Lucie Doležalová, Farkas Gábor Kiss, Rafał Wójcik

THE ART OF MEMORY
IN LATE MEDIEVAL CENTRAL EUROPE
(CZECH LANDS, HUNGARY, POLAND)

Edited by
Farkas Gábor Kiss
Lucie Doležalová, Farkas Gábor Kiss, Rafał Wójcik

THE ART OF MEMORY IN LATE MEDIEVAL CENTRAL EUROPE (CZECH LANDS, HUNGARY, POLAND)

Edited by Farkas Gábor Kiss

L'Harmattan
Budapest-Paris, 2016
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude for the longstanding support of numerous individuals and institutions: Nicole Bérióu (EHESS, Paris); Greta Dinkova-Bruun (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto); Christine Glassner and Maria Theisen (Institut für Mittelalterforschung, Vienna), Angelika Kemper (University of Klagenfurt); Stephen G. Nichols (Johns Hopkins University); Susanne Rischler (Würzburg); Kimberly Rivers (University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh); and Sabine Seelbach (University of Klagenfurt) have all helped us to tackle problems in both scientific and practical areas. We have also been helped by many institutions, including the Center for Theoretical Study (Prague), the Center for Medieval Studies (Bergen) and the Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes (Paris). Our particular gratitude goes to the holding libraries of our primary sources. We would also like to thank the following institutions for their generous support: two Charles University Research Development Programs undertaken at the Faculty of Humanities (“University Centre for the Study of Ancient and Medieval Intellectual Traditions” and “Phenomenology and Semiotics”, PRVOUK 18) (for L. Doležalová), the OTKA Hungarian Research Fund (PD 104316, for F. G. Kiss); the Lise Meitner Foundation (for R. Wójcik); the International Visegrád Fund; and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (the project Innovative Scholarship for Digitized Medieval Manuscripts, for all three authors). The publication of this book was made possible by a “Lendület” grant from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
Abbreviations

BI: Biblioteka Jagiellońska (Jagiellonian Library), Cracow
BSB: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich
CCCM: Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis (Turnhout, Brepols)
CCSL: Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout, Brepols)
CSEL: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna-Salzburg)
f., ff.: folio, folios
GW: Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke (http://www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de/)
Kap.: Archiv Pražského hradu, fond Knihovna metropolitní kapituly u sv. Víta
(Library of the Metropolitan Chapter), Prague
KNM: Knihovna Národního muzea (Library of the National Museum), Prague
MZK: Moravská zemská knihovna (Moravian Library), Brno
NK: Národní Knihovna (National Library), Prague
OSZK: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (National Széchényi Library), Budapest
ÖNB: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna
PSB: Polski Słownik Biograficzny (Polish Dictionary of Biography), ed. Władysław
SB: Staatsbibliothek (State Library)
SS: Słownik staropolski
UL: University Library
VD16: Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahr-
hunderts (vd16.de) (Scientific Library)
VK: Vědecká knihovna, Olomouc
Contents

Introduction (Farkas Gábor Kiss) 9

Artes memoriae and the memory culture in fifteenth-century Bohemia and Moravia (Lucie Doležalová) 27
1. Artes memoriae 28
1.1. The transmission of foreign treatises 28
1.2. Artes memoriae of Czech origin 30
1.2.1. The Hussite Anonymous: Memory as a search for similarities and differences 31
1.2.2. Mattheus Beran: Memory as a play with words 37
1.3. Other artes memoriae (fragments, parts of larger works, treatises of doubtful Czech provenance) 45
2. Improving memory by medical means and lifestyle 48
2.1. Treatises of foreign provenance circulating in the Czech Lands 48
2.2. Treatises of Czech provenance 50
2.2.1. Martinus Pragensis: “The art of memory is useful only for a few” 50
2.2.2. A reworking of Martinus? (inc. Optimus ille…) 55
2.2.3. De modullo studendi: “Avoid the art of memory!” 56
2.3. Other memory advice 58
3. The contexts of artes memoriae in the Czech lands 60
4. Conclusion 64

The art of memory in Poland in the Late Middle Ages (1400–1530) (Rafał Wójcik) 65
1. The beginnings of the art of memory in Poland: Treatises of foreign origin 65
1.1. Foreign teachers at Cracow University: Jacobus Publicius 69
1.2. Conrad Celtis 73
1.3. Thomas Murner 76
1.4. Johannes Cusanus 80
2. The Observants 80
2.1. Stanisław Korzybski and Antoni of Radomsko 82
2.2. Populus meus captivus ductus est… by Paulinus of Skalbierz 85
2.3. Opusculum de arte memorativa by Jan Szklarek 89
2.4. Modus reponendi sermones per artem memorativam 102
2.5. The influence of the Observants’ ars memorativa on different branches of medieval culture in Poland 103

The art of memory in Hungary at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Farkas Gábor Kiss) 109
1.1. The earliest art of memory in Hungary (Francesc Eiximenis) 109
1.2. Biblical mnemonics (Peter of Rosenheim and other mnemonic verses) 113
1.3. Ars et modus vitae contemplativa, 1473 116
1.4. Meditation and the art of memory (inc. Nota hanc figuram / Pro aliquadi intelligentia) 120
2.1. Itinerant humanists in Hungary (Jacobus Publicius, Conrad Celtis) 130
2.2. The popularity of the ars memorativa of Celtis in Hungary (Valentinus de Monteviridi/Grünberg) 138
2.3. Johannes Cusanus: Thirty years of teaching artificial memory in Europe 143
3.1. Related scholarly subjects in the Jagiellonian age 145
4.1. Preaching and the art of memory in Hungary 147
4.2. Memory aids for preachers 148
4.3. Alphabetical divisions as mnemonic tools in late medieval sermons: Lessons from Pelbartus of Temesvár 156

