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REVIEWS

Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo, ed., with Carol Stamatis Pendergast, *Memory and the Medieval Tomb* (Ashgate: Aldershot and Brookfield 2000) xv + 317 pp., ill.

This collection of essays, announce the editors, "focuses on the tomb monument and its context as a complex of strategies to define what is to be remembered, to fix memory, and to facilitate recollection in order to commemorate the deceased" (2). Originally presented at a series of conference sessions organized by the editors in 1994–1995, the eleven papers chosen to appear in *Memory and the Medieval Tomb* (three of which have been previously published) make significant contributions specific to the study of their selected period and locale, as well as to the broader understanding of medieval funerary monuments and the dynamics of memory. Unfortunately, given the constraint of review space together with the richness and depth of the book, a descriptive sketch and a few concluding remarks are all that can be offered here. It should be noted from the start, however, that this is a volume deserving of and sure to reward repeated, close study.

In the introduction by Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast (1–15), the broad, interrelated themes of funerary monuments, the affect of their representation, and the receptive and transformational qualities of memory are set forth. More specifically, these three topics, which serve to unite what is otherwise a patchwork of essays (running in no particular order from the fourth to the fifteenth century), are discussed in terms of their at times dynamic, if occasionally problematic structural–functional relationship within a medieval Christian milieu. Although highly and self-consciously dependent upon the foundational work of Frances Yates, Mary Carruthers, Jacques Le Goff, Patrick Geary, Otto Gerhard Oexle, Karl Schmid, James Fentress, Chris Wickham, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, the editors' survey of medieval memory nevertheless makes the case that these scholars have primarily focused on memory in the Middle Ages only as it related to literature, history, and monasticism. Consequently, the ways in which the idiosyncratic, atextual "languages" of art and space also interacted with and remained distinct from textual media have not received the

attention they deserve in their own dialectic with memory.[33] The present collection of essays makes a calculated attempt to address this conspicuous lacuna.

Part 1 of the book, falling beneath the rubric "The tomb: between the living and the dead," consists of five studies concentrating "on individual tombs and the ways in which memorial strategies define the dialogue between the living and the dead" (8). Beginning with Stephen Lamia's essay "Souvenir, synaesthesia, and the *sepulcrum Domini*: sensory stimuli as memory stratagems" (19–41), the importance of the "synaesthetic" or empathetic and sensory dimension to the experience of remembrance is underscored through a brief survey of a remarkable funerary tradition. In order to allow a direct, tactile encounter between saints and their worshippers, certain sacred tombs were deliberately perforated, creating apertures through which the "benefits" of proximity to the saint's relics might be gained. As Lamia observes, by the twelfth century the knowledge that such a pierced tomb had been constructed for Christ in Jerusalem had made its way west, and was beginning to appear as an iconographic scheme. The image of Christ's fenestrated sepulcher alone, he argues, was enough to act as a kind of trigger, vicariously though no less intensely prompting the memory of the Resurrection by its iconographic insistence upon the accessible reality available at the miraculous site. The next essay, Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo's "Lament for a lost Queen: the sarcophagus of Doña Blanca in Nájera" (43–79), continues to explore the immediacy evoked by a synaesthetic experience, but now in the context of twelfth-century Spain. Through an examination of Doña Blanca's sarcophagus and its particular design elements and allusions, she reveals numerous strategic, affective cues, and demonstrates how their careful placement served to initiate a "salvational exchange" of memory, prayer, and intercession between the living and the dead. As Valdez del Alamo argues, this memorial "conversation" was at once informed by the qualities for which Doña Blanca's husband wished she should be commemorated, shaped by contemporary religious and social institutions, and mediated by customary practices of mourning.

The remaining three essays of part 1 continue in the same vein: specific tombs and the various contextual layers within which they were

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[33]Yet cf. the remarks of Patrick Geary in 1998 about the movement of his research in this very direction, in C. M. Booker, "An Interview with Patrick J. Geary," *Comitatus* 29 (1998): 18–19.

embedded are examined for the purpose of recovering the situational constraints and possibilities that informed their commemorative strategies. For instance, Anne McGee Morganstern, in her study on "The tomb as prompter for the chantry: four examples from Late Medieval England" (81–97), looks at the architectural organization and spatial layout of tomb sculpture in fourteenth-century England (of the Lady Montacute and Burghersh families) not only to investigate the ways in which deliberate placement and decorum of design affected the liturgical practice of remembering the dead, but also to gain insight into the degree to which literary memory constructs of the day, such as that by Thomas Bradwardine, were actualized. Geraldine Johnson, in her essay "Activating the effigy: Donatello's Pecci Tomb in Siena Cathedral" (99–127), moves the focus of the discussion to early fifteenth-century Italy, but her leading question remains much the same. Taking a fresh look at Donatello's famous funeral effigy of Bishop Giovanni di Bartolomeo Pecci of Siena, Johnson argues that both its remarkable decorative technique and its particular placement in the cathedral floor had everything to do with ensuring the perennial "activation" of the bishop's commemoration. Strategically cast in an unusual, oblique perspective and deliberately located at the foot of the altar, "Donatello's [tomb] relief guaranteed," maintains Johnson, "that the potent prayers associated with the Mass itself would regularly be said by an ecclesiastic standing on the altar overlooking the effigy of the dead Bishop" (109–110). Here was a cue for remembrance in its most efficient and economical form. In the last essay of part 1, entitled "Commemorating a real bastard: the chapel of Alvaro de Luna" (129–153), the focus shifts once again, this time upon a fifteenth-century funerary chapel in Toledo Cathedral. In what is without doubt one of the most fascinating studies of the book, Patrick Lenaghan argues that the monumental grave of Alvaro de Luna, the controversial minister to King John II of Castile, should be understood as a counter-narrative, fashioned by his family to redeem the difficult reputation of the man they loved. Using the medium of a memorial tomb, de Luna's family attempted to answer the damning charges leveled against their ancestor—and also rid themselves of his lingering shame—by dramatically commemorating Alvaro as the paragon of virtue and nobility he never was. To this end, life-size figures of genuflecting knights and friars were erected around the elevated tomb; frozen in perpetual reverence, these "mourners" in a funeral ceremony for Alvaro that never occurred (he had been executed

