Developments in *Memoria*-Research in East Central Europe¹

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In 2008, in Utrecht a new website has been launched, presenting *Medieval Memoria Research in the Low Countries.* In the opening address, Truus van Bueren, its creator, emphasized that *memoria*-researchers tend to limit themselves to researching within their own modern national borders and linguistic frontiers. They also seem to have their own "citation communities".²

My paper can be seen then as a modest attempt to go beyond the borders of this research project, focusing as it does on the cultural centres of late medieval Europe, and carried out by 'Western' scholars. As will become clear, presenting developments of research on medieval *memoria* in what is called East Central Europe reflects methodological and practical preoccupations of a wider international community of scholars.

The area in question, called East Central Europe, Eastern Europe or *Ost-Mitteleuropa*, is difficult to define, both for historical and for political reasons.³ One

¹ This paper was pronounced during the Dutch-German Symposium on medieval *memoria* which took place in Utrecht in February 2009. It should be seen as work in progress, meant to give notice of scholarly developments in the East Central European region. These developments remain relatively unknown to many 'Western' scholars, if only for linguistic reasons.

² Cf. T. VAN BUEREN, "Care for the here and the hereafter: A multitude of possibilities", in: *Care for Here and the Hereafter: Memoria, Art and Ritual in the Middle Ages*, ed. T. VAN BUEREN and A. VAN LEERDAM (Turnhout, 2005), p. 13.

³ The political weight of these terms during the twentieth century was discussed a.o., by J. KLOCZOWSKI, *East Central Europe in the Historiography of the Countries of the Region* (Lublin, 1995), *passim*; Further literature in: A. ADAMSKA and M. MOSTERT, "Preface", in: *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe*, ed. A. ADAMSKA and M. MOSTERT (Turnhout, 2004: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 9), pp. 2 ff.

would be quite right in saying that it is situated 'somewhere between' Germany and Russia, and between the Baltic and Adriatic seas. After several years of studying the cultural history of the region in Utrecht,⁴ we decided to consider medieval East Central Europe as three kingdoms, Bohemia, Poland and Hungary, within their historical boundaries. This means that the area included Croatia and some parts of the Romanian lands in the south, and also today's Baltic states in the 'far' north-east (cf. the map below). This means that, in practice, when discussing the development of *memoria*-research we will be dealing with scholarly achievements not only in such countries as Bohemia and Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Croatia and Romania, but also with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

I will not pretend to provide a full picture of recent scholarly production concerning medieval *memoria* in the region – if only because it is technically impossible to do so in a paper of thirty minutes. Moreover, if we accept the universal, total concept of the study of *memoria* in the Middle Ages as *historische Kulturwissenschaft* (as proposed by Otto Gerhard Oexle, Joachim Wollasch and Michael Borgolte),⁵ we should consider in such a paper almost *all* research in the domain of socio-cultural history. Obviously this, too, is impossible. Hence we have to limit ourselves to some aspects of this research, choosing those which might be interesting from a methodological point of view, and sketching a very general picture of memorial practices in the region.

A selection of publications on the kinds of medieval *memoria* discussed here, can be found in the appendix. Looking at this bibliography one may easily notice that Polish publications seem to dominate. The main reason for this is that the situation of medieval studies in the different countries of the area is different; they are still struggling with the consequences of the domination of Marxist methodology and political control in the humanities. For instance, medieval studies in the Baltic states (former Soviet republics) were seriously affected by communist restrictions concerning the edition of medieval sources, and there was no liberty of

⁴ Cf. a.o. *The Development of Literate Mentalities, passim;* A. ADAMSKA, "Orality and literacy in medieval central Europe: Final prolegomena", in: *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, ed. E. MUNDAL and J. WELLENDORF (Copenhagen, 2008), pp. 69-84.

⁵ For a critical reflection on this current of research and for a detailed bibliographical overview, cf. M. BORGOLTE, "*Memoria*: Bilan intermédiaire d'un projet de recherche sur le Moyen Age", in: Les tendances actuelles de l'bistoire du Moyen Âge en France et en Allemagne, ed. J.-Cl. SCHMITT and O.G. OEXLE (Paris, 2003), pp. 53-69; M. LAUWERS, "*Memoria*: A propos d'un objet d'histoire en Allemagne", *ibid.*, pp. 105-126. See also: *Memoria*: Ricordare e dimenticare nella cultura del medioevo – *Memoria*: Errinnern und Vergessen in der Kultur des Mittelalters, ed. M. BORGOLTE, C.D. FONSECA and H. HOUBEN (Bologna and Berlin, 2005).