Arts of memory from East Central Europe: Editions of the Latin texts 165
1. An Anonymous Hussite art of memory (inc. Nam secduum commentatores), c. 1416–1418 (LD) 167
2. Matheus Beran: Ars aviatorem, 1431 (LD) 181
3. Pauilerinus: an excerpt from Liber viginti arcium, c. 1460 (LD) 219
4. [Magister Hainricus:] Ars memorandi, 1447–1473 (FGK) 221
5. Paulinus of Sklabmierz (†1498): Populus meus captivus ductus est (RW-FGK) 227
6. [Jan Szklarek:] Opusculum de arte memorativa, 1504 (RW) 247
7. Valentinus de Monteviridi: Praxis artis memorativae, 1504 (FGK) 273
8. Michael de Arce Draconis: Memorandi tractatus, 1505 (FGK) 285
9. Anonymous Observant: Modus reponendi sermones, 1507 (RW) 297
10. [Henricus Vibicetus – Johannes Cusanus:] Tractatus artificiose memorie, 1500–1519 (FGK-RW) 303

Index of Names 337

Index of Manuscripts and Early Prints 347
Introduction:
the late medieval art of memory
in East Central Europe

The art of memory, or *ars memorativa*, was transmitted as a unified system of rules that aided the orator to perform his speeches by heart at public fora. According to legend, the roots of the theory go back to the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries BC, although the first texts to describe it in detail date from Roman times: the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (3, 28–40) from the first century BC, probably written by Cornificius but attributed to Cicero up until the end of the fifteenth century; Cicero’s work *On the Orator* (*De oratore*, 2, 86–90, 350–360); and the *Institution oratoria* of Quintilian (11, 2, 11–51). The practice of the art is explained in greatest detail in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, thus most treatises on the subject in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are based on this work. Memory may be natural or artificial. Natural memory has to be aided by artificial techniques, but both have fundamentally the same structure. We have to conceive of places (*loci*) in our minds, which generally have an architectonic shape: houses, palaces or cities. The best way to imagine a place is to recall an existing place that is otherwise well known to us. In this mental place, or map, we have to locate images (*imagines*) that can be associated somehow (metaphorically or metonymically) with the subjects we wish to memorize. When we want to recall these subjects, we need only walk past these places and scan (and decode) the images we located there one by one, in a well-preserved order.

The places (which we might also call “backgrounds”) must be imagined as a stable structure that we can use and reuse several times. These backgrounds may remain unchanged for several occasions: one has merely to delete the images from the places, as if erasing the writing from a wax tablet, and attach new images to them. After establishing the fixed background, one must set up images that efficiently represent the subject to be remembered:

And we shall do so if we establish likenesses as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague, but doing something; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns

---

or purple cloaks, for example, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily. (Rhetorica ad Herennium, 3, 22, 37)

Unlike the places (or backgrounds), images (imaginæ) have to be reinvented each time, and they must not seem familiar, conventional, or typical. They stick in our mind because of the evocative power of their abnormal, exceptional, unique features, and are therefore called “active images” (imaginæ agentes). A famous example from the Rhetorica ad Herennium is that of a man who is accused of poisoning someone for his inheritance, which is also testified to by witnesses. The imago agentis for this situation should be a sick man, the defendant next to him, with a cup in his right hand and a wax tablet in his left. We should also place the testicles of a ram on his ring finger. Two polysemic puns aid the memory in this case: the double meaning of the Latin testis (both witness and testicle), which also refers to the inheritance, as Roman purses were often made from the scrotum of a ram.

It is important to note that the ancient art of memory was aimed at memoria rerum — that is, how to recall subjects from memory and how to give speeches from a thread of ideas. It was not intended primarily for memoria verborum, the word-by-word memorizing of texts. The art of memory was considered rather as an element of composition, a process of recreating and retelling an existing chain of ideas. Special rules also existed for the exact memorization of strange or foreign words and verses in medieval treatises, although this practice was generally characterized as exceptional and infrequent.²

A very important aspect of the art is order: the images associated with the parts of the speech or the elements of the text to be remembered have to be organized in a manner that excludes the possibility of confusion. Several methods exist for this purpose: one can put the images in a place, or places, that one knows thoroughly so as not to mix up the sequence of elements (familiar palaces or houses, or even a street leading from the main square of the town to its outskirts, or to the cemetery, to quote some medieval examples). Another method is to create an artificial.

---
² The art of memory is often associated with oral poetry or the oral performance of vernacular poetry in scholarly literature. See e.g. Jody Enders, “Music, Delivery, and the Rhetoric of Memory in Guillaume de Machaut’s Remède de Fortune,” Publications of the Modern Language Association 107 (1992): 450–464. Attempts have been made to read the illustration cycles of troubadour manuscripts as memory images: Sylvia Huot, “Visualization and Memory: The Illustration of Troubadour Lyric in a Thirteenth-Century Manuscript,” Gesta 31 (1992): 3–14. However, there is no reference in ancient or medieval arts of memory to applying artificial memory to memorize poems, and the memorative functions of rhymes or other structural elements in poetry (e.g. refrains or recurring phrases) are not mentioned in the treatises known to us.
imaginary palace, or system of places, which can be completely arbitrary but must be carefully memorized (such as a system of places in which each place contains one animal and four craftsmen). A method that became very popular in the later Middle Ages creates this palace of places and images from the alphabet: each letter of the Latin alphabet includes five subcategories that can be used as images with the aid of attributes referring to the memorized object.

