

JÜRIG GLAUSER, PERNILLE HERMANN, STEPHEN A. MITCHELL (eds.):
Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies.
Interdisciplinary approaches.

Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and Boston, Mass., 2018. 2 vols (I: pp. xxvi + 940; II: pp. vii + 223). 54 figs, 7 tables, 26 colour plates.
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Front matter aside, the pagination in this two-volume work is continuous. 940 of its 1163 pages make up the first volume, while the second, containing seven of its 54 figures and all 26 of its colour plates, gives extracts, with translations, from writings and runic inscriptions in Old Norse (West and East), and from works in medieval Latin, illustrating in one way or another the ways in which memory and commemoration found expression in ancient Scandinavia. The first volume contains an Introduction by the three editors and a hundred chapters (numbered I: 1-30; II: 1-70) by seventy-eight contributors, some of them (including the editors) contributing more than one chapter (the extracts in volume II are numbered III: 1-45). While the focus of the book is mainly on pre-modern Scandinavia, as its title suggests and as the contents of its second volume confirm, there is in fact much in it that is modern, since it is concerned with how ancient Scandinavia both was and is remembered, in the present as well as the past, and includes chapters on present-day popular culture and neopaganism as well as on late Iron Age architecture and medieval manuscripts. Its interdisciplinary approach, also signalled in the title, is evident in contributions from such neighbouring disciplines as Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Sámi studies, and in chapters on Greenlandic, Balto-Finnic, North American, Irish, British, French, German, Polish, and Russian perspectives on the Scandinavian past. Where chapters are referred to solely by number in the present review (for reasons of space) it should be noted that the topics stated here as treated in them are not always reflected in their titles.

Key concepts in the first volume are collective memory, communicative memory, and cultural memory, which the editors discuss in a somewhat open-ended way in their Introduction (pp. 6-12), acknowledging that the term 'memory' is 'still not fully explained' (p.11), and preparing the reader for the many different modifiers applied to it by the volume's contributors. The term 'collective memory' derives from writings by Maurice Halbwachs (referred to on pp. 29, 129), who argued (if I have understood him correctly) that memory is essentially a social phenomenon, in that individuals cannot exercise

memory in any coherent or persistent way independently of the cultural norms and traditions of the groups to which they belong. The other two terms derive from writings by Aleida and Jan Assmann (referred to on p. 27) and are described in the book under review, without specific reference to Halbwachs, as 'modes' (p. 756) or 'forms' (p. 762) of collective memory. Communicative memory depends on informal, everyday social interaction and cannot be expected to last longer than 80-100 years (pp. 218, 508), whereas cultural memory is carried by relatively attentive agents of memory and manifests itself over time in (for example) visual art, written works, monuments, and rituals which to a greater or lesser extent reinforce the identity of a particular cultural group. Christian iconography, Icelandic sagas, royal burial mounds, and Faroese chain dances may thus be regarded as reflections of cultural memory (see the chapters by Anne-Sofie Gräslund (II: 11), Vésteinn Ólason (II:14), Torun Zachrisson (II: 31), and Tóta Árnadóttir (II: 43), respectively). While it is true that, as Ulrich Schmid says in his chapter on 'Russian perspectives' (II: 69), 'collective memory is transformed by writing techniques into cultural memory' (p. 929), it is surely inevitable that communicative memory will at some stage play its part in this process. It should not be thought, however, that the transition from communicative to cultural memory coincides with the transition from orality to writing: skaldic poetry, with its fixity of form, must in some cases have given rise to cultural memory independently of writing (see Mats Malm's chapter (I: 15) on 'Runology' (p. 218); cf. Kate Heslop's (I: 18) on 'Media studies', p. 257). Collective memory, it seems, is always there in the background, provided that what is remembered has cultural value: as long as this is so, collective memory will replace communicative memory if the latter fails to produce cultural memory by the end of its 80-100-year timeframe (see John Lindow's chapter (II: 17) on 'Folk belief', p. 508). It is misleading to attribute to Jan Assmann the view that collective memory has this timeframe, as Birgitta Wallace does in her chapter (II: 60) on 'Canadian perspectives' (p. 859): it is clear from the source referred to (*New German Critique* 65 (1995), p. 127) that what Assmann has in mind here is communicative memory. Some policing by the editors of the use of these terms by contributors would have done no harm.

