The transmission of memory is a prerequisite for the emergence, continuity and change of memory cultures. However, for the early modern period, the ways in which memories were passed on and how they changed in the process have not been studied systematically. There has also been a lack of scholarly differentiation between the transmission of memories over time, from generation to generation and their transmission through space, for instance as a consequence of migration and the dispersion of people, written media and objects. This is partly due to the fact that until recently memory and commemoration have been the domain of national and comparative historiography. In spite of differences in their research agendas both Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, the pioneers of memory studies, with their emphasis on sites and sociabilities, made the nation state the focal point of memory formation.¹ Nora’s *Les lieux de mémoire*, in particular, has found many imitators who defined national sites of memory such as the *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, on which Hagen Schulze and Francois Etienne edited an influential volume.²

Students of early modern memory need to develop different parameters in order to address the more fragmented but nevertheless collective perceptions of belonging which constitute the focal point of early modern memory formation and memory transmission. A distinctive issue for the period 1500–1800 is the formation of collective memories which were not grounded within the confines of the nation-state but which were

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generated in a dynamic between translocal developments and local circumstances. In this essay, religion will serve as a focal point of collective memory formation in the early modern period. Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the conflicts between and within world religions, religious wars, the inquisitions and the prosecution of ‘heretics’, missionary programmes, religious print media and objects, rituals and dogma had a profound impact on collective memory formation across time and space.

Apart from the necessary reconsideration of what we might define as the focal points of memory formation in the early modern period, the analysis has to consider who were the agents in memory transmission. In this context, agency refers not only to people but also to media and material objects or ‘things’. While people use objects to define and document their selves, things also enter and mark human lives. As tools of a practical nature or as keys to memory, things structure the actions and interactions of people. Things mark people’s life stories, yet they also have their own biographies. This implies that we go beyond the idea of objects as ‘memory containers’ with a fixed meaning and also reject the notion of artefacts as ‘repositories of memory’, which are kept alive in memory transmission and which can be retrieved by cognitive acts of remembering these meanings and what they stand for. Instead, artefacts should be conceived of as co-actors of the social, in a network of references to varying meanings that are being bestowed on things by different actors in specific contexts and social practices. While the concept of the ‘biography of things’, first

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4 Andrew Jones, Memory and material culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2007), 42. In his essay on Global flows and local cultures, Helmuth Berking has stressed that ‘place matters’ for meaning and his ideas can be built upon for the relevance of social sites when looking at memory transmission as constituted in social practices. See Helmuth Berking, ‘Global flows and local cultures. Über die Rekonfiguration sozialer Räume im Globalisierungsprozess’, Berliner Journal für Soziologie 8 (1989), 381–392.