An analytical investigation like this presents the historian with two main challenges. On the one hand, religious life is a very heterogeneous research field that is truly difficult to address in all its facets, and indeed full of phantoms of remembrance. On the other hand, ‘memory’ possesses a no less multidimensional nature, and has received particular attention in recent decades. The literature on medieval ‘memory’ has become almost impossible to handle.¹ Today, it is a well-known fact that people – consciously or not – create their past again and again. The ongoing transformation of knowledge by changing, adding, omitting or ‘simply’ forgetting facts is questioned by nobody. It is also clear that such phenomena are embedded in manifold cultural circumstances more or less shaped by crisis, concurrence and reforms in politics, economy and belief. Sometimes they are just shaped by coincidence.

In light of these two challenges, there are two main approaches for my study on monastic phantoms of remembrance. The first option is to underpin those well-known phenomena of historiography by adding some paradigmatic case studies: Robert of Molesme († 1111), for instance, who left his Benedictine monastery in 1098 and founded Cîteaux, the motherhouse of the Cistercian Order, was nearly forgotten in the Order historiography until the end of the 12th century. Since the Benedictine tradition of the Cistercians had to be re-emphasized and Bernard of Clairvaux († 1153) had become a rather European saint no more exclusive to the Cistercians, however, Robert was ‘discovered’ again.² Bruno of Cologne († 1101), the founder of the Carthusian Order, offers a similar, but even more significant example. He was promoted intensively in the 16th century. The monks of Cologne were right to recog-

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nize in Bruno one of the very few German founders of a religious order and the German Carthusians gained a lot of prestige by this fact.³

Beside this historiographic approach, a second option for a study like this is to face the phantoms of remembrance in religious life by doing something different, that means not to focus on historiography, but rather on other sources such as the monastic customaries, which give us fruitful insights into the rituals in monastic life and the multifaceted, creative selection done there. Rituals indeed offer a brilliant strategy both for and against forgetting. This fact can even be considered one element of their success.

Due to this, I would like to interlink these two approaches, the historiographic and the ritual one. After analysing two paradigmatic rituals, I will examine the ‘historiographic misery’ of the Hermits of Saint William, an Order scarcely known and researched in comparison to others.⁴ Lastly, I shall bring my results into the perspective of this volume, and argue that – unlike any other area of life – medieval vita religiosa offers a fundamental means for investigating the cultural phenomena of social memory and oblivion. Religious orders not only possessed the best institutionalized instruments for deleting memory, but also for restoring it.

Rituals

It is a matter of common knowledge that many needs of medieval society could crystallize in religious life. One of the most important aspects may be the wish to be memorized, and indeed, during the Middle Ages, monasteries were places of remembrance (Erinnerungsorte) par excellence. A very distinctive element in this sense was the memory of deceased persons, the regular commemoration, in order to enable their souls to find eternal salvation. Since there is plenty of research on this memoria and the correlating ceremonies already done by Karl Schmid, Michael Borgolte and others,⁵ and its analysis does not fit into our focus on the memory of historical phe-

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³ I would just like to mention Norbert of Xanten († 1134), the founding figure of the Premonstratensians, and Rudolf of Worms († after 1230), the founder of the Order of St Mary Magdalene. On Bruno of Cologne, who was canonized by Leo X in 1514, see Gerardo Posada, Der heilige Bruno. Vater der Kartäuser. Ein Sohn der Stadt Köln, Cologne 1987.
⁵ I only mention a few books: Karl Schmid, Joachim Wollasch (eds.), Memoria. Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter, Munich 1984 (Münstersche Mittelalterschriften 48); Michael Borgolte, Cosimo Damiano Fonseca, Hubert Houben (eds.), Memoria. Erinnern und Vergessen in der Kultur des Mittelalters = Ricordare e dimenticare nella cultura del medioevo,
nomena and their evolution, my article sets aside this broad field. Instead, I choose two other instances for further consideration: firstly, the foot-washing rituals and, secondly, the daily dinner in the refectory. Both rituals are extensively described in the customaries of the 11th and 12th century and explained in many pateric texts throughout the Middle Ages.⁶

Medieval monastic foot-washing followed John 12–13, Luke 7 and Gen. 18, 1–5: according to John, on the evening of Maundy Thursday, Jesus got up from the Last Supper, wrapped a linen towel around his waist and washed the feet of all of his disciples. He justified this act with the argument that unless he washed them, they would have no part with him. As he had ordered his disciples to wash the feet of each other, the monastic ritual got the name *mandatum*. According to Luke, a sinful woman wet the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Because of this, all her sins were forgiven by Christ. According to John 12, Mary of Bethany washed the feet, dried them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. Abraham gave bread and wine to the three angels and let their feet be washed.