All our sources from Antiquity mention only the first method, based on houses and palaces that contain active images. From the sources known in the Middle Ages, the De Oratore of Cicero (2, 86–88, 350–360) and the Marriage of Philology and Mercury of Martian Capella (5, 538–539) mention the art of memory only perfunctorily, or with attention to a certain aspect, such as order, while the Institutio oratoria of Quintilian, which gives a detailed but unfavorable account of the technique (11, 2, 11–26), remained rather unpopular throughout the Middle Ages and was rediscovered in its entirety only in 1416 by Poggio Bracciolini.3 There exists only one source, the Rhetorica ad Herennium, which offered a lengthy, detailed and conveniently accessible description of the technique to readers in the High and Late Middle Ages.4

Evidently, with the decay of Roman oratorical culture, the focus of the art of memory shifted from delivering speeches to remembering what one had been told or what one had read (especially authorities), and the art of memory became an important tool for meditation. Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) exerted the greatest influence in this direction. One of his major works, the De tribus maximis circumstantiis, begins with the statement that memory is a treasure-house where one should keep one’s knowledge, after which he outlines the Herennian tradition of the art of memory. It is in his work that memory, and along with it the art of memory, becomes a tool for self-perfection leading to a moral change in humanity, since the source of morality is knowledge coming from Divine Wisdom. The mind must perfectly mirror a physical book in which knowledge is contained — and vice versa, the appearance of the book and the shape of the page must be a mirror image of the order created in the mind with the aid of


memory. The tradition of Hugh’s meditative works had an important influence on later medieval treatises on the art of memory. For the rhetorician Boncompagno da Signa (c. 1170 to after 1240) of Bologna, any creature of the universe could serve as a structural memory aid, be it an architectural form, a building, a painting or a sculpture, as it is through the memorative function of the created world that God reminds us to remember him, and helps us in remembering.

Compared to the arts of memory from the fifteenth century, the few surviving treatises on the subject from the fourteenth century, such as the De memoria artificiali adquirienda by Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1290–1349),7 and the chapter on memorization in the Art of Preaching by Francesc Eiximenis (c. 1340–c. 1409),8 rather attest to the general lack of interest in the art of memory in this century. Bradwardine’s is the first representative of the technical type of treatise that became typical in the fifteenth century. Unlike the works of Hugh of St. Victor, the theoretical, philosophical, and theological references are limited in most treatises, and they focus instead on the technicalities of memorizing. Bradwardine’s tract survives in only three fifteenth-century copies,9 and it seems never to have left England. Similarly, the Art of Preaching by Francesc Eiximenis survives in only three copies, two of which are in East Central Europe, written in the second half of the fifteenth century and connected to the University of Cracow.10

The art of memory in Latin reached its heyday in the first decades of the fifteenth century, when a number of tracts suddenly appeared in Italy, and the fashion seems to have spread rapidly all over the continent, with the Council of

---


8 Kimberly Rivers, “Memory and Medieval Preaching: Mnemonic Advice in the ‘Ars praedicandi’ of Francesc Eiximenis,” Viator 30 (1999): 253–284; and Rivers, Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice: Memory, Images and Preaching in the Late Middle Ages (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

9 Although several authors have doubted the attribution of the treatise (cf. Heimann-Seelbach, Ars und scientia, 159–160), no valid argument has yet been raised against his authorship. Indeed, the contents of the treatise itself closely resemble the later fifteenth-century arts of memory, although the reference to the Battle of Berwick (1333) suggests a contemporary, early fourteenth-century author, even if it was not Thomas Bradwardine.

Constance, and especially the Council of Basel, apparently playing a not negligible role. The vogue lasted until the early days of the Protestant Reformation, and the *Congestorium artificialium memoriae* (1520) of the Dominican Johann Host of Rombercch establishes a convenient end date to this period of mnemonics. Romberech’s *Congestorium* gathered and amplified the contents of the most important earlier arts of memory on the one hand, and, on the other hand, served as inspiration for Lodovico Dolce’s 1562 *Dialogo nel quale si ragione di accrescere e conservar la memoria* (Dialogue on how we can improve and conserve our memory), a treatise that introduced a more hermetic, more combinatory period in the history of the art of memory along with Camillo’s *L’idea del teatro*.

Most of the treatises from the fifteenth century focus on placing and recollecting memories in the mind, but deal less with their inventive usage. The concept of inventive recollection, as opposed to the informative recalling of data, has far less relevance in these texts. The use of mnemonic devices is not aimed at the composition of a new series of pre-memorized ideas or expressions, but rather serves the oral performance of a set of ideas, laws, or definitions. Nevertheless, there are important exceptions to this tendency: some treatises give a detailed account of the techniques for creating a new sermon from a memorized series of citations of authorities, while other treatises try to aid artificial meditation by offering a table of moral subjects that can be internalized and meditated on according to any creative order. Furthermore, the influence of the mnemonic-combinatory teaching of Raymond Lull is also present in this period, although to a much lesser extent than it was in the encyclopedic approaches to the art of memory around the turn of the seventeenth century.

The period between the emergence of *artes memoratiae* in around 1400 and their hermetic, combinatory reorientation after 1520 is marked by an important change: the introduction of printing to Europe by Johannes Gutenberg. The printing press altered the landscape of the art of memory: the first half of this period was characterized by the widespread circulation of anonymous manuscript treatises, in

---

11 The treatise of Rombercch was written in 1513 and first printed in 1520 (Venice: Georgius de Rusconibus), but it became widely available only with the 1533 Venice edition by Melchior Sassa.
13 Developed by Carruthers, *Book of Memory, 234*.
14 See, for example, the *Nota hanc figuram…* a treatise described later on pp. 120–130.
15 Such as the *Memoria fecunda* treatise: Pack, “An Ars”.
which the mnemonic tables varied from manuscript to manuscript according to the needs of the copyist, while chapters were lost and added during the different phases of the transmission of the text. Scribes often expropriated earlier authors, as we will see in the case of Matthaeus de Verona and Matouš Beran. After 1475, a number of itinerant humanists published short treatises on the subject, an occurrence that largely coincides with the Europe-wide availability of the printing press (1470). The first printed arts of memory appeared around this date. They were quickly followed by a number of treatises by new, and often barely known authors (such as Henricus Vicipex, Christian Umhauser, Johannes Cusanus, or — to quote a Polish example — Jan Szklarek), who generally published their works in university cities (Paris, Cologne, Bologna, Basel, Leipzig, Erfurt, Ingolstadt, Vienna, Cracow). These texts are not more original than their manuscript predecessors, but they often contain important illustrative material (woodcuts or tables) that the scribes of the manuscripts usually failed to copy.

