

De Marre, M. and Bhola, R.K. (edd.) 2022. *Making and Unmaking Ancient Memory*. Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies. London/New York: Routledge. Pp. 324. ISBN 978-0-367-37144-9; 978-1-032-25134-9. \$160.00/£120.00.

The phrase ‘ancient memory’ in the title of this book permits a range of possible interpretations. It could denote, on the one hand, the processes by which people in the ancient world called to mind events and circumstances from the remote or recent past. Alternatively, it could be taken to refer to recollections of the ancient world by those who lived in later times. Rather than resolve this ambiguity, the editors happily exploit it, encompassing both perspectives in this collection of studies, the bulk of which derive from papers delivered at the 19th UNISA Classics Colloquium, held in Pretoria in 2018. Reflecting this genesis, the sense given to ‘ancient’ is limited in cultural terms to a Greco-Roman milieu, albeit with a broad chronological scope. The distribution of topics breaks down roughly as follows: one chapter on fifth-century Athenian tragedy; three on Hellenistic Historiography (including one on Josephus); three on the Roman Principate (including two on material culture); six on Late Antique/Byzantine literature (including three on John Chrysostom); and two on nineteenth-century English poetry. The categories are not necessarily so well-defined as my list makes them appear, as several of the pieces that center on the operation of memory in antiquity also have their eye on more recent receptions of ancient material. Eric Varner’s survey (‘Monster or martyr? Contesting Nero’s Memory in Rome’, pp. 114–45) of the posthumous memory of Nero, for example, stretches on into the nineteenth century.

The sheer diversity of subject-matter places this book beyond the capacity of any but the most learned of reviewers to offer a meaningful assessment of each contribution in turn. Rather than hone in on those parts where I found myself most comfortable, this review will instead provide some general reflections on the volume’s overriding themes. Returning again to the title, the gerunds ‘making and unmaking’ point to an emphasis on the malleability of memory as a mode of representing the past that stands in contrast to the more critical/positivistic perspective of history in its Rankean sense. The importance of this distinction goes back to the work of Maurice Halbwach, who coined the term ‘la mémoire collective’ almost a century ago. It persists, to a greater or lesser extent, in the works of scholars such as Pierre Nora and Aleida and Jan Assmann, who revitalized memory studies in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Making and Unmaking Ancient Memory promises to set these issues in the context of more recent concerns. The preface calls the reader's attention to 'the current age of alternative facts, fake news and post-truth discourses, although these phenomena are by no means a recent development' (xii). Gillian Clark's introductory chapter ('Introduction: Making and unmaking ancient Mediterranean memory', pp. 1-7) likewise opens with a reference to the toppling of commemorative statues, and the context suggests that the reader is meant to think not only of the fall of Sejanus in Juvenal's tenth *Satire*, but also of figures like Leopold II of Belgium and Robert E. Lee. Apart from Martin Szöke's thoughtful chapter ('An age of post-truth politics? Making and unmaking memory in Pliny's *Panegyricus*', pp. 95-113) on Pliny the Younger and 'post-truth politics,' however, these perspectives receive scant attention in the main body of the collection. This is unfortunate, because they merit closer scrutiny.

To begin with 'fake news,' I count myself among those who view this as a recent, or at least distinctively modern, phenomenon. I take this term to refer to something different, and more pernicious, than the perennial problem of bias in the reporting of events and/or the allegations of impropriety that tend to arise therefrom (for which one can find ready examples in, say, Book 12 of Polybius' *Histories* or Plutarch's *de Malignitate Heroditi*). As deployed in contemporary political discourse, the boggart of 'fake news' has come to represent a deliberate, cynical assault on the norms of what was once derisively termed 'the reality-based community' that seeks to undermine the public's ability to distinguish fact from fiction. This is not the same thing as having an evolving public understanding of the past or even, in Pliny's case, giving a misleading shine to one's autobiography.