High medieval monastic life knew two kinds of ceremonies. On the one hand, there was the brotherly washing on Saturday evening and, on the other hand, the daily washing of the three poor in traditional Benedictine circles and of all the visitors in Cistercian monasteries respectively. These two categories culminated in the big rituals on Maundy Thursday where the abbot acted as the main figure to the poor, guests and monks in the monastic cloister. In the High Middle Ages, the procedure in the communities of Cluny, Fruttuaria, the so-called Lothringian reform groups and the Cistercian Order as paradigmatic example cases was as follows:
Foot-Washing of the Monks on Maundy Thursday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluny Bernard</th>
<th>Fruttuaria/ St Blasien</th>
<th>Texts of the Lothringian Reform (E and F)</th>
<th>Cistercians 12th century</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late 11th century</td>
<td>12th/13th century</td>
<td>10th and 11th century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>praelavatio*</th>
<th>praelavatio</th>
<th>praelavatio</th>
<th>praelavatio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The washing is done by the three brothers who serve in the kitchen this week.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>The washing is done by the three brothers who serve in the kitchen this week.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This main washing is done by the abbot and at least three monks, supported by at least 12 assistants.</td>
<td>Only the abbot washes all the feet (also of the children).</td>
<td>Only the abbot washes all the feet (also of the children).</td>
<td>The abbot and 12 monks wash the feet in the cloister. The remaining monks get their feet washed by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drying the feet.</td>
<td>Drying the feet?</td>
<td>Drying the feet.</td>
<td>Drying the feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The abbot and the three helpers kiss the feet.</td>
<td>The abbot kisses the feet.</td>
<td>The abbot gives two foot-kisses.</td>
<td>The abbot and his helpers kiss the feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two monks wash the feet of the abbot and all the other helpers outside of the chapter room.</td>
<td>The abbot washes the hands of all.</td>
<td>The brothers wash the feet of the helpers. At the end, the deacon washes the abbot’s feet. In ‘Fulda’ (f), the hand washing takes place.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand-washing</td>
<td>The prior washes, kisses and dries the abbot’s feet in the chapter room.</td>
<td>The abbot washes all the hands. In ‘Fulda’, the abbot’s feet are washed now.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ante et retro by the abbot and his three helpers.</td>
<td>Ante et retro by the abbot and his helpers.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading of John 13/14 in the chapter room.</td>
<td>Reading of John 13/14 in the chapter room.</td>
<td>Reading of John 13/14 in the chapter room.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Here, the monks wash their feet themselves in order to clean them from the dirt. This *praelavatio* is symbolically less important than the next two washings.
### Foot-Washing of the Monks on Maundy Thursday (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluny</td>
<td>Bernard</td>
<td>Late 11th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruttuaria/ St Blasien</td>
<td>12th/13th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Texts of the Lothringian Reform</td>
<td>(E and F) 10th and 11th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cistercians</td>
<td>12th century</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The abbot and the three monks offer wine by giving a kiss on the hand to every brother.

The abbot offers wine by giving a kiss on the hand.

The abbot offers wine by giving a kiss on the hand.

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### Foot-Washing of the Poor/Guests on Maundy Thursday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluny</td>
<td>Bernard, Ulrich</td>
<td>Late 11th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruttuaria / St Blasien</td>
<td>12th/13th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Texts of the Lothringian Reform</td>
<td>(E and F) 10th and 11th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cistercians</td>
<td>12th century</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of the poor corresponds to the number of the *fratres*.

The number of the poor corresponds to the number of the *fratres*.

12 poor

The number of the poor corresponds to the number of the *monachi*.