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research in domains touching upon religion; nor was there access to 'Western' scholarly literature. After 1989, medieval studies in Poland, which meanwhile had been influenced by such currents as the historical school of the *Annales*, historical anthropology and structuralism, despite the communist control of scientific life, were different from its neighbours and it could produce significant achievements.⁶

⁶ Cf. G. KLANICZAY, "Le Goff, the *Annales* and medieval studies in Hungary", in: *The Work* of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History, ed. M. RUBIN (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 223-237; P. PLESKOT, Intelektualni sąsiedzi: Kontakty historyków polskich ze środowiskiem "Annales" 1945-1989

However, after the collapse of the oppressive Communist system, one notices a significant intensification of scholarly work on these formerly 'politically incorrect' topics, especially in Estonia.⁷

1. The Concept of Medieval Memoria

The concept of medieval *memoria* and of *memoria*-culture can be defined in many ways. Some scholars understand it as the study of the forms and practices of the commemoration of death. What had an obvious impact on research in East Central Europe is the great, 'universal' idea, elaborated by the German scholarship, of the omnipresent remembering of the ancestors in medieval Western society. This society can be seen as a community of the living and the dead, in which almost every form of social activity can possess this commemorative dimension.⁸ This means that *memoria*-culture can be investigated from the angles of social history, art history, literary history, theology and liturgy, etc. In practice this means that investigations remain dispersed among these disciplines, among local scientific traditions and in thin chronological 'shelves'.

2. New Questions Asked of Well-Known Sources

Direct influence of this recent German idea of *memoria* and its social functions on the scholarship in our region can be seen from the beginning of the 1990s onwards, especially in Polish medieval studies. The application of the new research questionnaire, proposed by Joachim Wollasch and Otto Gerhard Oexle, resulted in the re-reading of already very well-known genres of written sources, in first place *libri memoriales, necrologia* and *libri fundationum.*⁹ At the same time one

[Intellectual neighbours: Contacts of Polish historians with the circle of Annales, 1945-1989] (Warszawa, 2010).

⁷ As a first attempt at summarising the state of the art in medieval studies in today's East Central Europe, cf. *Fifteen Years of Medieval Studies in Central Europe*, ed. M. Sághy (Budapest, 2009: *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 15).

⁸ Rich bibliographical references concerning the German tradition of research in: BORGOLTE, *"Memoria:* Bilan intermédiaire", *passim.*

⁹ Quite instructive in this respect is the 'strategy of translations'. In 1990, in the respected Polish annual *Studia Źródłoznawcze* appeared an article by Joachim Wollasch on the new way of reading medieval necrologia. Oexle's works on the concept of *memoria* were translated into Polish in 2000, while the book by Jan Assmann on cultural memory, important for all *memoria*-research was

notices an intensification of collaboration between historians and art historians. Together, they started to study sources in which written texts coexisted with images, such as gravestones, epitaphs, commemorative stones and inscriptions.

3. Study of the Memoria Practices of the Social Elites

From the mid 1990s started, again first in Poland, but later also in the Czech republic and Estonia, a wave of publications concerning the spread of *memoria*-culture and of commemorative practices among the social elites, i.e. the rulers and the aristocracy. In this current of research one can see a successful combination of different questionnaires, concerning religiosity, the theory and practice of power, political propaganda and social communication (especially of the so-called *theatrum ceremoniale*).

From recent studies one may conclude that, as far as *memoria* and commemorative practices as concerned, immediately after their baptism in the ninth and then late tenth century, the lay elites of Central Europe started to behave in the same way as the rulers and aristocracy in the West, more in particular those in the Ottonian realms.¹⁰ The monarchs' care and protection of the Church, expressed in pious donations of lands, buildings, and precious objects, from the beginning had a strong collective and commemorative dimension. This was expressed by the phrase "*pro animas parentum nostrorum*". Maybe it is even more important that, soon after the conversion, the new Christian rulers of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary were included in the commemorative practices of the religious communities of Western Europe. From the beginning of the eleventh century onwards, their names can be found back in the *libri memoriales* of the monastic communities of Bamberg, Regensburg, Cologne, Liège, and even in St. Gilles in Southern France.

