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20.09.13 Glauser et al., Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies

The Medieval Review (<http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr>) 20.09.13

Glauser, Jürg, Pernille Hermann, and Stephen A. Mitchell, eds. *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches (two volumes)*. De Gruyter Reference. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2018. pp. xxiv, 1163. ISBN: 978-3-11-043136-0 (hardback).

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This extensive handbook successfully offers, as its editors state, "an invitation into the possibilities of what memory studies can offer to those working on the pre-modern Nordic materials" (xxvii). Guðrún Nordal, in her Foreword, defines memory studies as "the study of the process of remembering over time, rather than what is remembered" (xiii). This interdisciplinary approach proves particularly applicable to the rich body of material from the early and medieval Scandinavian worlds, and this handbook particularly useful in organizing a vast collection of information in a clear and approachable way.

After a brief preface tracing the genealogy of memory studies through various sessions and volumes during the 2010s, the introduction by the three editors presents a brief overview of the background of interdisciplinary memory studies (3-12). The editors begin their introduction by examining a passage from Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* in the Prose Edda that links the idea of memory, *minni*, both with other associated concepts like wisdom, reason, understanding, and eloquence and with the place within the body where *minni* might be located (1). As they have done in earlier collections, separately and together, the editors reflect on the concept of *minni* and how its complex associations within the "memory cultures" of the pre-modern Norse world can lead us to insights about the ways in which that world theorized memory. The one hundred essays in this handbook by over seventy contributors demonstrate the various ways in which memory and the idea of memory can be explored in visual and material cultures from Greenland to Russia and from the late Iron Age through the Early Modern Period (12-13). One organizing thread linking these essays is a deliberate troubling of traditional temporal boundaries in order to stress "the negotiation between old and new, between past and present, and the ways in which the past was examined through the present and, in turn, the present was in dialogue with the past" (13). The editors present memory studies as intrinsically interdisciplinary, an approach well suited to the study of the Nordic past.

The editors have divided the handbook into three parts. Part I, "Disciplines, Traditions, and Perspectives," is composed of essays examining pre-modern Old Norse memory studies in individual disciplines (such as rhetoric, mythology, archaeology, and law, to name a few), and organized for ease of approach into sections. Each essay provides a definition of the discipline within its historical

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context, sums up the state of research with regard to memory studies, discusses the pre-modern Nordic material important to the discipline, and offers perspectives for future research.

Part II, "Case Studies," contains seventy "individual examinations" of different research questions "intended to illuminate, supplement, and expand the discussions in the disciplinarily-organised entries in Part I" (23). The editors have sorted these short analyses into four thematic categories exploring "the dimensions of memory" (24): Media, Space, Action, and Power, each of which have several subcategories. As in Part I, each essay contains a short introduction and then the "case study," ranging from topics such as Carolyn Larrington's focus on Emotions (514-518, in Media: Narrating the Past) to Úlfar Bragason on Genealogies (744-749, in Power: Designing Beginnings).

Part III, "Texts and Images," forms a much shorter second volume of the anthology (pages 947-1163) and offers excerpts from literary-historical, runic, and pictorial primary texts which engage with the actions of memory and forgetting in the premodern North. Twenty-six color plates, with references to the essays mentioning them, are included. The second volume also contains a Select Bibliography of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies and the extensive index, which the editors intend to function as a cross-referencing system for readers (26).

The end-matter seems to be largely accurate and well-edited, as the Select Bibliography and index discussed above make up a particularly important part of the editorial project. Each essay has an individual bibliography as well. There are a few misspellings in the translated texts, but that cannot be surprising in a collection of over 1000 pages.

This handbook represents an enormous undertaking for the editors and an extremely useful reference work on memory studies in pre-modern Scandinavian Studies. Advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and those new to memory studies should find it helpful. Part III, with its beautiful color plates and cross-referenced selections from primary texts, may also prove perhaps particularly useful for teaching.

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