*Venia* (Ulrich) *Venia super genua* (Bernard)

- *Genuflection* (Ulrich)
- *Adoratio* (Bernard) [no information]

Foot-washing

- Drying the feet
- Drying the feet
- Drying the feet
- Drying the feet
- Kiss
- Using the hair
- Hand-washing
- Hand-washing
- Hand-washing
- Hand-washing
- Drying the hands
- Drying the hands
- Drying the hands
- Drying the hands
- Blessed wine and 2 *denarii* are offered to the poor.
- Blessed wine and *denarii* are offered.
- Blessed wine, clothes and *denarii* are offered.
- The monks kneel down and offer one coin.
- Kiss on the hand

Venia and the ‘Suscepimus’

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9 For a broader overview and the diverse references, see, again, Sonntag, Klosterleben (note 7), 600–614.
These rituals gave the opportunity to show obedience towards Christ and they were seen as a means of purifying the monks’ souls in particular from the daily affects (affectus). In addition, the diverse chants during these rituals ensured that the monks put themselves into the places of diverse biblical figures doing their particular actions in a physically and spiritually congruent way. A very prominent feature was the use of the hair to dry the feet. This procedure took place not only in the reform groups of Fruttuaria but also in those of Hirsau. What is interesting is that, in particular here, the three different women from the biblical stories merged together. Especially the merging of both Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and Mary Magdalene, the sinful woman, into one monastic role model, became a widespread phenomenon. This congruence of the two Marys was based on Gregory the Great. There were not a few medieval authors such as, for instance, Gerald of Salles († 1120) who followed his opinion. In any case, within and by the monastic footwashing (at least in the reform groups of Fruttuaria/St Blasien and Hirsau), this blended model of one Mary was ritually performed and remembered time and again.

The monastic table community entailed even more of such multifaceted blending role models: the time of day and the silence at the table addressed the Eucharist; the location of the refectory was seen as imitation of the Heavenly Banquet and Paradise. Likewise, the blessing of the wine and bread imitated the New Testament stories of Christ feeding the multitudes and the marriage feast at Cana. The food itself re-

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**Foot-Washing of the Poor/Guests on Maundy Thursday (Continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Texts of the Lothringian Reforms (E and F)</th>
<th>Cistercians 12th century</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluny Bernard</td>
<td>Late 11th century</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruttuaria / St Blasien</td>
<td>12th/13th century</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cistercians</td>
<td>12th century</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritual</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ante et retro</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers in the church</td>
<td>Prayers in the church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostration</td>
<td>Venia and Ante et retro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[no information]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adoratio Washing the hands by the abbot in the guest house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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minded of Adam and Eve, the children of Israel in the burning oven, Elijah and Christ. When breadcrumbs were swept from the table and eaten, the parable of the beggar Lazarus came to mind. Augmented by the symbolism of light, both in the candles and room’s orientation towards east, the monks thus created a holy place, a locus sanctus, where, under the eyes of God, Christ and the angels – who were all quite intentionally described as the addressees – a real unity between convent and heaven was fashioned, and the actors actually became transformed.¹²

I could add many similar cases here: Monks did penance like Cain and Job, or they died like and as Jesus, the poor Lazarus, Lazarus of Bethany, or Martin of Tours. Indeed, plenty of actions from the Bible, as a kind of ‘director’s book’, found their realization via diverse symbolic techniques. Monks extracted specific modules of specific role models and combined them to new hybrid imitation clusters in order to charge the situation with holy aura and to train the individual souls. Again, due to this technique, holy auras of the imitated figures (Christ, Lazarus, Mary of Bethany, Adam and Eve, Martin, the angels) were internalized and, at the same time, these figures became present in the imitating persons.

In fact, monastic representation thus preferred to portray time as a state of simultaneous existence instead of acknowledging the passing and changing of times in the present. Augustine wrote about immutable eternity and the metaphysically opposed stream of time in his Confessiones. While temporality defines the conditio humana, eternity stands as always without any sequence of time as simultaneity. The eternal Word of God, the principium, expresses itself, according to Augustine, in a temporal fashion in the Bible. Through imitating various biblical role models in a congruent fashion, the monks expressed this Word, so that the monastic spirit over the course of time would gain a degree of permanence and find eternal truth. The simultaneous assumption of various biblical role models (Mary, Martin, Christ, Lazarus) did not enable monks to experience “all things simultaneously”, but “a multiple simultaneity” which glimpsed and symbolically revealed the heavenly beyond and eternity.¹³