Two phenomena, emphasized in recent research, should be pointed out here. First, in all three kingdoms of the region one notices the same dynamic of the reception of *memoria*-culture in the earlier Middle Ages (in this region, 'earlier

translated in 2008 (a Czech translation had already appeared in 2001). See J. WOLLASCH, "O wartości źródłowej nekrologów średniowiecznych [About the value of medieval *necrologia* in respect of source criticism]", *Studia Źródłoznawcze* 32-33 (1990), pp. 7-16; O.G. OEXLE, *Społeczeństwo średniowiecza: Mentalność - grupy społeczne - formy życia* [Medieval society: Mentality – social groups – forms of life] (Toruń, 2000); J. ASSMANN, *Kultura a paměť* (Praha, 2001); ID., *Pamięć kulturowa* (Warszawa, 2008).

¹⁰ The complex process of the Christianisation and 'acculturation' of early medieval East Central Europe has been intensely discussed in scholarly literature around 2000. Cf., a.o. *Europas Mitte um 1000*, ed. A. WIECZOREK and H.-M. HINZ, 3 vols. (Darmstadt, 2000).

Middle Ages' refers to the eleventh and twelfth centuries). While the rulers participated in this culture immediately after the conversion, the local aristocracy becam active in this domain from the late eleventh century onwards, after they had laid a solid material and financial basis in the form of their possession of lands and economic privileges. The 'golden age' of aristocratic engagement in practices of pious foundations and gifts *pro anima* was definitely the twelfth century. The mechanisms of the reception of *memoria*-culture's rules seem the same in all strata of secular elites. Scholars are convinced that, as the pious foundations and commemorative practices of monarchs were a form of *imitatio imperii*, so the behaviour of the local aristocrats was a form of *imitatio regni*. We will encounter the importance of *imitation* as a decisive social factor again later on.

The second noteworthy phenomenon is the close connection between the development of *memoria*-culture and the implantation in East Central Europe, in the first half of the twelfth century, of new religious orders. These were the Cistercians, Premonstratensians and the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Their extremely important role in the development of the economy and literacy in the region becomes ever more clear, thanks to a true renaissance in the study of Cistercian monasticism in the last fifteen years.¹¹ What is important for us today, is that these Orders implanted in the region the well-known model of the prayer-community, consisting of a monastic community and a circle of secular founders and benefactors. For individuals and aristocratic families the affiliation with such a community was highly prestigious. This can be concluded from the strong wish to be buried within the monastery, actually against the prescriptions of the Cistercians. In this context, further study of *memoria* culture can profit significantly from the results of the work done by archaeologists, studying burial practices in the sacral topography of medieval monasteries.

4. Urban Memoria – The Limits of Research

In my view the most interesting achievement of Central European scholars in the domain of *memoria*-culture is research concerning medieval urban society. This field may be an enlightening example of the complexity of the problems we are

¹¹ Cf. a.o. K. CHARVÁTOVÁ, Dějiny cisterckého řádu v Čechách, 1142 -1420 [History of the Cistercian Order in Bohemia, 1142-1420] (Praha, 1998); Monasticon Cisterciense Poloniae, ed. A.M. WYRWA et al., 2 vols. (Poznań, 1998).

dealing with, and of the importance of extra-professional factors that may influence the results of our work.

An interest in the forms and functions of urban memoria is noticeable, first in Poland and then in Hungary and the Baltic states, from the mid-1990s. It has multiple origins. First, it originated in the regionally well-developed research into urban history, emphasizing the important role of towns in the region as vehicles of 'progress' in economic, social and cultural respects. A second stimulus came from the successful reception of the French model of the social history of religion (l'histoire socio-religieuse), expressed, among others, in discussions about the nature of urban religiosity and urban piety (what is called by French scholars la religion civique). The third impulse was the very difficult and politically significant discussion about the ethnic and cultural identities of towns in Central Europe, which in great part had been created by German immigrants or on the basis of the so-called ius Theutonicum.¹² Today's scholars in the region find themselves in a much more comfortable situation than their predecessors of thirty years ago, because they are no longer asked to prove the Polish character of Breslau (Wroclaw), the Hungarian character of Buda or the Livonian character of Riga. Quite freely, today we can talk about the influence of Hanseatic culture on the Central European towns this might even be seen today as a form of political correctness in medieval studies.