Despite the similarity in mnemonic techniques, each text is worth examination because of the fascinating variety of associative methods that are suggested in these books. Through the mirror of these creative associations, the average cleric and university student seems to be much more of an original thinker, with a more vivid imagination than one would commonly suppose. As is well known, the author of the Rhetorica ad Herennium suggests that one should create humorous, horrible or atrocious associations, and his late medieval followers interpreted the notion of humor widely and boldly. The humanistic commentary on the Ad Herennium by Francesco Maturanzio suggests remembering a clown, a fool, or a monkey playing the violin. Such ridiculous or cruel images could be developed into small and rather daring scenes. A probably early version of the Memoria secunda treatise creates an entire sequence of cruel imagination: “Andrew should hold an amphora,

---

20 M. T. Cicero, Rhetoricae libros cum tribus commentis, ed. Franciscus Maturantius Perusinus (Venice: Philippus Pincius, 1496), f. 82r (Budapest UL, Inc. 575).
as if he desperately wanted to drink, but he puts the bottle to his mouth clumsily and knocks out several teeth, hurting his tongue and his gums at the same time. He then spits out blood along with teeth and bits of his tongue, dripping blood on himself. This makes him angry and he throws the amphora at the wall, but it bounces back and pierces his stomach.\textsuperscript{21} Christian Umhauser, the author of a German treatise from around 1500, proposes that to memorize a medicine we should imagine a well-known doctor, dressed in wonderful clothes, who holds an ampule of urine in his hand that he pours over an old lady.\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Haec est pulchra imago} (This is a beautiful image!), as the author comments. Giovanni Michele Alberto Carrara, an Italian humanist from Bergamo from the second half of the fifteenth century, advises, quoting Avicenna, that we should set up images of pretty girls whose names start with the same letter as the thing to be remembered. His example of amusing or moving images is that if we want to memorize something connected to Antonius we must imagine one of our friends named Anthony whose head is being chewed by an ass with rabies, and who, with blood spurting out, is asking desperately for help.\textsuperscript{23}

It seems undeniable that the later Middle Ages, and especially the early fifteenth century, experienced an unprecedented growth in the popularity of treatises on the art of memory. The reason for this sudden increase in the number of copied manuscripts has been the subject of scholarly debate. Frances A. Yates attempted to explain the sudden flourishing of this type of literature by the change that occurred in the notion of memory in the \textit{Summa theologiae} of Thomas Aquinas.

\textsuperscript{21} “Andreas capiat amforam volens vehementer bibere et eam cum tanta importunitate in os suum trudat ut plures dentes evellat linguamque cum dentina crudeliter vulneret, quo facio expuat sanguinem cum dentoibus et partibus linguae igitur ut se ipsum turpiter macularet, et sic irritus proiciat amforam contra murum, que resilientis intret ventrem suum.” Berlin, SB, ms. germ. qu. 1522, f. 282\textsuperscript{r}. This manuscript contains a probably early variant of the \textit{Memoria fercunda treatise}, which significantly differs from the version published by Pack. “An Ars”.

\textsuperscript{22} “Imago (ut ante dixi) est similiudo et figura et significatio rei, quam volumus loceis tradere. Verbi gratia, si vellem commemorare medicinam, ad locum constituio medicum mihi cognitum mirabilis veste indutum urinae in manu habens et urina vetulam repergens. Hec est pulchra imago. In ordine regula: Imagines debent esse tareae, mirabileae, insitiae, ridiculae, quia natura usitata re non exsuscitatur et debemus eis attribuere egregiam pulchritudinem aut unicum turpitudinem si alius quocumque corona aut verte, tunc cruciant aut steno oblitias inducamus.” Munich, BSB, clm. 44177; f. 3\textsuperscript{rv}.

Interestingly, this quotation does not appear in the printed, significantly altered edition of the text, cf. Christian Umhauser, \textit{Ars memorativa S. Thome, Ciceroni, Qunitiliani, Petri Ravennae} (Nürnberg: Ambrosius Hueber, 1501), f. 2\textsuperscript{r}.

\textsuperscript{23} Giovanni Michele Alberto Carrara, \textit{De omnibus ingenii augendae memoriae} (Bologna: Plato de Benedictis, 1491), f. a5\textsuperscript{v}: “Ut sivum movet figura, aut misericordiam aut admirationem, haec enim facit etiam puellas recordari, ut inquit Avicenna sexto naturalium particula quaera. Facile enim inventitur quaestis figura quae affectum animae commoverit. Exemplum hoc est: in ore asini rabidi caput Antonii constituittm moribus fere osa confringi, cruorem effluere, illum auxilia petere, et pasits palmis vociferare. Pieri non poterit, ut cum vulvete, non videam hunc oculos meos, et reddere Antonium nesestam repetenti.”
When Aquinas outlined the system of virtues in the *Summa theologiae* on the basis of Aristotle’s ethics, he complemented the traditional elements of the virtue of Prudence with memory, which he borrowed from Cicero’s rhetorical work *De inventione*. Thus, according to Yates, memory, which was previously regarded as a subject of rhetoric, now gained importance and was considered as a part of ethics, which stood higher in the hierarchy of sciences.

However, according to our present knowledge it is only in the fifteenth century that these kinds of treatises proliferated and became present in almost every area of Europe. Important treatises on the subject survive from the previous two and a half centuries between Thomas Aquinas and the fifteenth century, but they are scarce compared to the fifty-six treatises that Sabine Heimann-Seelbach found while investigating only the tradition of the art of memory in the fifteenth century. These treatises survive in more than two hundred and fifty manuscripts and at least fifteen incunabulum prints in total. Moreover, a completely new genre, the pictorial mnemonic Bible, appeared both in manuscript and in print in numerous copies.