One other important element for this process lies in the ritual itself. It is the force of repetition. The memory of the role models and their selected stories in the ritual came to the ‘actors’ minds in constant repetition. When enacting a ritual the performers remembered the past, experienced the present and anticipated the future as (theoretically) identical events.¹⁴

In the eyes of the imitators, such imitation was more than symbolic. It gained a magical, sacred character. Indeed, this was a very special kind of remembrance: a

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¹² See this passage in: Sonntag, The Horror of Flawlessness (note 6), 110–111.
¹³ See this argumentation in: Sonntag, The Horror of Flawlessness (note 6), 110–111.
sanctified memory that became an essential part of one’s own salvation. What is interesting for our purposes is the creative selection of those specific actions, which – in the social memory of a monastery or religious order – not only derived from actions and characters of specific, real figures in the past. From the level of modern observation, they were rather fictive figures like the ‘one’ Mary, the ‘one’ Lazarus or even hybrid phantoms, phantoms sanctified by the combination of specific elements from many different historical occasions. Rituals were the relay-station between these phantoms and the acting monk or nun. Living the life of others, of phantoms and their sanctified memory, was a strongly institutionalized part of every monastery’s symbolic order. An empiricist in our days could even argue that reality itself was forgotten; a medieval monk, however, would have claimed the opposite. At any rate, the unnecessary was left aside and – at least in the specific moment of acting – indeed forgotten. This mechanism therefore offers an ideal-typical instance of a Komplexitätsreduktion. What remained was the necessary essence expressed and remembered by the acting persons.

Historiography

Yet, all institutions and their various claims of validity supporting and determining them underlay social, moral, political and theological influences, and thus institutions and their symbolic orders were subjected to diverse processes of transformation over time. Due to new spiritual necessities or sometimes just organizational practices, such hybrid imitation clusters and memories distinguished one religious order from the other. However, they were prospectively reorganized again and again, especially in times of monastic reform. Some role models, or rather imaginations and actions linked to them, lost their potency, some achieved more importance, new figures were ‘found’. Mainly with the rise of the Order (Orden) as an institutional phenomenon and legal entity in the High and Late Middle Ages, the founding fathers of these orders were re-discovered and more and more integrated into the symbolic order (Ordnung). Robert of Molesme and Bruno of Cologne have already been mentioned. The history of the Carmelite Order provides us with a quite similar picture. In the 13th century, the hermits from Mount Carmel in the Holy Land fled from the Muslims to Western Europe and had to experience an essential change. They were transformed into preaching mendicants living in or nearby the city by the pope. Since they were desperately looking for one identity during the whole Middle Ages, it is no coincidence that their dress also used for their rituals was suddenly said to have been given by the prophet Elijah, the first Carmelite.15

15 Jean Cheminot († c. 1350), John of Hildesheim († 1375), or Philippe Ribot († 1391) were prominent figures in the re-invention of the Carmelite Order. Cf. for instance Andrew Jotischky, The Carmelites and Antiquity. Mendicants and their Pasts in the Middle Ages, Oxford 2003, 45–78 and 211–260
Especially here, within religious life, there was a strong competition in the interpretation of the signs, and symbolism was (and is) a basic element of all institutional arrangements. The orders’ worlds of signs were not hermetic, but overlapped to a high degree. It was therefore all the more vital to recognize and highlight the contours of the own *propositum*. This power to communicate guiding principles, origins, rituals and rights, which should be preserved, was as important as the power to stand against the strategies (or sometimes just influences) of other religious groups. This fact directly connects to the fate of the Hermits of Saint William (Williamites, Guilelmites, Wilhelmiten) who obviously failed in this attempt.

Kaspar Elm, the leading expert in the history of the Williamites, reported a short story from the early 17th century: in 1620, a defective carriage of the Spanish Cistercian Chrysostomus Henriquez forced him to make an intermediate stop in the small town of Aalst between Ghent and Brussels. The monk came to the Spanish Netherlands in order to write his History of the *Belgica Sacra*, its monasteries and saints. He was accompanied by the prior of the Augustinian Hermits from Bruges who called the attention of Henriquez to a small monastery in Aalst. Both, indeed, visited this monastery and Henriquez was very surprised. The monks there wore nearly the same clothes as he did, they followed the Rule of Benedict, they lived according to similar constitutions, and their rituals and role models were nearly the same. But the brothers in Aalst were by no means Cistercians as the two guests were ensured by the local prior. The brothers were rather hermits – Hermits of St William. The founder of the Williamite Order, William of Malavalle (†1157), was said to have been convinced of monastic life by Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century.