Until now the most urbanised areas in the region, and those most closely related to Hanseatic culture, enjoyed most scholarly attention. These are the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea (from the Elbe to the Finnish Bay), colonised by German populations from the twelfth until the fourteenth century, and Silesia (with a strong Slav ethnic element). Under the circumstances the habit of Central European scholars to use the history of towns in German lands for purposes of comparison is quite understandable. Recent studies, especially in Poland and Hungary, also consider middling and small towns, and study also the south-eastern border area of the region, called Red Ruthenia.¹³

¹² From the abundant literature on this subject, cf. a.o. *Rechts- und Sprachtransfer in Mittel- und Osteuropa: Sachsenspiegel und Magdeburger Recht*, ed. E. EICHLER and H. LÜCK (Berlin, 2008); *The Germans and the East*, ed. Ch.W. INGRAO and F.J. SZABO (West Lafayette, Indiana, 2008).

¹³ Cf. a.o. On the Frontier of Latin Europe: Integration and Segregation in Red Ruthenia, ed. Th. WÜNSCH and A. JANECZEK (Warsaw, 2004).

5. Specific Characteristics of Urban Memoria

The dynamic development of research on urban *memoria* in East Central Europe enables one to highlight some preliminary conclusions concerning the nature of the phenomenon.

What strikes us especially is the *omnipresence* of *memoria*-culture in urban life. It was expressed in multiple forms which are very well known in the 'West' as well, such as foundations of chapels and altars, material gifts, and testamentary legacies of money for prayers. It was present *always* in urban life, even on such occasions as urban carnivals. In the main cities of Livonia (Reval-Tallin, Riga and Dorpat), during carnival festivities (called, not without reason, "great *drunke*" – carnival took a whole week), one evening was reserved for the obligatory Church service, during which commemorative prayers were said for the deceased members of guilds.

In the whole area, just as elsewhere, a crucial role was played by guilds and fraternities, providing a framework for the commemorative liturgy and for funeral practices, for caring for the sick and the poor. Significant is the participation of women in pious donations, especially during the fifteenth century. For instance, in large cities of Prussia, such as Culm (Chełmno), Thorn (Toruń) and Danzig (Gdańsk), it became almost fashionable among widows to reserve money for ecclesiastics who were to pray permanently for the souls of their late husbands.

Yet another mark of urban *memoria*-culture in East Central Europe is its orientation to the *bonum commune*. Especially in the fifteenth century, pious gifts and foundations started to be made which were meant for the whole community. One can notice this phenomenon not only in the towns of Prussia and Livonia, but also in Silesia. In this way, the founders could expect gratitude through prayers by the whole community.

Scholars like to see the omnipresence of *memoria*-practices in the medieval towns of the region as an essential mark of urban piety. Simultaneously, they emphasise the importance of two factors stimulating the development of the phenomenon.

One of them was, without doubt, adopting the model of urban culture as elaborated in the cities of Germany. German immigrants, organising 'new' towns in the region, immediately transplanted the institutions of social and religious life they were used to. For instance, the 'new' city of Thorn (Torun) in Prussia was officially located in 1312, the parish Church was consecrated in 1330, and already

eight years later we see the first great private foundation of the chapel of Corpus Christi, founded by the Rockendorf family.

The imitation of the German (or Hanseatic) model is visible also in the growth of a specific form of urban *memoria*, developed by urban elites. Especially in the main cities of Prussia we witness the development of the so-called *Ratsmemoria* (*memoria* of the city council), just as it could be established by Uwe Heckert for German towns such as Braunschweig, Lübeck, Stralsund etc.¹⁴ In the 1430s, Danzig, Culm, Thorn and Königsberg got a special council chapel (*Ratskapelle*) in the parish church, with its own chaplain and its own commemorative liturgy. In this way a group of people connected among themselves by their offices became a separate religious community. Recent studies emphasise the function of this *Ratsmemoria* as an instrument of expressing the self-identity of urban elites in the late Middle Ages.

