

Personalities as a Memory Box

HETA AALI

This section discusses persons' representations¹, personalities, and the transfer of memories about the persons as memory boxes from their own lifetime to subsequent generations. Person here refers to the actual human being and personality to his or hers later representation. The section includes two articles. In the first, the sixth-century Merovingian queen Clotilde is the personality in nineteenth-century French historiography. In the second article, twelfth-century Prince Henry the Lion becomes the personality *Enrico Leone* in a seventeenth-century libretto. The articles focus on the opening moments of the memory boxes and highlight the cultural framework of the opening moments which in both cases date hundreds of years after the actual person's death. Especially interesting is the concrete situation when the box was opened – these moments can for example be gendered, royalist, misogynistic, nationalistic or cultural. Indeed, the personalities shall not be separated from the context of the opening moment but shall be examined closely in their frameworks.

The personalities discussed here were all historical persons but the level of their later *reality* varies in both articles. Even though the focus of the articles lies in the opening moments of the memory boxes, the creation of the memory boxes are crucial as well. The process of the creation and recreation of memory boxes makes personalities more or less fictive. In other words, it makes them more or less products of imagination rather than strictly confining them to the testimonies of existing sources. The authors of this section see this process as the location of cultural transfer: especially important is the temporal aspect from a real person to a representation, to a memory box. Personalities

1 For the concept of representation, see for example ZAMMITO 2005, pp. 155-181.

thus make references to persons who are absent but who are preserved from oblivion or whose memories are revived, often in order to achieve a specific aim. The persons under discussion in this section belonged to the highest nobility, a queen and a duke with quasi-royal ambitions. Other personalities who might gain the quality of a memory box are heroes, martyrs and saints, but also artists and scientists. While a great part of personalities' memory boxes refer to more or less well-known historical figures, there are also several examples which probably have no real historical person as starting-point (or, at least, we are not able to define it), e.g. mythological heroes, as Heracles and Jason, or biblical figures, as Judith or queen Esther.

The concept of memory box is considered here as a theoretical tool which is not seen as having existed materially in history. Thanks to their non-materiality, personalities can be used by various groups simultaneously for rather different purposes. The articles focus on memories transferred uniquely in texts. The term text is understood widely and also includes sources such as opera, notes and librettos. Such a textual memory box allows us to expand the concept of memory box from its original material signification presented by Bernd Roeck in 2007 to a wider use and meaning.

Time is a crucial factor in the formation of memory boxes. Here we come close to the concept of *lieu de mémoire*. The concept of *lieu de mémoire* originally refers to a physical place containing memories and did not include transferring of memories.² However, it is possible to consider – as we shall see in the articles – that a person can be a *lieu de mémoire* and that personalities are memory boxes once they are removed (by death) from the original context. Very interesting is also the thought of displacement in time: personality as a memory box is no longer in his or her own time, but is displaced from it. In most of the articles the person is already dead or has been so for a long time. It follows that it is possible for the memory box to be entirely distinct from the original person and the memory box and person most likely do not have any correlation.

The first article focuses on the Merovingian queen Clotilde († 545) and on her representation. Heta Aali considers queen Clotilde as a *personality* in the context of the early nineteenth-century French historiography when the memory box was opened by historians and authors interested in early Middle Ages. The article focuses on three moments of opening the memory box, i.e. in three different works from 1820s to 1840s. Each work had a specific cultural

2 About *lieu de mémoire*, see for example NORA 1997, pp. 15f.

framework and therefore is to be separated as individual moments of opening the memory box.

The second article, written by Matthias Schnettger, examines Henry the Lion († 1195) who was the most famous ancestor of the House of Brunswick. Very soon after his death a legend arose which reshaped some elements of the life and the representation of the historical Henry in a quite creative way. Both, the real and the legendary Henry the Lion were often used by the later Guelphs as evidence of the dynasty's extraordinary nobility. Focusing on the famous opera *Henry the Lion* performed in Hanover in 1689, the article will show how Henry the Lion was enacted as veritable memory box by Ernst August of Hanover during the crucial years of the struggle for the ninth electorate in order to underline the Guelphs' claims on the electoral dignity.

The two articles are united by the same social rank of the personalities. The memory boxes are opened several hundred years after the person's death and the openings in both cases involve clear political motivations. The articles demonstrate how considering the personalities as memory boxes will provide new insight in studying representations in various contexts.

List of References

- NORA, PIERRE (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, Vol. I, Paris 1997.
 ZAMMITO, JOHN, Ankersmit and Historical Representation, in: *History and Theory* 44, 2 (2005), pp. 155-181.