All of this was completely new to the Spanish Cistercian Henriquez. He had never heard of those Hermits of St William Subsequently, a big dispute emerged between the Augustinian guest and the local Williamite prior. With reference to many *scriptores*, the Augustinian claimed that the other was allegedly no hermit of William (and no Cistercian), but an Augustinian. The Williamite then brought all of his breviaries to point out that he was not an Augustinian, but a real hermit of William. For the third party, the Cistercian Henriquez, everything was clear: the so-called hermit of William was, in fact, a Cistercian.¹⁶

The story presented here may sound like a comedy: two brothers discuss the order membership of another who obviously can say whatever he wants. Nobody believes him. The autonomy of his order was in a first step denied by protagonists of

¹⁶ On this story, see Elm, Zisterzienser und Wilhelmiten (note 4), 1–4.
other religious communities, possibly forgotten by their recipients in a second step, and indeed – in a last step – completely unknown at least to the guests. This process of oblivion and unknowingness, however, is no reason to wonder. The aforementioned episode is rather symptomatic for the foreign perception of the Hermits of St William.

Already in the Middle Ages, there were plenty of different opinions about the origins of the order’s founder, about the order’s observance and the convent’s daily life. The monks themselves referred to William of Malavalle, and the historiographies of the order not only attributed French origins to him, but also identified him as William X of Aquitaine († 1137) to enhance the order’s prestige in the French nobility.¹⁷ In fact, the Hermits of St William experienced a turbulent history shaped by continual new self-discovery processes on their way to one specific collective identity that would distinguish them from other orders. In the beginning, they lived after the Rule of William as hermits – every hermit alone in a cell within the monastery. This rule was already lost in the Late Middle Ages. Pope Gregory IX obliged the hermits to adopt the Rule of St Benedict in 1237/38.¹⁸ In the year 1256, Pope Alexander IV incorporated them into the heterogeneous group of Augustinian Hermits. This meant that they had to observe the Rule of St Augustine. In 1266, they managed to break out, and were re-established as a religious Order living according to the Rule of Benedict.¹⁹ The Williamites created a specific mixed style of religious life, a *propositum* combining eremitical and coenobitic, traditional and mendicant life, solitude and urban matters. Their statutes for example offer a fascinating mixture of their own and Cistercian legal provisions enriched by Dominican elements.²⁰

However, the Williamites were not successful in communicating this sustainable, specific identity, which they themselves had been looking for since the 12th century, to the religious world outside of their order. Obviously, there are organizational, spiritual and historiographical reasons for this: firstly, the order’s institutional structure is characterized by a significant heterogeneity of its houses, in particular, by a clear distinction between the Italian traditional convents on the one hand and the quite independent monastic communities in the north of the Alps on the other.²¹ In addition, the Hermits of St William did not develop characteristic rituals including specific, singular role models. At least, we have no instances for that. Neither did they write outstanding spiritual literature nor any rule commentary. Even in the his-

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¹⁷ Elm, Zisterzienser und Wilhelmiten (note 4), 18 and 22–24.
¹⁸ Elm, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Wilhelmitenordens (note 4), 43–47 and Idem, Zisterzienser und Wilhelmiten (note 4), 42.
²¹ Elm, Zisterzienser und Wilhelmiten (note 4), in particular 29–33.
toriographical stage, they did not manage to delete their flaws and stigma, that is, first of all, the time spent as Augustinians, and to anchor their independence within the collective memory of other religious groups. Papal bulls were obviously not enough. In the eyes of their religious competitors and in the collective memory of many others, the Williamites did not exist. The Augustinians simply had the better historiographers. They just did not mention the Williamites’ particularity for prestige reasons. The result was that in large parts of religious life, the Williamites themselves were forgotten and even unknown.