I would further contend that the willful abandonment of truth as a basis for evaluating public discourse ultimately amounts to an assault on memory itself. In both its individual and communal applications, memory depends on the premise that what we remember are not mere phantoms of someone's imagination but actual events that occurred in the real world. While it is often difficult to recall the past with total accuracy, serious failures of memory are normally distressing when pointed out. Sustained dissonance between what one remembers as true and what one is repeatedly told ('gaslighting' in today's parlance) can be traumatic in the extreme. To bring this back to the context of the volume under review, I would call attention to Harmut Ziche's discussion of the representation of Constantine in the works of Eusebius and Zosimus ('Misremembering Constantine in Eusebius and Zosimus', pp. 149-68). The later historian's account differs radically from that of his predecessor, but their disagreement necessarily rests on a shared recognition that Constantine was a real person who had a profound impact on the Roman empire and its religious development, and

that assessing the nature of these achievements is what mattered to posterity.

Attention to the fate of commemorative monuments, on the other hand, points to the affective power of memories, as well as the determination of some people to cling to particular visions of the past and to rationalize those attachments even in the face of contradictory evidence. The central question, as Clark rightly points out, is usually a political one, depending on whose interests are served by a given memorial framework and whether or not they have the power to impose their perspective on a wider public. By the same token, however, it would be a mistake to confuse the monument for the memory it represents. One can tear down statues or even burn books, but (to paraphrase Tacitus *Agricola* 2.3) it is easier to silence memory than to obliterate it. Moreover, as Charles Hedrick demonstrates in his important monograph *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (2000), erasures tend to take on a presence of their own.

'Making and unmaking' is therefore perhaps not the most useful framework for thinking about how memories operate on a social level. A more accurate term, to choose among those that recur in various contexts through this volume, might be 'competing' or 'negotiated' memories, or perhaps simply the 'construction of memory' and its 'counter-memory.' In untangling these complex processes, the key thing is to resist the urge to reduce communal memory to an object of cynical manipulation that can be created or erased at the whim of some totalitarian authority. We should expect memories to develop and change as political realities and cultural priorities shift over time. Such changes typically emerge in the context of a preexisting store of communal memories, however, and these can also act as a check against radical transformation.

To put this in more concrete terms, I would mention Jan Assmann's distinction between 'communicative' and 'cultural' memory. As elements of what is essentially an evolutionary model, these terms call attention to the difference in chronological awareness between societies that transmit memory orally, for whom knowledge of the past typically extends only a couple of generations into the past before leaping back to a mythical moment of origins (what Jan Vansina called the 'floating gap'), and those in which the memory of intervening generations has been entrusted to more enduring cultural institutions such as writing. I was surprised to find these terms invoked by some of the contributors to this volume as though this distinction persisted within the historical consciousness of societies that have developed traditions of cultural memory. Certainly the bulk of communal knowledge continued to be transmitted orally from person to person throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, but after the watershed of Herodotus one should expect to find some degree of interpenetration

between the contents of this communicative memory and the store of cultural memory preserved in texts, monuments, and other more permanent commemorative resources. Our ability to assess the extent of this overlap will depend upon our understanding of the relationship between 'popular' and 'elite' culture, but the point is that one should not be surprised if visitors to the Forum of Augustus or the audience of Chrysostom's sermons had access to memories of events that lay beyond the generational threshold of Vansina's 'floating gap.'

This problem brings us back to the question of the relationship between memory and history. The overwhelming emphasis of this volume on literary texts, including histories, suggests that this is not an issue that we need worry too much about when thinking about the ancient world. In light of the underlying differences in the conceptual frameworks of ancient and modern historiography, I am generally comfortable with this approach. The focus on literature as a vehicle for cultural memory does have its drawbacks, however. Other modes of collective remembering, such as funerary practices and religious rituals, receive only limited attention, most notably in Wendy Meyer's discussion of Christian martyr shrines ('Remembering dystopia: Re-reading Chrysostom's homily *On the Holy Martyr Babylas* through the lens of disgust', pp. 169-81) and Chris L. de Wet's analysis of the *Funerary Speech in Praise of Saint John Chrysostom* ('Martyrdom and the memorialisation of John Chrysostom: In Ps.-Martyrius' *Funerary Speech in Praise of John Chrysostom*', pp. 182-95). There is also a tendency among a handful of contributors to circumvent these issues entirely, adopting an approach to cultural memory as if it were *Quellenforschung* by another name, in which the goal is simply to separate the distortions of 'memory' from reliable historical facts. In such cases, the preoccupations of the modern historian threaten to overwhelm our appreciation of how memory functioned within ancient society.

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