



*War and Memory at the Time of the Fifth Crusade* by Megan Cassidy-Welch.

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Analyses of memory as a category of historical investigation have increased dramatically over the past decade in studies of medieval history. Medievalists have come to recognize the gains made by modern historians in exploring how humans remember and commemorate the past—Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*<sup>1</sup> is an instructive case in point. For too long, historians misguidedly conceived of the population of Europe in AD 500–1500 as distinctly “other” and hence inherently unknowable. To their credit, recent students of memory in medieval contexts have drawn on scholarship in the biological sciences to prove that human beings have functioned, physiologically, in almost identical ways for many millennia. Historian Megan Cassidy-Welch (Univ. of Queensland) has now expanded on studies of remembrance in modern times to conceptualize the context and content of the memorialization of the Fifth Crusade (1217–21). In so doing, she raises two key questions: why was the remembrance of war important in the thirteenth century, and what purpose did it serve?

The author begins with an introductory discussion of the two authors who provide most of her source material, namely, the preacher Jacques de Vitry (ca. 1165–1240) and the priest (later bishop) Oliver of Paderborn (fl. 1196–1227). Both men participated in the Fifth Crusade and wrote about their experiences during and immediately after it. The author explains that she has chosen to focus on this crusade because she believes the early thirteenth century was a time of change in the organization of crusading that made the social activity of memorialization more important than it had been up to then. She sketches how modern scholars have dealt with memory in the Middle Ages with respect to war and its intersection with the state. This introduction closes with a summary of the Fifth Crusade and a list of the many contemporary sources for it.

Chapter 1, “Preparatory Memory: Managing Remembrance,” concerns how participants in the Fifth Crusade sought to shape the memory of their service both before they left home and while they were on campaign. Cassidy-Welch describes in some detail the narrative portions of crusaders’ wills and the charters they issued to ecclesiastical institutions. In her analysis of battlefield orations in narrative sources, she draws on the pioneering work of John Bliese,<sup>2</sup> who showed that battlefield orations of this type were rhetorical exercises that reflected the views of the authors of chronicles. She concludes that Fifth Crusade participants wished to influence how they would be remembered based on their membership in a collective effort. Missing here, however, is any discussion of what was distinctive in such self-fashioned memories, vis-à-vis participants in either earlier crusades or pre-thirteenth-century non-crusading warfare.

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1. New York: Oxford U Pr, 1975.

2. “The Courage of the Normans: A Comparative Study of Battle Rhetoric,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 35 (1991) 1–26; “Rhetoric and Morale: A Study of Battle Orations from the Central Middle Ages,” *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989) 201–26; and “When Knightly Courage May Fail: Battle Orations in Medieval Europe,” *Historian* 53 (1991) 489–504.

Chapter 2, “Eyewitnessing and Remembrance Work,” begins with a discussion of Jacques de Vitry’s use of Isidore of Seville’s concept of the superiority of eyewitness testimony about the past. However, Cassidy-Welch overlooks most of the pertinent scholarship<sup>3</sup> on historical inquiry before the crusade period and in the twelfth century. Hence, few historians will accept her claim for a “rediscovery” of the value of eyewitness accounts in the context of the First Crusade. She is on firmer ground in examining Jacques de Vitry’s account of events, including his use of emotional language to make his texts more memorable. The chapter concludes with the reasonable observation that memorialization is not unique to the modern world and does not require the apparatus of the modern state. But it is not true that such memorialization either began or was perfected in the early thirteenth century. Historians of medieval Germany, for example, have observed these same phenomena in the eleventh and tenth centuries, especially in texts on the conduct of war.

Cassidy-Welch turns in chapter 3, “Remembering Crusaders,” to the question of who was worth remembering. She argues that remembering and being remembered were central to the meaning of the crusades, and that the crusading movement created a kind of temporal fluidity by bringing together the past, present, and future in an eschatological sense. She stresses the identification of the crusaders with Biblical heroes, especially the Maccabees. This sort of association was not unique to the crusades, however. Many historians have identified considerable efforts in pre-crusade Europe to make the same kinds of connections with Biblical forbearers. Famous examples are the equation of Franks with Israelites in the Carolingian Empire and of Germans with the Maccabees in the Ottonian period. Cassidy-Welch helpfully clarifies how contemporaries of the Fifth Crusade highlighted the actions of specific groups and individuals for praise or condemnation. But her discussion of this handful of texts cannot bear the weight of her generalizations regarding who was worth remembering beyond the narrow confines of this time and place.