This is surprising because religious communities and orders were normally more aware of potential dangers resulting from external influences. The Carthusians, for instance, differed from all other Orders due to their strong emphasis of seclusion. They were not afraid to be forgotten, but rather to be defamed. As pronounced by the Carthusian general chapter, the errors of the order’s members should be hidden from those not allowed to know any internal detail. All transgressions against the order’s norms, instead, should be forgotten – inside and outside. This is why the general chapter ordered that all the material resulting from the visitations should be destroyed after two years. In the year 1479, the prior of the monastery in Aggsbach, for instance, lost his position for one month since he had ordered to read and copy letters, which described transgressions of some deviant monks. The official message was clear and stated time and again: *Cartusia numquam reformata, quia numquam deformata.* “The Carthusian Order has never been reformed because it had never been deformed”.23

An analysis of the Franciscan history sheds light on a similar approach to officially enhance an individual and social forgetting. In fact, the ‘real’ Francis of Assisi († 1226) and his early religious followers, who called themselves tomfools of God, apparently differed from the figures the Franciscan sources convey after 1260. Bonaventura († 1274), the master general of the order, wrote a new *vitae* of Francis that fit better into the hagiographic tradition and, more importantly, the institutionalized young order’s structure. Bonaventura not only created a transformed image of the saint by changing, adding and omitting ‘facts’ from the older *vitae*. In 1260, the general chap-

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ter of the order even abolished these older vitae. Together with them, all statutes given before 1260 were declared as invalid and should be burned for all time.\footnote{On these different images on Francis and their evolution, see Gert Melville, Der geteilte Franziskus. Beobachtungen zum institutionellen Umgang mit Charisma, in: Joachim Fischer, Hans Joas (eds.), Kunst, Macht und Institution. Studien zur Philosophischen Anthropologie, soziologischen Theorie und Kultursoziologie der Moderne. Festschrift für Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, Frankfurt a.M., New York 2003, 347–363 and Achim Wesjohann, Mendikantische Gründungserzählungen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Mythen als Element institutioneller Eigengeschichtsschreibung der mittelalterlichen Franziskaner, Dominikaner und Augustiner-Eremiten, Berlin 2012 (Vita regularis. Abhandlungen 49), 41–309, in particular 199–211.} The Franciscans as well as the Carthusians obviously thought that they could regulate forgetting by a legal act. Certainly, the Franciscans were very successful in the case of their early statutes. Some of the old vitae, however, such as the “Legend of the Three Companions” was still remembered at some time. Interestingly, all these early texts on the life of Francis and some of the statutes survived in Cistercian monasteries.

Perspectivation

Forgetting as a concrete act is seldom reflected directly in the sources. We need sufficient orientational knowledge (Orientierungswissen) to make accurate statements about the existence or the missing of information. That means that only when we know the specific context, the before and the hereafter, can an oblivion be determined. This is one main reason why the field of religious life is most suitable for an analysis of memory as well as oblivion. Both phenomena belong together and do not function separately. For the area of religious life, we have not only the highest concentration, but also the highest spectrum of source material. All the phenomena discussed in this volume could also, and perhaps even particularly, be found here. The religious figures were pioneers and masters in remembering, transforming and deleting (and as a consequence even in ‘systematic’ forgetting) of knowledge.

This pioneer role is theologically based on the fundamental comprehension of \textit{vita religiosa} as \textit{vita perfectionis}. The fascinating educational paradox was to gain perfection in the future by ostentatiously being perfect in the present, as this article’s section on the rituals aimed to demonstrate. In monastic life, presented as \textit{vita perfectionis} again and again, this kind of symbolism (to symbolize, but already to be) was striking. Perfecting always requires selecting the ‘best’. Selection, in turn, naturally causes deleting and forgetting. Indeed, the permanent tension between heavenly orientation and earthly necessities in the monasteries caused creativity in many respects. One of them was creativity in selecting the things intended to be either forgotten or remembered in ritual, text and art. I intended to demonstrate that rituals not only perpetuated, deleted, transformed and combined memories. Sometimes
the content of these memories even acquired present meaning in a magical, a sanctified manner. Even phantoms, artificial fictions, became alive – such as the one Mary, the one Lazarus, or other artificial hybrid figures and supposed events that had never existed or happened in reality. The legitimation of both this monastic strategy and, as a result, these phantoms is deeply anchored in medieval Christology, since the actions of all of these role models were seen as incorporated in and derived from Christ’s all-encompassing nature. Such a high quality and density of a ‘holy’ remembering, out of which distinctive religious identities developed, was unique in comparison to other areas of medieval life.

