

**Review of: Bernbeck, R., Hofmann, K. P. & Sommer, U. (2017). *Between Memory Sites and Memory Networks. New Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*. Berlin: Edition Topoi.** 357 pages. ISBN 978-3-9816751-9-1. Open access edition: <http://edition-topoi.org/books/details/1308>

Jakob Schneider

Since Maurice Halbwach's discovery of the *mémoire collective* and the *cadres sociaux de la mémoire* Memory Studies gained an unprecedented attention from scholars worldwide. Nowadays the field forms a complex and interdisciplinary organism which connects even remote and highly different disciplines under the roof of memory. During the last meeting of the Memory Studies Association (Madrid, 25-28 June 2019) 1500 scholars gathered to discuss the latest developments, presenting a staggering amount of case studies from every corner of the world. Surprisingly enough, archaeologists and classical scholars are still suspiciously absent in this field and are only rarely presenting their research within the frames of memory. At the same time contemporary Memory Studies show a remarkable tendency for present topics and a certain neglect for pre-modern times in general. This lack of communication between Archaeology/Classical Studies and Memory Studies created a disciplinary gap which is most inconvenient, given that both sides work on arguably quite similar mechanisms and processes.

In recent times the attempt is made to bridge the gap between *Memory Sites* and *Memory Networks* and to discuss archaeological and historical material from the point of memory. 13 contributions (including an extensive introduction) cover a vast number of topics from the realms of Archaeology, experimental and contemporary Archaeology, History, Museology and Politics. The common denominator of all the contributions is the question about the relationship between spaces/places and memory and the dynamics of their entanglements over time. The contributions are of excellent quality and will raise interest even for readers not familiar with one of the topics covered. The reasonable price and the open-access online availability complete a well-made package which will surely attract many readers from many different fields.

The editors give a comprehensive introduction into the background and the theoretical framework of the following contributions. The reader is informed that the main impetus be-

hind the publication is the increasing erasure of archaeological sites in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To understand the entanglement between archaeological sites, memory and destruction is to understand the entanglement of archaeology and politics and thus to acknowledge the public responsibility of archaeology. Consequently, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* gives an analytical framework for such delicate considerations. The introductory note continues with a concise critique of memory theory from earlier conceptualizations of Maurice Halbwachs and Aleida and Jan Assmann to more recent considerations of remembering, disremembering and forgetting as it is explored by the contributors. Such a survey of the foundations of Memory Studies is much needed as it facilitates communication between all disciplines involved. However, this introduction may have benefited from an even stronger emphasis on contemporary Memory Theory and its representatives. For example, a section about memory and forgetting should at least mention the influential works of Elena Esposito on the vital role of forgetting in System Theory, considering that her approach is certainly of high importance for every discipline dealing with social questions. Recent publications on Memory Theory and Methodology such as Erll & Nünning (2008) and Erll (2011) are missing as well, and although their absence does not endanger the general reasoning of the editors their inclusion would have certainly be helpful for readers not acquainted with Memory Studies.

The following two contributions cover topics from more conventional archaeological areas. Regarding the central European Bell-Beaker culture Ulrike Sommer asks how acts of re-usage, reframing and deliberate destruction can be interpreted. Based on a wide theoretical framework and a vast amount of analogies she concludes that people using Bell-Beakers blocked, destroyed and re-used older funerary structures to keep the supernatural powers in check which would emanate from them. Thus, in her reading, the Bell-Beakers are not so much a sign of political struggles but rather the remnants of a rich world of superstitions and myths attributed to older funerary monuments. Although her arguments are well framed and convincing, dissent must be raised, concerning the neglect of the performative aspects of memory. Every act of destruction is, for the most part, carried out towards the present as a performative act to bolster the identity of a group in the given moment. Thus, when Sommer states "(t)he attempt[s] at the destruction of memory thus only draws attention to it and makes it a self-defeating exercise" (p.38) she ignores

the observation that acts of *damnatio* often have an implication for the present which can surpass its impact for the future by far. Apart from this consideration the thought-provoking theoretical introduction and its application to a rich treasure trove of references and studies render this article a prime example of how a careful archaeological reading of Memory Theory can be played out.

The topic of the next contribution by Ariane Ballmer is the difference between the mnemonic implications of single bronze artefact depositions and *Brandopferplätze* of the Bronze Age in the Central Alps. She argues that the single finds are signs of a non-hierarchical “depositionscape” in which acts of commemoration could be carried out by almost anyone and almost anywhere within a broader mythological charged landscape. The gradual, but distinct shift to *Brandopferplätze* marks a crucial shift in the organization of society. The possibility of egalitarian commemoration declines in favor of centralized acts of memory within stricter hierarchical structures. The minute observation of these changes in the archaeological material is most useful and directs the reader towards a more flexible understanding of landscape in a broader and less physically determined sense. However, the interpretation of the material is held back by the preferred use of slightly outdated theoretical considerations. This becomes especially apparent when Ballmer follows Jan Assmann in his distinction between a virtually democratic and accessible communicative memory and a fixed and hegemonic controlled cultural memory relieved from considerations of the present (p. 87 ff.). This approach was discarded in Memory Studies already a while ago, since it does not properly reflect the complex relationships between humans, objects and memories. It creates an artificial gap between two imagined modes of memorizing which, in reality, form a single discourse in which the past is constantly negotiated and constructed from the present. To divide this discourse into a “living” memory and a “static” history is to deny the ability of societies to engage with their past(s) in meaningful (and sometimes ambiguous) ways and to use and abuse memories in regard to the requirements of the present (ERLL, 2011, 126 ff.). Ironically this critique can already be found in the introduction in which Assmanns approach is rejected by the editors as “echoing historic prejudices of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 15 ff.).

