped into five sections, each concerned with an aspect of memory or commemoration, and comprise a plurality of methodologies, subjects, and periods. Nevertheless, as the editors observe, this diversity does not extend to the social strata under discussion (p. 5). With a few exceptions, the essays analyze examples from French “high” culture.

The first section tackles the ways in which memory works both in and through images. Jean-Claude Schmitt provides a lucid historiographical overview of the section’s concerns, before concluding with a somewhat truncated analysis of the sixth-century mosaics in the basilica of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. Martha Easton interrogates the depiction of violence in medieval manuscripts. Although the issue has been much studied of late, Easton makes several fruitful suggestions about the locus of gender, memory, and devotional meditation in martyr scenes.³ Rosa María Rodríguez Porto compares thirteenth-century illuminated manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* and the *Histoire Ancienne*, tracking iconographic choices that point up the complex workings of cultural memory.

³ The exhibition *Images of Violence in the Medieval World* at the Getty Center from December 2004 to March 2005 posed similar questions. In addition to the groundbreaking scholarship of Michael Camille, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “To Make Women Weep: Ugly Art as ‘Feminine’ and the Origins of Modern Aesthetics,” *Res* 31 (Spring 1997): 9-34; and Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, The Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).



Roman de Troie, L'adoubement de Pyrrhus, fils d'Achille, Œuvre en vers de Benoît de Sainte-Maure, c. 1300. Photo: Creative Commons

The second section considers the relationship between commemoration and oblivion. Eva-Marie Butz and Alfons Zettler's essay on Carolingian *libri memoriales*—focusing on the surviving *libri memoriale* of the nunnery at Remiremont—explores the difficulties of reconstructing notions of past and present from recorded genealogies. Mailan Doquang surveys issues at stake in the construction of burial chapels in northern France during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Of particular value is Christian Jaser's analysis of ritual excommunication in light of Umberto Eco's suggestion that an *ars oblivionalis* is always already doomed to fail.⁴ His remarkably subtle reading of the

⁴ Umberto Eco, "An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget It!" trans. Marilyn Migiel, *PMLA* 103.3 (May 1988): 254-61.

reversibility of anathema lends credence to Paul Ricoeur's reflections on the intermingling of forgetting and forgiveness.⁵

The third section traces the connective tissue between memory, reading, and performance. Mary Franklin-Brown considers Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Maius* in light of Carolingian and Enlightenment encyclopedic projects. Joanna Fronska argues that the marginal images in legal texts might work in concert with the elaborate memorial-images investigated by Carruthers, Paolo Rossi, and Frances Yates.⁶ Kate Maxwell makes a welcome contribution to the scholarship on the manuscripts of Guillaume de Machaut, examining the expanded circle of performers whose memories guided the reproduction and activation of musical texts. Finally, John F. Levy probes an intriguing and understudied phenomenon: the incorporation of acrostics into written poetry. His meditations on the acrostics of Niccolò da Verona raise exciting questions about fixedness and stability, textuality and orality.

The fourth section is devoted to royal and aristocratic subjects of commemoration. Elisabeth Van Houts continues her work on the rich subject of migratory aristocratic women.⁷ Her essay neatly complements Anne-Hélène Alliot's comparison of commemorative strategies at the abbeys of Longchamp and Lourcine. Alliot makes an important contribution to the flourishing literature on the ways royal and aristocratic

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 412.

⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*; Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. Stephen Clucas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

⁷ Among Van Houts' many publications, see Elisabeth Van Houts, "Family, Marriage, Kinship," in *A Social History of England, 900-1200*, eds. Julia Crick and Elisabeth Van Houts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 133-41.



Transept, Abbey Church of St-Pierre de Cluny, 11th-12th centuries, France. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

women wielded power through monastic means.⁸ M. Cecilia Gaposchkin discusses the memorializing strategies implicit in liturgical texts, examining liturgical offices as the “ritual solidification” of the memory of Louis IX (264).

The final section, composed of three excellent essays devoted to the “remembering” of the medieval past,

is the volume’s most noteworthy contribution to the field. Recent years have seen calls—particularly from art historians—to critically reconsider the relationship between the medieval and the modern.⁹ If these essays don’t reach the radical methodological heights of Alexander Nagel’s and Amy Powell’s recent forays into anachronism, they nevertheless pose important questions in this vein. Elizabeth Emery revisits Pierre Loti’s 1888 late-medieval-themed dinner party through the critical lens of memory. Janet Marquardt analyzes the social and political stakes of three modern celebrations of

⁸ See, for example, Kathleen Nolan, ed., *Capetian Woman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2012); and Amy Knight Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (New York: Zone Books, 2012).

Cluny's medieval past, and Shirin Fozi rounds out the volume with a discussion of a stained glass window in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Reassembled from the fragments from the ruins of Notre-Dame de Reims, the window encoded memories of "the martyr cathedral" ravaged by World War I (p. 344).

Although in many ways this volume makes a fine addition to current scholarship, it is hampered in part by its eclecticism. Despite the recurrence of canonical formulations and theoretical models (such as Pierre Nora's *lieu de mémoire*), the key concepts of commemoration, history, memory, and pastness vary from essay to essay. The lack of critical reflection on these charged and unstable terms undermines the usefulness of several essays. While some authors (e.g. Schmitt, Van Houts) attend to the distinctions between individual, collective, and cultural memory, others blur these categories in confusing manner.¹⁰ Finally, poor copyediting mars the text (Otto von Simson's name is routinely misspelled throughout, for example).

On the other hand, as the editors note, the volume's eclecticism may be considered a strong point. Taken as a whole, the collection evidences the complex entanglements of memory and commemoration. It testifies to the manifold ways in which forms of pastness and futurity structured so many aspects of medieval life and death. An invitation to further speculation on these topics, it is a welcome presence on this medievalist's shelf.

¹⁰ It is encouraging to see several contributors dealing with the important work on these subjects recently published in English by Egyptologists Aleida and Jan Assmann. See Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* trans. Aleida Assmann and David Henry Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices, and Trajectories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).