As argued above, in terms of their practices monasteries can be described as total institutions since their symbolic cosmos was nearly all-encompassing. Even the tying of shoes could gain symbolic significance.²⁵ This strong tendency itself provided both chances and risks. Particularly in the time of monastic reform and spiritual as well as organizational renewal, this overwhelming symbolic cosmos cemented the ritual remembering of those phantoms for a long time, and vice versa. As history has shown, the tendency of overdoing the symbolism, however, also leads to deep and repeated crises. Exaggeration could provoke rejection and, as a consequence, the risk of being ignored, and – at some time – forgotten. In any case, there needs to be a balance for the precarious system of fictions.²⁶

In order not to be weakened, ignored or forgotten, it was important for religious communities to stand against other institutional arrangements in the competing views on the interpretation of those signs. Even a systematic deletion of knowledge could obtain a strongly institutionalized form as was shown with the examples of the Carthusian and Franciscan document destructions. These destructions should induce an oblivion (and later unknowingness that means deletion) of the inappropriate and the unfitting (old norms and role models, mistakes, critics) both inside and outside the order. Due to this, my study argues that – firstly – medieval religious life had the


best instruments to ensure that things could be forgotten, because (beyond the rituals) its knowledge was more safely stored in literacy than in any other area of life. In light of this claim, medieval religious life had – secondly – the best instruments to remember, to rediscover the ‘unknown’, to forget the forgetting. Its high level of institutionalization and *pragmatische Schriftlichkeit*\(^{27}\) made a permanent oblivion more difficult and more improbable than in other areas of life. In addition, the probability that condemned contents survived in other manuscripts was higher as shown with the preservation of the Franciscan sources in Cistercian houses. One may even think – thirdly – that for every area of religious life there is a kind of institutionally cushioned balance between remembrance and oblivion grounded in the level of literacy (*Schriftlichkeit*). This, most particularly, is the case for administrative records (*Verwaltungsschriftgut*).

However, the areas of religious, urban or courtly life were not separated at all. Even their literacies (*Schriftlichkeiten*) overlapped. In addition, there is still the broad field of rituals where things obviously could also be remembered without any written form. Even the highest institutionalized rituals could be changed (by ritual).\(^{28}\) The higher this institutionalization of rituals was, the higher the potential to remember them, although some individual elements were ordered to be deleted due to other spiritual and organizational needs, or just because of the above-mentioned exaggerations. Such phenomena are naturally more difficult to determine. To analyse the historical success or failure of remembrance and oblivion properly, we thus may have to consider, firstly, the specific contents of remembrance and oblivion (persons, events, feelings) as well as, secondly, the quality of their ‘performances’ (texts, rituals, etc.). This investigation becomes much more complicated if, thirdly, we keep in mind the interrelations of the contents of knowledge (*Wissensbestände*), and its social ‘stores’: the different institutions, communities or orders with their own specific claims of validity and their own balanced memorized and forgotten contents, which are involved or clash together, as in the case of the Augustinians and the Williamites. The latter were not able to get rid of their flaw, to make it forgotten, because this flaw, at the same time, was part of the collective memory of others, the Augustinians. The Carmelites, however, were more successful. They genuinely had forgotten their own past, but reinvented their history and – to a certain degree – themselves. Such entanglements of inside and outside form a core aspect of the immense complexity of remembrance in religious life, and not only there.

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However, an appropriate analysis is even more complex. In fact, the collective oblivion of an institution in one specific case is not necessarily identical with the oblivion of a member of exactly this institution. That means that although things can be made forgotten by an institution, and although things actually were forgotten in the collective memory of a group, and although this fact may be visualized by their absence in written form, these contents of knowledge may still have been remembered by individuals of this specific group. Thus, fourthly, we have to deal with this problem. However, the question arises if, due to the lack of sources, it is really possible to filter out this content of individual knowledge and oblivion. The answer may be: mostly not, but – for the whole cultural picture – it sometimes may not even be necessary to filter it out.

But is there something that cannot be made forgotten in medieval religious life for both groups and individual monks and nuns? The answer is: yes. These are the classical endoxa of religious, in particular, monastic European culture: God himself, the sacred in general, and the momentous monastic values such as humilitas and caritas. Petrus Venerabilis († 1156), the abbot of Cluny, argued in this respect that external appearances of rituals change; sometimes they were therefore forgotten, but the spiritual basis of those values such as caritas would be preserved in the collective identity for all time.²⁹ One main aspect for remembrance is, indeed, the rituals: the more deeply one of those values is anchored in the identities of individuals and groups, the harder it is to delete or even transform it and, accordingly, to forget at least some of its aspects.