Another idea put forward by Yates and recently taken up by Sabine Heimann-Seelbach, concerns the possible influence of Greek scholars who arrived in Italy from Byzantium in around 1400. According to ancient accounts, artificial memory aids had been invented by the Greek Simonides, thus it would have been no surprise if the Byzantine Greeks had reintroduced them to Italy. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* explicitly mentions the Greek arts of memory in Antiquity, and differentiates them from the Latin practice:

> I know that most of the Greeks who have written on the memory have taken the course of listing images that correspond to a great many words, so that persons who wished to learn these images by heart would have them ready without expending effort on a search for them. I disapprove of their method on several grounds. First, among the innumerable multitude of words it is

---


25 To this number should be added the number of copies of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which made available the same mnemonic teachings. In this case, of course, the evidence is ambiguous, as the copists and owners of that treatise were not necessarily interested in the art of memory. See also *The Rhetoric of Cicero in its Medieval and Early Renaissance*, ed. Virginia Cox and John Ward (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

26 Rischpler, *Biblia Sacra*.


ridiculous to collect images for a thousand. How meagre is the value these can have, when out of the infinite store of words we shall need to remember now one, and now another? Secondly, why do we wish to rob anybody of his initiative, so that, to save him from making any search himself, we deliver to him everything searched out and ready? Then again, one person is more struck by one likeness, and another more by another. Often in fact when we declare that some one form resembles another, we fail to receive universal assent, because things seem different to different persons. The same is true with respect to images: one that is well defined to us appears relatively inconspicuous to others.39

Obviously, this negative approach to the Greek art of memory did not encourage the acceptance of Hellenic wisdom in this field. Furthermore, we do not know of a single Byzantine art of memory that would have transmitted the method of places and images that became so popular in the Latin West in the fifteenth century.40 Even more disturbing is the fact that the treatise attributed to Thomas Bradwardine probabi, and the Art of Preaching of Francesc Eiximenis certainly, antedate the possible arrival of Greek scholars in Italy.41

The sudden popularity of these types of texts from the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards cannot possibly be explained by only one factor. Around the year 1400 the number of students studying at universities grew significantly. Higher-level studies became widespread in Germany, where several new universities were founded throughout the century (Heidelberg 1386, Cologne 1388, Erfurt 1392, Leipzig 1409, Rostock 1419, Greifswald 1456, Freiburg im Breisgau 1457, Ingolstadt 1472, Mainz 1477, Tübingen 1477, Frankfurt an der Oder 1506). The Central European universities that were founded in the middle of the fourteenth century (Prague 1348, Cracow 1364, Vienna 1365) — despite the initial backlash — had to be re-founded at the turn of the century because of growing demand (Vienna 1384, Cracow 1400), and even Prague, which came under Hussite influence from 1409, reached a wider public than before in the early fifteenth century.42 These institutions educated the target audience for the art memorativa. As Johann Romberch wrote in 1520, it was an art most necessary for “all the theologians, preachers, confessors, lawyers, judges, procurators, advocates, notaries, physicians, philosophers, students of the liberal arts, moreover merchants, messengers, and

40 As Herwig Blum notes, we do not know of any such word lists as those quoted in the Rhetorica ad Herennium. Id., Die antike Mnemotechnik (Olms: Hildesheim, 1969), 122.
41 In his recension of the book of Sabine Heimann-Seebach, Frank Fürbeth also sees the theory of Greek origin as weak: Arbiterium 21 (2003): 295–300.
couriers." The spread of university education necessitated the massive reproduction of books, excerpts, miscellanies, and other forms of epitomized knowledge — including the art of memory. At the same time, these new educational institutions provided a larger public for the art of memory and facilitated the circulation of such treatises in university circles, a fact that is mirrored in the number of treatises edited or copied at universities.

As far as we know, the art of memory never became an official part of any university curricula, and it was taught privatim, among other minor but useful subjects as ars epistolandi (letter writing), algorismus (counting with Arabic numbers in the decimal system), and arbor consanguinitatis et affinitatis (the degrees of family relations for legal purposes). The larger student body present at the universities now proved to be a sufficient audience for traveling teachers of these subjects, who spent one or two semesters teaching in one place (and in certain cases studying other subjects at the same time), then traveled further around Europe. This was the case with Jacobus Publicius, Conrad Celtis, Thomas Murner and Johannes Cusanus in the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Many of the treatises on the art of memory in the fifteenth century are connected to university environments, or directly to teachers at universities in both Western Europe (e.g. the Memoria secunda treatise, written in Bologna in 1425; the Artificiosa memoria secundum Parisienses; the different forms of the ars memorativa of Jacobus Publicius; the treatise of Henricus Vibicetus at the University of Cologne from 1500; or the short treatise of Pedro Ciruelo on the art of memory from Alcalá in the early sixteenth century) and East Central Europe (Matouš Beran at the University of Erfurt, Martinus Pragensis at the University of Prague, Stanisław Korzybski, Antoni of Radomski, Conrad Celtis, JAN Szkłarz, Thomas Murner, and Cusanus in Cracow — the last also taught in Vienna, among other universities).

The sudden shift to mass education at universities changed the forms of scholarly discourse as well, and professors began to write shorter, more specialized treatises instead of the longer, more comprehensive works. Daniel Hobbins calls

---

33 See the title page of the Congestorium artificiosae memorie, 1520 (Venice: Georgius de Rusconibus), 1r: "opus omnibus theologiis, predicatoris et confessorisibus, iurisprudensibus, iurisprudensibus, procuratoribus, advocatis et notariis, medicis, philosophis, artium liberalium professoribus, insuper mercatoribus, nunciis et tabellariis pernec hassorium."
34 Pack, "An Ars".
35 Heimann-Seelbach, Ars und scientia, 46–50.
36 The final form can be read in English translation in Carruthers and Ziolkowski, eds., Medieval Craft of Memory, 226–254.
37 Heimann-Seelbach, Ars und scientia, 61–64; and the introduction to Johannes Cusanus below, pp. 303–310.
this new type of scholarly treatise “the late medieval tract.” Treatises on the art of memory ranked lower in academic prestige than treatises on theology or the subjects taught at the faculty of arts: its professors remained external lecturers (professores extranei) throughout their careers and their teaching was only occasionally recorded in university acts. These texts were therefore presumably considered as study aids rather than serious scholarship. The popularity of such condensed forms of educational texts nevertheless helped the circulation of the *ars memorativa*.