Another of the book's key concepts, not so frequently invoked as those just discussed, is that of *lieux de mémoire*, i.e. sites or realms of memory, derived from the work of Pierre Nora, referred to on p. 30 and quoted on p. 908; cf. also pp. 275, 921. Such sites have a symbolic function in the memorial heritage of a community and need not have material form. Topics considered in the light of this concept in volume

I include rituals (Terry Gunnell, I: 6); rune stones (Mats Malm, I: 15); Sámi cult objects of wood and stone (Thomas A. DuBois, I: 27); manuscripts (Karl G. Johansson, II: 6); cave-dwellings (John Lindow, II: 17); past weather conditions (Bernardine McCreesh, II: 22); place names (Stefan Brink, II: 24); pilgrimages and holy relics (Christian Krötzel, II: 27, Tracey Sands, II: 28); burial mounds referred to in the sagas (Lisa Bennett, II: 30); the monuments at Glavendrup and Jelling in Denmark (Pernille Hermann, II: 32; II: 50), at Krosshólaborg in Iceland (Sophie Vanherpen, II: 47), and at Borre in Norway (Terje Gansum, II: 55); and François Clasquin's 1915 lithograph of the god Þórr as a symbol of Germanic destructiveness (Pierre-Brice Stahl, II: 66). In an engaging chapter (II: 64) on 'British perspectives' Richard Cole assembles examples of responses to the Vikings in Old English, Anglo-Norman, and Victorian writings, and in British folklore, into what he calls a *famille de mémoire*.

If the failure of memory, forgetting, receives relatively little attention in volume I (see, however, pp. 2 and 17 of the Introduction, and the chapters by Michael Schulte (I: 13, pp. 200-01), Jürg Glauser (I: 16, pp. 240, 243-44), Aidan Conti (I: 23, p. 320), Carolyne Larrington (II: 18, p. 515), Pernille Hermann (II: 37, p. 671), and Thomas A. DuBois (II: 59, p. 842)), it is given its due in volume II, where the extracts illustrate the fervent wish of medieval writers (not least the anonymous Icelandic author of the bishops' saga *Hungrvaka* and the Danish historians Saxo Grammaticus and Sven Aggesen) for their material not to fall into oblivion (III: 6, 8-9); the *óminnishegri* or 'heron of forgetfulness' mentioned in st. 13 of *Hávamál* and the potion of forgetfulness administered by Queen Grímhildr to the hero Sigurðr in ch. 28 of *Völsunga saga* and to her daughter Guðrún in *Guðrúnarkviða II*, st. 21 (III: 19-20); and the threat of forgetfulness issued by the god Þórr to the warrior-poet Starkaðr as part of a curse in ch. 7 of *Gautreks saga* (III: 33).

Very few stones are left unturned here. In one or other of the chapters on 'Spatial studies' (I: 19, by Lukas Röslí) and 'Origins' (II: 45, by Else Mundal), which deal in different ways with the tendency of saga narratives to impose memories of a constructed past on Icelandic topography, I should like to have seen a reference to Þórhallur Vilmundarson's theory, fully illustrated in the introduction to *Íslenzk fornrit XIII* (Reykjavík, 1991), that places in Iceland were named by the first settlers after features of the landscape, but later, when the name had outlived the memory of the naming, a story or situation had to be invented to explain it. Thus Geirshólmur, an island in Hvalfjörður in the west of Iceland, originally so named (according to the theory)

because it was thought to be spear-shaped (Old Norse *geirr* 'spear'), is stated in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* to be named after Geirr, a man who lived there; and the inlet Dritvík on the Snæfellsnes peninsula, originally so named because of bird-droppings (Old Norse *drit*) found there, is explained in that same saga as a result of settlers defecating overboard for apotropaic purposes. Given Grundtvig's despair, described by Sophie Bønding in her chapter (II: 51) on 'Danish perspectives – N.F.S Grundtvig', at the excessive use of Latin in Danish schools and universities, making education through Danish impossible (see p. 785), one might have wished for a reference, in Stephen A. Mitchell's chapter on 'Swedish perspectives' (II: 57), to Gösta Holm's fascinating article, 'August Strindberg och isländskan' (in *Einarsbók*, ed. by Bjarni Guðnason and others (Reykjavík, 1969), pp. 107-13), showing how Strindberg advocated the teaching of Icelandic instead of Latin in Swedish schools. And where Richard Cole states in his chapter (II: 64, already mentioned, p. 893) that the Vikings became conflated with the Saracens in medieval English romance and art he could have referred to the *Annals of St Bertin* for 849, where it is stated that the Northmen sacked the city of Périgueux in Aquitaine and then, in the next sentence, that the Saracens sacked the Italian city of Luni. According to Jan de Vries in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 44 (1928), 122-25, it was in all likelihood a hasty reading of this passage that gave rise to the idea that the Vikings sacked Luni – an almost certainly erroneous notion that as recently as 2008-09 was still finding its way, admittedly somewhat gingerly, into the history books: see Martin Arnold, *The Vikings: a short history* (Stroud, Glos, 2008), pp. 116-17, and Robert Ferguson, *The hammer and the cross: a new history of the Vikings* (London, 2009), p. 250.

The *Handbook* reviewed here is itself a monumental work: a landmark, if not as yet a *lieu de mémoire*, in the study of ancient Scandinavia. It should be emphasised that only parts of it have been touched on here, and that every part of it has something of interest and value to offer.

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