However, the problem of urban piety is not solved by pointing out borrowings from German developments. We cannot be satisfied with the explanation of urban piety and urban memoria in the Central European towns as a simple imitation of a German model, because we can see the same forms also in towns which were not that much touched by Hanseatic culture. Another factor stimulating the development of urban memoria-culture is the imitation by the townspeople of the behaviour of the king and aristocracy, which we have already had occasion to mention. Scholars believe that the urban 'strategy' of commemorative foundations and charity was in great part inspired by the courtly and aristocratic model of showing one's own social status by sacrum commercium. This mechanism was strongly present in the fourteenth-century agglomeration of Prague, where town dwellers and merchants had the opportunity to watch the imperial court of Charles IV, and also the court of the archbishop. This suggests that, when investigating urban piety, we should allow not only for religious motives but also for such factors as ambition and snobbery. (Maybe it is exactly this melange of sacrum and profanum in memoria-culture that makes it so fascinating a subject of study.)

In urban *memoria*-culture, the building of prestige by a single family through pious foundations was usually combined with the interests of the whole community. This can be concluded, for instance, from the situation in fifteenth-century Silesia. Founders of private chapels and altars in the churches of Wroclaw usually took care of papal indulgences for the whole community and used to transfer their patronage rights to the city council.

¹⁴ U. HECKERT, "Die Ratskapelle als Zentrum bürgerlicher Herrschaft und Frömmigkeit: Struktur, Ikonographie und Funktion", *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 129 (1993), pp. 139-164.

Conclusion

This presentation has been an attempt to introduce a comparative dimension to *your* research, which concerns one of the central areas of late medieval Latin Christendom. Whether you recognised some familiar elements or not – that is up to you to tell. Allowing one to see similarities and differences, that is the essence of comparative studies, after all ...

One final question, however, should be addressed here. For what is the use of such comparative perspective? And what might be the advantage of this particular comparison? East Central Europe was one of the peripheries of medieval *Latinitas*. It adapted, with a 'natural' chronological delay, the models of so-called Western civilisation. The mechanisms of the transfer of the socio-cultural model created in Carolingian and Ottonian times form, in themselves, a fascinating subject of study. East Central Europe can serve as a mirror, reflecting and sometimes enlarging the details of things we also know from elsewhere. But the same can be said about other peripheries, for instance about Scandinavia. This area experienced the same 'late entrance' into *Latinitas*, and adapted the institutions of social and religious life in the same tempo. What, then, is special about East Central Europe as area of comparison when studying *memoria* culture?

My answer would be: in this area *Latinitas* meets *Slavia Orthodoxa*. If we investigate characteristics of Hanseatic-German culture in the late medieval towns of Livonia, we should remember that just on the other side of the frontier, in the Great Duchy of Lithuania, Catholic and Orthodox churches were built in one and the same towns. In Dalmatia, on the other border of our region, one could find, in one and the same church, commemorative inscriptions written in the Latin, Cyrillic and Glagolitic alphabets. If we are studying foundations *pro anima* in Poland, we may be confronted with a private royal chapel decorated with frescoes in the Byzantine style in Cracow cathedral itself! The list of examples of the coexistence of two religious cultures in the region could easily be extended. It could generate an even longer list of questions around the central one: how did *memoria*culture develop in such a mixed area? Serious research on this question remains to be done.

Appendix: Additional Bibliography

This bibliography refers to those publications judged as the most important or representative of the research traditions discussed in this paper.

1. New Reading' of Written Sources, esp. of Libri Memoriales

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2. Pious Foundations, Donations and Gift Exchange

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dle Ages: The importance of princely foundations in the Gothic style in Silesia] (Warszawa andWroclaw, 1991).

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- 12 DOBOSZ, J., Działalność fundacyjna Kazimierza Sprawiedliwego [The foundations of Prince Kazimir the Just] (Poznań, 1995).
- 13 Fundacje i fundatorzy w średniowieczu i epoce nowożytnej [Foudations and founders in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times], ed. E. OPALIŃSKI and T. WIŚLICZ (Warszawa, 2000).
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