“Cellula quae meminit est cellula deliciarum” — “a little cell that remembers is a chamber of pleasure”, wrote Geoffrey of Vinsauf in his popular treatise on poetics, the *Poetria nova*, and his advice was often followed in monasteries and convents. Several manuscripts on the art of memory reveal monastic origins, especially in Central and East Central Europe. The number of treatises and copies coming from the Franciscan environment hints at another important factor behind the spread of the art of memory. A new style of preaching emerged among the Franciscans, and especially among the Observants, introduced by Saint Bernardino of Siena, who made extensive use of rhetorical tools to influence his audience. These included the alphabetical segmentation of the text and the use of lively metaphorical images and symbol-like mnemonic structures, which resembled the techniques of the art of memory. Saint Bernardino of Siena refers to the art of memory several times in his vernacular preaching, and he even explains its rules to his public twice,
in order to prepare them better for confession. On another occasion he relates the example of a rich but unlettered peasant, who studied the twenty sentences of the Lord’s Prayer by attaching the image of his twenty debtors to each sentence. “This is almost the art of memory,” says Saint Bernardino. His affective and emotional style of preaching created a school among Observant Franciscans (John Capistrano, Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce, Jacopo delle Marche), which quickly spread to Central Europe, as the Italian preachers sent out to preach against heretic movements, Jews, and Turks reached Hungary and Poland. A parallel might easily be drawn between the tendency of the Franciscans to preach with the “imaginative” (that is, using gripping images) and the creative imaging techniques of the art of memory. Almost all the treatises on the art of memory surviving from Poland can be connected to Observant preachers: Stanisław Korzybski, who taught the subject at the University of Cracow in 1470; Paulinus of Skalbmierz (1498); Jan Szklarek (who published his Opusculum de arte memorativa in 1504 but started to teach in 1474); and the Modus reponendi sermones, an anonymous treatise from around 1507. We know of another treatise by Antoni of Radomsko that did not survive. The Franciscan use of images and other mnemonic devices as tools of persuasion and discipline coincides with the practice of the art of memory, as seen in the case of Johannes Sintram in the first half of the fifteenth century,⁴³ and Johann Geiler von Kayserberg at the turn of the sixteenth century.⁴⁴

Another important factor in the fifteenth-century popularity of the art of memory was its applicability to meditative and devotional practice. The stress of the ars memorativa on the spatial visualization of mental structures closely resembles the use of visual patterns in devotion. Its imaginative techniques — for example the creation of places (laci) in existing sacral spaces (churches, cemeteries, cities, or pilgrim routes), or the use of symbolic images (such as the bull or the eagle for the Gospels) — recall the widespread use of such elements in meditative treatises from Hugh of St. Victor onwards. The meditative techniques developed by Wessel Gansfort and Jean Mombaer, representatives of the Modern Devotion movement in the second half of the fifteenth century, bear close resemblance to the image-


based ordering methods of the art of memory. Moreover, the circulation of treatises on *ars memorativa* was often connected to monastic reform movements, as has been demonstrated in the case of the Melk Reform. Peter of Rosenheim, a central figure in the Melk Benedictine reform movement, was personally responsible for a mnemonic summary of the Bible. Benedictines in the Salzburg Archabbey were active in applying the art of memory to their meditative practice.

Due to these factors, the popularity of the art of memory cannot easily be connected to the spread of humanism. The *ars memorativa*, used by university students to mug up on the *Decretals* and advocated by Franciscan friars to spread the word of God, could not elicit a unanimously positive response in humanistic circles. Under the guise of Thomas Klorbius, a fictional theologian of the early sixteenth century, the art of memory was ironically exposed as an important element of late medieval scholastic culture and parodied along with the typical targets of humanist mockery (scholasticism, Scotism, rudimentary knowledge of grammar) in the second part of the *Letters of Obscure Men* (1517):

You have recently mentioned in a letter our theologian as being well lettered, and a Doctor of long standing, and a profound Scotist, and deeply versed in the *Book of Sentences*. You also averred that he had conned by rote the whole book of the Holy Doctor *Of Entity and Essence*, and that he knew *The Fortress of Faith* like his paternoster, and that by memorial art he had impressed the *Formalites* of Scotus upon his mind like so much wax; and finally, you alleged that he was ‘a member of ten universities.’

Ulrich von Hutten, the most probable candidate for the authorship of the second part of the *Letters of Obscure Men*, considered the art of memory as a characteristic

---

63 This is especially true of the *Rosetum exercitorum spiritualium et sacrarum meditationum* of Jean Mombae (Johannes Mauburnus), first published in 1494, in which he discusses meditative practices bound to imagined sacred spaces such as churches. See Pierre Debongnie, *Jean Mombae de Bruxelles, abbé de Liéry. Ses écrits et ses réformes* (Louvain-Toulouse: Uysteyn, 1927); and Sara Ritchey, “Wessel Gansen, John Mombae, and Medieval Technologies of the Self: Affective Meditation in a Fifteenth-Century Emotional Community,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 38 (2013): 153–166.