for treason) strategically serve, Lenaghan argues, to enhance the solemnity of the space, as well as to impress upon onlookers the "correct" response of bereavement and loss. For Lenaghan, this mimetic configuration was a "successful visual stratagem," for it confronted and answered the strident textual polemics against Alvaro, but in a language far more affective than the written word.

Part 2 of the volume, entitled "Shaping communal memory," begins by jumping back to the period of Late Antiquity with Dorothy Hoogland Verkerk's contribution, "*The font is a kind of grave*: remembrance in the Via Latina catacombs" (157–181). Re-examining a well-known series of painted scenes from the Book of Exodus on the walls of the Roman catacombs (Via Latina–Cubiculum C), Verkerk offers a fresh interpretation of their meaning by exploring the nature of their impact upon the memory of early Christian worshippers. Through their typological allusions to the rite of baptism and its promise of rebirth and resurrection, she argues that the tomb paintings "activated" memory, reminding anguished Christians visiting the tomb "that they have already passed from spiritual death into a spiritual rebirth" (160). Triggered by images and reinforced by ritual action, the consolatory remembrance of a fundamental Christian belief acted to bind the past with the present, the dead with the living. The next essay, Kyle R. Crocker's treatment of "Memory and the social landscape in eleventh-century Upplandic commemorative practice" (183–203), at first seems to present a rather jarring shift, for it moves the discussion forward in time by half a millennium and upward in latitude to the northernmost reaches of the medieval world. Crocker argues that Scandinavian natives of the region around Lake Vallentuna (near Stockholm) responded in an inventive way to the slow, disruptive impact of Christianity upon their traditional, territorial burial practices. Despite their eventual adherence to the Christian requirement of communal interment near the church, families still managed to maintain close ties to both the land and the honor so closely associated with the recently removed bodies of their ancestors by strategically employing the proxy of cenotaphs, engraved stones that—*in loco corporum*—staked out territory and preserved the exploits of deceased kindred. Like Verkerk's essay, Crocker's discussion illustrates the creative steps that people would take to overcome constraints and maintain a constitutive form of remembrance. In Verkerk's case, an allusive iconography of Christian transformation and promise best suited the cramped, funereal context of

the catacombs, while in Crocker's study, innovative monuments recording territorial rights and feats of valor fulfilled the customary needs of commemoration, identity, and status without violating newly espoused Christian precepts.

The four remaining articles only provide further examples of such constraints upon commemoration and the various strategies for circumvention that they engendered. Thomas E. A. Dale's study, "Stolen property: Saint Mark's first Venetian tomb and the politics of communal memory" (205–225), looks at the ways the Venetians, upon their "rediscovery" of the stolen relics of Saint Mark in the twelfth century, justified the initial translation of the saint's remains from Alexandria by their Venetian ancestors in the ninth century. Dale shows that the presence of the holy relics in Venice was strategically recontextualized by means of suggestive, "historical" mosaic and sculptural programs in order to lend solemn power and sacred legitimacy to local civic institutions. For want of space, it is enough to note that the last three essays, Carolyn M. Carty's contribution, "Dream Images, *memoria,* and the Heribert Shrine" (227–247), Kathleen Nolan's article, "The Queen's body and institutional memory: the tomb of Adelaide of Maurienne" (249–267), and the concluding study by Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, "*Monumenta et memoriae*: the thirteenth-century episcopal pantheon of Léon Cathedral" (269–299), explore individual cases of funerary monuments in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany, France, and Spain respectively. All follow similar paths in their quest to elucidate both the context and "social logic" that gave the memory "triggers," "prompts," and "cues" of specific monuments their idiosyncratic form.

I should like to conclude with two points, the first specific, the second general. The essays in *Memory and the Medieval Tomb* provide a wide array of studies with the common goal of laying the groundwork for the exploration of memory, art, space, and the dynamic relationships among them. Unfortunately, there is a yawning gap in the landscape they describe, for the period between the sixth and eleventh centuries remains—in the context of the present volume, at least—*terra incognita.* Readers will go unaware, for instance, of the famous return to the tomb of Charlemagne by Otto III in the year 1000. Yet, this is only to criticize the book for what it is not. A broader complaint has to do precisely with the book's central, overriding assumption—the apparently straightforward relationship between foresight and agency in the Middle Ages. This review is not the place to begin a discussion on

the nature of medieval agency, but with their heavy reliance upon notions of "strategy" one would like to have seen the editors or contributors to the volume offer at least a few critical reflections on this important subject. How are we to distinguish careful, strategic measures from those that were shaped by contingency? Were people in the Middle Ages strategists in the way we understand the term? How should we reconcile notions of strategy with Christ's injunction on the Mount to "be not solicitous for tomorrow; for the morrow will be solicitous for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6.34)?

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