In any case, we have to avoid anachronisms. Fifthly, we must distinguish the level of the medieval object and the level of modern observance. The results of both levels of analysis are not necessarily congruent. They can be destructions, as in the case of the Franciscan document. The rituals, however, which I have considered as means of remembrance on the level of modern observance are – from the perspective of a medieval monk – not primarily strategies against oblivion, but rather strategies against imperfection, and for sanctification. In addition, there seem to be no generally valid indicators for us historians to determine the reasons of forgetting in full. There was and is hardly one reason for forgetting: all reasons are embedded in a complex cultural, or at least sub-cultural context constituted by institutions supported or attacked by individuals who are at once integrated into a social milieu born of and situated in specific and constantly changing group dynamics.

In fact, all kinds of sources may be fruitful for a history of memory. Nevertheless, for the broad field of medieval religious life, this study proposes the genre of rule commentaries as one of the best to identify such processes of creative selection, ritual memory and some of the phantoms connected to them. In explaining, undermining and sometimes relativizing norms by means of biblical citations, and theological or legal *summae*, commentaries could gather and organize knowledge in reference to rituals, liturgies, historiographies, models for life and conceptions of the world. Because commentaries provide an excellent means, an interface, by which historians may research many different fields at once, they fit perfectly into a research perspective on creative selection and the creating of memory that, in fact, should be approached from such different angles as well. With their continual attempts to explain normative guidelines to fit new circumstances, commentaries, like scarcely any other source, possess the potential to depict religious memories and identities. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes not, as in the case of the Pontigny sermons on the Rule of Benedict. One can characterize these 94 sermons composed around the year 1210, the only medieval Cistercian commentary on the Rule, as a type of monastic encyclopaedia since they offer a distinctive, comprehensive concept of both heaven and earth and a fascinating snapshot of monastic theology and medieval society in general. Confronting the Cathars and other religious movements, the text argues for instance that the Rule of Benedict would have been valid in heaven and on earth from the creation of the world until now. In light of socio-political needs, memorizing well-chosen role models and omitting inappropriate facts from the past is an omnipresent strategy.\(^30\)

It remains remarkable that commentaries on religious rules have never been studied in their full complexity. A comparative history still needs to be written. Scholars do not even know how many commentaries exist on the rules of Benedict, Augustine, Basilius, Romuald, Francis or Albert. For this reason, I am currently working to create an online ‘Compendium of Medieval Rule Commentaries’.\(^31\) This intends to supply – in a second step – the necessary basis for comparative research, both qualitative and quantitative, that help us towards establishing a sustainable typology of rule commentaries in the Middle Ages. This will help us to offer one more clue to analyse the history of memory and oblivion.

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This study could have discussed plenty of other issues such as the punishment against individual forgetting, a forgetting considered as error in the *consuetudines*. However, I rather focused on abstract social phenomena. In comparison to the other studies brought together in this volume, my contribution not only aimed to


\(^{31}\) This database of medieval rule commentaries is hosted by the Saxon Academy of Sciences, and will be online this year.
complement their results with the high and late medieval material from a very specific area of life. It also aimed at demonstrating that religious life itself, its rituals and historiography, is even best suited to an analysis of memory and oblivion since all the discussed phenomena can especially be observed here.

The research field of the creative selection of knowledge continues to be a challenging one, also and specifically for the broad field of religious life. Sometimes it is impossible to filter out the reasons for the loss of knowledge; sometimes it is not even necessary because the cultural consequences may be clear and much more important. Repeatedly, the borders between omission and forgetting became blurred, and the sources do not allow us to commit ourselves to the one and only solution of interpretation. Such an analysis therefore requires a multifaceted approach that includes different genres of sources that, for instance, illuminate the history of institutions and individuals, ideal and practice, historiography and rituals, and as a result social identities in all its facets.

Analysing memory and oblivion remains a necessary comprehensive tool for the comparative history of religious orders. It never loses its actuality since indeed all historical characters stay phantoms, because no source is all-encompassing and all sources are interpreted by us. Thus, every historian sees another Francis, another Bruno or another William of Malaval. The phantoms change; they did so in the past and they will in the future.