65 See Kiss, “Performing,” 421–422.

accessory of scholastic learning, and a parallel can easily be drawn between his attitude and Erasmus’s rejection of this technique. Although the art of memory was ridiculed by the most famous humanists of the second decade of the sixteenth century, it was a popular subject that even the “German arch-humanist” Conrad Celtis had deigned worthy of attention a few decades earlier. Although we do not find any prominent Italian humanists among the authors of the treatises, a number of important philologists, including Marcantonio Sabellico, professor at the University of Padua, attested to the usefulness of the art of memory in their writings. After general praise of memory, Sabellico says that memory can indeed be improved by artificial techniques. It was accepted even more warmly by court humanists if a member of a princely family indulged in the art; in the Artificialis memoriae regulae of Jacopos de Ragona, the author mentions in his dedication to his humanist patron, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua (c. 1395–1444), that they had spent several days practicing the art of memory. In a similar tone, the renowned humanist author Angelo Camillo Decembrio recounts how court intellectuuals celebrated the Duke of Ferrara, Leonel d’Este (1450), for having studied mnemonics with Tommaso Morroni di Rieti (Thomas Reatini). Unfortunately, we do not know Tommaso Morroni’s teaching on the art of memory, but he must have won over the duke as he was knighted for his services, earning him the envy of several humanists, including Poggio Bracciolini. All these cases demonstrate an ambiguous attitude towards the art of memory on the part of the humanists: on the one hand it seems that no significant humanist scholar wrote

---

49 See, e.g., Roszi, Logic, 2–6.
50 “Est hic thesaurus disciplinarum omnium artiumque studii et labore questitarum custos fidelissima, aliquid erte vidit sapiens poeta qui Musarum memoriam dixit matrem nee minus, qui Leuken, quae huic contraria est, apud inferos statuit: constat id bonum nature beneficio, auget tamen et excultur arte.” (Exempla, lib. 10, cap. 9). Later on, Sabellicus quotes the example of Antonio da Ravenna who could state several thousand things in the correct order, but it was through an artificial technique: “sed hic artificij sunt, non nature.” See Marcus Antonius Sabellicus, Exempla Sabellici ( Lipsiae: Wolfgang Monacensis, 1513), f. 113v.
52 Angelo Camillo Decembrio, De Politia litteraria, ed. Norbert Witten (Leipzig: KG Saur, 2002), 157 (Bk. 1, ch. 3, 24). Tommaso Morroni’s knowledge of the art of memory is mentioned several times in this dialogue, although without any specific details (cf. ibid., 145, 171). For further details about the life of this interesting figure see Arnaldo Segarizzi, “Per Tommaso Morroni,” Rassegna bibliografica della letteratura italiana 6 (1898): 325–327; and Bice Boralevi, “Di alcuni scritti inediti di Tommaso Morroni da Rieti,” Bollettino del R. Deputazione di Storia Patria, per l’Umbria 17 (1911): 535–614 (esp. 598–599), according to which Morroni could extemporize on any subject in poetry or prose.
on this subject, and that they were rather suspicious of its non-natural, mechanical approach to language and knowledge; on the other hand, they were tolerant towards the success of an art already known in Antiquity, especially when it was supported by a wealthy patron.

On a wider note, medial changes that increase the accessibility of privileged cultural goods generally trigger an instinct for collection in the communities in which they occur. All the factors mentioned above — universities, preaching, monastic devotion — (coupled with the humanists’ tacit support for the art) may be sufficient to explain the growing fashion among fifteenth-century intellectuals of using imaginative techniques to memorize massive amounts of facts and citations. Nevertheless, on a more abstract level we might also add to these the impact of the medial changes that occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As the sheer quantity of knowledge that was accessible to an individual grew with the triumph of paper manuscripts (from the thirteenth century) and with the invention of the printing press (from the mid-fifteenth century), so the need to systemize, digest, and appropriate this freshly acquired material increased. In fact, a parallel can be drawn between the popularity of mnemonic arts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the late medieval and Early Modern expansion of “commonplace reading,” which was a similar effort to cope with the extensive fields of knowledge that had suddenly become accessible to far wider circles than before.

As the art of memory provided a tool for memorizing hundreds of legal decrees (e.g. the card play of Thomas Murner) or theological statements (e.g. the Nota hanc figuram treatise), so personal miscellanies and collections of commonplaces were created and organized to bring order to the disorderly heap of knowledge. We might interpret the overwhelming success of the art of memory in the fifteenth century as a symptom of dealing with a “post-scarcity economy of knowledge”, as scholarly knowledge became more accessible than ever before, readers became more avid collectors of scholarly content. An obvious present-day parallel here is the advent of the Internet era, which has prompted many of us to collect a previ-

54 Conrad Celtis’ exception rather proves the rule: Conrad Celtis published his treatise early, at the start of his career (1492), and the text probably reflects his extracurricular teaching at the University of Cracow, while he was studying for a degree there. George of Trebizond’s Rhetoricon libri V contains a detailed account of the art of memory with a very theoretical outlook. See Luis Merino-Jerez, “Retórica y Artes memoriales: la memoria en los Rhetoricon libri quinque de Jorge de Trebizond,” in Pectora mulctet. Estudios de Retórica y Oratoria latinas, eds. Trinidad Arcos-Pereira et al., (Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos), 2009, 983–993. His categorizations resemble the theories of imposition exposed by Leonardo Giustiniani (impositio, transumpsiio, gestus, etc.) and Lodovico da Pirano (alud in toto simile, alud in toto disimile, alud partim simile).

55 On commonplace reading and collecting in the Early Modern era, see Ann M. Blair, Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

56 See below, pp. 76–80 and 120–130.
ously unimaginable quantity of books, films, music and other cultural goods in digital format.\textsuperscript{57} Mnemonic Bibles and memorized collections of citations provided their users with a readily applicable treasure trove of useful information, just as encyclopedias and commonplace collections did, with the significant difference of not having been written, but rather inculcated. Furthermore, these mnemonic practices contributed to the classification and segmentation of the available scholarly knowledge, a role that similarly has its parallel in modern scientific research.\textsuperscript{58}

The history of the art of memory has been the focus of continuous scholarly research since at least the early nineteenth century. Johann Christoph Frh. von Aretin was the first to devote an entire book to the history of this technique in 1810.\textsuperscript{59} As an enlightened aristocrat, his main interest in the subject centered on the pedagogical use of the art of memory among the wider population. Nevertheless, von Aretin had a deep interest in history, and during the time of the secularization of the Bavarian monasteries (1802–1803) he was in charge of the transfer of monastic book collections to the court library in Munich. He thus had first-hand acquaintance with the fifteenth-century manuscript material on mnemonics precisely in Bavaria, where the late medieval art of memory probably had the greatest influence in all Europe, and he described some of the unpublished texts he found in his monograph.