The next three contributions present studies from Ancient History. Bernd Steinbock describes the relationship between attic master narratives and local narratives in ancient Greece. His study

shows impressively how the interaction between such narratives can be used to bolster local identities and how flexible even long-established histories can be handled, if it serves the interest of a particular group. The importance of memory for identity politics cannot be overstated and Steinbocks contribution is a telling example of how such interactions can be already observed in antiquity. His careful reading of Memory Theory also allows him to emphasize the multitude of memories in complex societies and to reject the application of the narrow and disputed concept of *Invented Tradition* on his material. This critical approach is only slightly sabotaged by his acceptance of the *floating-gap* idea (p. 104) – an old, ethnological concept already long discarded by contemporary Memory Theory (ERLL, 2011, 128ff.).

Simon Lentsch asks how and why Roman narratives about the Gallic conquering the Capitol were deliberately based on narratives about the Persian conquering of the Athenian Acropolis. Similar to Steinbocks contribution about Greek identity politics Lentsch shows how Roman cultural memory was gradually enhanced and complemented to increase the dramatic effect and to prove that Romans were equal to Greeks in fighting off Barbarians. The article will certainly help for a better understanding of intercultural memory dynamics in ancient times. However, in a volume about memory one may have been happy to learn more about the actual mechanics of ancient historiography. Given that history is strongly depended on memory processes (cf. ERLL, 2011, 41 ff.) it could have been a good opportunity to criticize an all too positivistic reading of classical sources.

In her article Heidrun Derks goes a long way to reconstruct the Varus battle and its reception history in minute detail. Her critical account can certainly be praised as being a prime example of memory history, since it shows precisely how mechanics of memory building, spatialization and monopolization interact with power dynamics and identity politics of a given time. The second part of her contribution is also most interesting, since she explores the delicate question about how a museum should remember a battlefield once so crucial for the construction of German identity. She argues convincingly that the site of the battle should not be called a *lieux de mémoire*, because it would stretch Noras conceptual framework too far and would veil that the battlefield nowadays is a “cold place of memory” (p. 187) with little potential to activate contemporary nationalistic values (*sensu* Nora). Her critique of the excessive and watered down application of *lieux de mémoire* and her

reasoning about the unusual ways, in which the event is remembered in her museum, makes her contribution a rich deposit of ideas and critiques for scholars of memory, museums and history alike. One may only add that, while the labeling of something as a *lieux de mémoire* is a political act, also the non-labeling is fundamentally political, hence it enforces democratic values of openness, equifinality and participation which are more and more under threat in modern times.

The volume delves deeper into political terrain with the article of Ruth M. Van Dyke who explores the struggle of the Hopi and the Navajo to retain access to their sacred landscape in the area of Chaco Canyon. She shows how the colonial practice of ethnicizing created animosities between local groups who are already under pressure of proving their heritage to the government. The noxious entanglement of DNA-heritage analysis, archaeology, history and economic, political and local interests render the Chaco Canyon a *lieux de discorde* – a contested space which serves as an uncanny reminder on the difficulties in separating the archaeological from the political.

The following contribution by Brian Broadrose picks up on this topic: He criticizes the attempts of archaeologists and anthropologists to separate modern Native Americans from the archaeological traces of their ancestors by declaring the latter as being part of human history in general. This forced globalization of heritage marginalizes the identity of indigenous groups and is a common way of preventing them from interacting with the past on their own. This practice is further reinforced through the distribution of monuments dedicated to white and colonial history and the neglect of monuments presenting the respective counter histories. Native American voices are only taken into consideration if they come from people willing to cooperate in further enforcing colonized views on history. With his relentless criticism on contemporary colonial practices Broadroses article provides a much-needed voice in a field obsessed with depoliticisation and should not be missed in any archaeological or anthropological seminar to come.