Chapter 4, “Remembering Loss,” concerns the question of how contemporaries processed the epic failure of the Fifth Crusade. Cassidy-Welch’s main source here is Oliver of Paderborn, who considered it a worthy endeavor despite its ultimate failure, because it demonstrated the value of suffering and provided a basis for the future by remembering the past. The author again emphasizes that—then as now—it was possible to create meaning from the past without the need for a nation state to anchor it. But she misses an opportunity to compare the arguments of Oliver of Paderborn with those of Odo of Deuil and Bernard of Clairvaux, who had sought to explain the value of another failed campaign—the Second Crusade to Syria.

Chapter 5, “Places of Remembrance,” considers the creation of places where past events could be commemorated and re-valORIZED by succeeding generations, in particular at the monastery of São Vicente de Fora, built in Lisbon in the aftermath of its capture by Christian forces during the Second Crusade in 1147. The author notes that Frisian and German crusaders stopped at the monastery on their way to join the crusading host at Damietta in 1217 and witnessed and recorded a number of miracles. She connects this physical location, as a place of memory for the crusades, with references to important places like Mt. Tabor, as discussed by Oliver of Paderborn and others. Omitted, however, aside from a single reference to Battle Abbey (124), is any explanation of how such physical memorials drew on earlier traditions throughout the Latin West.

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3. E.g., Justin C. Lake, “Truth, Plausibility, and the Virtues of Narrative at the Millennium,” *Journal of Medieval History* 35 (2009) 221–38; Thomas Scharff, *Die Kämpfe der Herrscher und der Heiligen: Krieg und historische Erinnerung in der Karolingerzeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002); and Bernard S. Bachrach, “Dudo of St. Quentin as a Military Historian,” *Haskins Society Journal* 12 (2002) 155–85.

In chapter 6, “Coming Home: The Materials of Memory,” Cassidy-Welch examines physical objects used to preserve memories of crusades. These include items linked to Jacques de Vitry, including a miter he gave to the priory of Oignies, a portable altar, and a collection of containers such as ivory boxes he reportedly possessed. The author argues that such objects created and perpetuated memories across time and space.

In her brief conclusion, Cassidy-Welch reiterates the main points of the text, arguing that an examination of a particular moment—like the Fifth Crusade—permits us “to unravel some of the many strands of war memory in the medieval past” (148). She returns to her leitmotiv that medieval people shared with their modern descendants a desire to create remembrances of wars. In her view, the Fifth Crusade constitutes an archetype of a newer and broader era of crusading in which many people, rather than actually going on an armed pilgrimage, remained at home supporting the crusades in a variety of other ways.

The strength of the book lies in its insights into the epistolary and narrative sources for the Fifth Crusade and the ways that individuals like Jacques de Vitry and Oliver of Paderborn tried to shape memories of the expedition. However, aside from a brief discussion (in chap. 4) of the crusade of King Louis IX of France to Damietta in 1249, the author has little to say about how efforts to shape memory were accepted or interpreted by non-participants in the Fifth Crusade. Moreover, her contention that the Crusade marked a new era in warfare and its memorialization by participants is problematic. Participation in crusading by those who did not actually serve on campaign went back to the very beginning. For instance, the soldier Anselm of Ribemont addressed letters to Archbishop Manassas II of Rheims in 1099 asking him to solicit prayers throughout the archdiocese on behalf of the crusading army; his efforts to stoke the fires of the “home front” on behalf of the army in the field—and secure his own memorialization in the process—were part of a tradition dating back to the pre-Christian era.<sup>4</sup> The Fifth Crusade was, like all military expeditions, *sui generis*, but the activity of memorialization that Megan Cassidy-Welch discusses so astutely was part of a very long tradition of Christian warfare in the Latin West.

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4. See Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 1990), which lays out the entire tradition, including the adoption of pre-Christian Roman models by the early Christian emperors.