After von Aretin’s initial advances in this field, the manuscript material remained largely untouched by researchers until the fundamental work of Ludwig Volkmann, who was the first to call attention to the rich pictorial material connected to the art of memory.\textsuperscript{60} However, the subject proved too literary for art historians and too pictorial for literary scholars, thus it remained a neglected field until the early 1960s when two scholars, Paolo Rossi and Frances Yates, almost simultaneously called attention to its importance to the history of ideas and philosophy.\textsuperscript{61} While Paolo Rossi focused more on the combinatorial aspects of artificial memory and its influence as a language of signs on the rhetoric and philosophy

\textsuperscript{57} On the collecting passions triggered by the Internet era, see Collecting and the Internet: Essays on the Pursuit of Old Passions through New Technologies, ed. Susan Koppelman and Alison Franks (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2008).

\textsuperscript{58} Geoffrey Bowker called attention to the classificatory role of archiving and recording: “What is stored in the archive is not facts, but disaggregated classifications that can at will be reassembled to take the form of facts about the world.” Geoffrey C. Bowker, Memory Practices in the Sciences (MIT Press, 2005), 18. Lucie Doležalová has called attention to the mnemonic and cognitive role of order in her “Orden des Gedächtnisses: das Verzeichnis als Raum des Wissens in der Vormoderne,” in Wissenspaläste. Räume des Wissens in der Vormoderne, ed. Gesine Mierke and Christoph Farbender (Würzburg: Königshausen&Neumann, 2013), 42–77.

\textsuperscript{59} Systematische Anleitung zur Theorie und Praxis der Mnemonik (Sulebach: Seidel, 1810).

\textsuperscript{60} Volkmann, “Ars Memorativa”. In addition to his work on the art of memory, Volkmann founded the systematic study of Renaissance hieroglyphics and emblems (Bilderschriften der Renaissance, 1923).

\textsuperscript{61} See Rossi, Logic and Yates, Art of memory.
of the thinkers who applied it, Frances Yates concentrated on the concept of the
hermetic recreation of the universe in the sixteenth-century art of memory. Their
research refers only in passing to the manuscript tradition of the fifteenth-century
arts of memory that were diffused in monastic and university circles, and despite
the enormous influence their work had on Renaissance scholarship, the evolution
of the ars memorativa in fifteenth-century Europe remained untouched for a long
time.

Memory again became a fashionable interpretative concept of human history
in the early 1990s. Within the general framework of cultural memory (Jan Ass-
nann or commemorative places (les lieux de mémoire, Pierre Nora), the concept
of historical memory has been applied to a great many different fields, from an-
thropology to archeology. The art of memory as a technique became a central
notion in interpreting the medieval procedures of reading and meditation in The
Book of Memory by Mary Carruthers (1990), who called attention to the inventive,
creative element in the medieval ars memorativa. Lina Bolzioni systematically
applied the theoretical concept of places and images in interpreting late medieval
and Renaissance pictorial representations as palaces of memory according to the
terminology of the art of memory.

The field of manuscript artes memorativae from the fifteenth century never-
theless remained unexplored, despite some earlier, scattered efforts. Sabine Hei-
mann-Seelbach was the first to survey the immense amount of codex material sur-
viving from this age (more than 200 manuscripts, with important textual variants
in almost each of them) and to attempt to clarify the complicated ramifications of
the textual tradition of these treatises, which often contain very similar theoretical
material but can be very different in their actual form and structure. Her work
concentrates on two larger geographical areas of Europe — Italy and Germany
(including Austria) — where the art of memory was probably the most influential
throughout the fifteenth century. France is represented by far fewer manuscripts
than any of these, partly because of the early presence of printed arts of memory
there (already from 1475–76), and partly because of the difficulties involved in
looking for short, anonymous texts in French catalogs of manuscripts. England
seems to have remained relatively untouched by the wave of artificial memory in

62 See David C. Berliner, “The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology,”
Anthropological Quarterly 78 (2005): 197–211.
63 La stanza della memoria (Turin: Einaudi 1995); La rete delle immagini. Predicazione in volgare dalle
origini a Bernardo da Siena (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).
64 This approach has been criticized by Peter Parshall, “The Art of Memory and the Passion,” Art Bul-
lein 81 (1999): 456–472, esp. 460–462, who claims that this parallel is undermined by the uniqueness
and personal appropriation that ancient rhetoric required from mnemonic images.
65 Especially by Pack, “An Ars”.
66 Heimann-Seelbach, Ars und scientia.
the fifteenth century, while Spain is still a *terra incognita* in this respect.\(^7\) Nevertheless, the fashion of the art of memory appears to have been so strong in monastic communities and at universities, and the circulation of texts so international, that a fresh study of local sources would most likely yield further manuscript treatises in all of these countries. We therefore decided to look for remnants of the art of memory in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. When Rafał Wójcik prepared his doctoral dissertation on the printed treatise of Jan Szkłarek (1504),\(^4\) he encountered a number of unedited treatises from Poland that had close connections to the Czech Republic and Hungary as well, and he suggested that research should be extended in these directions. Indeed, the libraries and archives of these three countries offered an unexpected wealth of material from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries on artificial memory and memorization in general, which is published in the following pages.

*Farkas Gábor Kiss*

---

\(^7\) Spanish scholarship seems to focus on the 16th century: Luis Merino-Jerez, *Retórica y artes de memoria en el Humanismo renacentista* (Jorge de Treviso, Pedro de Ravenna y El Brocnet), (Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 2007).

\(^4\) Wójcik, *Opusculum*. 