Reinhard Bernbeck continues to scrutinize current archaeological terminology and practice. He begins with a profound deconstruction of the concept of *lieux de mémoire* and argues that it is too rigid and nationalistic to be of use in our age of globalization, but also too entangled with the idea of *nation* to be applied to pre-modern societies. Furthermore, Noras romanticized notion of past rural societies, the nationalistic undercurrents of his ideas and the modern unrestrained applica-

tion of his ideas on all sorts of phenomena makes *lieux de mémoire* a concept which certainly raises more questions than it is willing to answer. Bernbeck continues with an examination of non-spaces (i. e. spaces of de-subjectivation such as modern airports) and argues that – contrary to ideological motivated dichotomies between pre-modern and modern times – such spaces must have already existed in antiquity. He sets forth to explore the concept of third spaces (*sensu* Bhabha). Such spaces lie outside academically/hegemonically constructed classifications and may be even found in the archaeological record of liminal spaces. The notion of third spaces allows the archeologist to acknowledge the ambiguous nature of the material he is working on and emphasizes that objects may belong to several timelines at once. Finally, Bernbeck applies his critical reading of spatial theory on fields of dolmens in northern Jordan and shows how an open and non-binary interpretation can help to overcome the rigid definiteness of earlier examinations. The meticulous deconstruction of established paradigms and the call for an open and non-binary interpretation of space render Bernbecks contribution an impressive and thought-provoking example of archeological theory. Because of that the reader might ask why the article was not placed at the very beginning of the volume to give a much-needed framework for the complexities of spatial theory.

The following article by Alfredo González-Rubal returns to the political implications of archaeologies concerning modern times. He shows how the archaeological (re)appraisal of the Spanish civil war interferes with the doctrine of the Spanish state to present the war as a war-among-brothers in which everyone was a victim. Every archaeological discovery is thus read as a threat to this doctrine since it brings new light to a chapter already closed by modern politics. Moreover, archaeology endangers the forced “democratization” of the war since it emphasises the war crimes as being politically motivated and works against the silencing of fascist crimes in the past. González-Rubals article is thus an uncanny reminder that the aggressive pursuit for dominance about the past is not a quality of authoritarian governments alone, but also a problem in democratic societies.

The immediacy and political implication of modern Archaeology is also reflected in the contribution by Gabriel Moshenska. He asks about the “circumstances in which archaeological sites can be appropriated by different interest groups (...) as arenas for the promotion and contestation of different historical narratives” (p. 305). In a decidedly Marxist read-

ing, he interprets archaeology as a process of commodity production and thus the fascination with public archaeology as the public need to consume the material and intellectual valuables created by archaeologists at dedicated sites. To escape the trap of premediated knowledge production through mutual commodification and consumption he suggests tearing down the fourth wall and to invite the public to participate in a direct and unmediated way. He argues that immediate responses could counter processes of appropriation and thus outsmart the neo-liberal impetus of literally "owning" the past. Moshenk's Marxist critique of modern archaeology is concise but thought-provoking and many readers will certainly hope for a more detailed elaboration of the subject in the future.

The last two contributions continue to tackle political issues. Christopher Ten Wolde criticizes Archaeology for focusing too much on the first and the second hermeneutic circle i.e. the question for the meaning of archaeological data in the past and in the present. In concentrating on those circles Archaeology often neglects the third hermeneutic circle which concerns the communication of that meaning(s) to the public. In forgetting about this circle, Archaeology not only misses the opportunity to participate in public discourse, but also runs into the danger of losing the prerogative of interpretation to political and other players. As experts on their field, archaeologists should not deprive themselves of the possibility to integrate their knowledge within the society they are working in. To give an example of how such integration could look like Wolde presents several workshops and events he conducted with students of archaeology. In creating several places of memories together with the students, he shows how meaning can be embedded in places and how people can be invited to feel the temporal depth and significance of an archaeological site.

Finally, Joachim Baur pursues the question of how migration museums can solve the problem of heritage dissonance in modern and multiethnic societies. In creating a master narrative museums are able to represent and encompass various differing histories of migration and to create a memorial place for everyone. However, this approach is highly problematic for three reasons: 1) Migration museums are often located at places with certain significance for migration history (e.g. Ellis Island in New York, Pier 21 in Halifax). In their pursuit to represent all other places connected to migration history they level all the memories on migration (including their own) so that specific histories of other places are negated. Furthermore, in reduc-

ing the history of migration to a single place such museums enforce right winged ideologies of singular and easily "defendable" access points to countries. 2) The attempt of presenting *all* migrants at once belittles the history of those who were forcefully brought to the respective country. Baur emphasizes that the descendants of such groups show little interest in supporting museums with such an agenda. As a result, migration museums often receive little to none physical objects to represent victims of forced migrations which in turn are represented even less. 3) Migration museums tend to celebrate migration history as a history of success and mutual nation building to the expense of neglecting the violent colonial histories and the suffering of native groups. In his attempt to draw a parallel to Derks article about the Varus battle Baur thus also points to the difficulties in presenting memories in places imbued with controversial histories. To solve this problem Baur does not suggest a depoliticisation, but rather a de-nationalization and an opening of museums to the histories of forced migration and colonization.

All in all, *Between Memory Sites and Memory Networks*. New Archaeological and Historical Perspectives stands out as a successful attempt to bridge multiple disciplinary boundaries. The volume addresses many problems at once but always manages to maintain a strong level of coherence between the individual contributions. The various questions, problems and approaches are often thought-provoking and provide fascinating perspectives besides the usual academic discussions. Every scholar concerned with the intricate relationships between archaeology, memory and politics should find inspiration in this powerful and critical statement which must not be ignored in future debates.

## References

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Jakob Schneider  
HU Berlin, Institut für Archäologie  
Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte Nordostafrikas  
(AKNOA)  
Jakob.Schneider@FU-Berlin.de

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6788-2656>