CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SPACES OF MEMORY AND THEIR TRANSMEDIATIONS.
ON THE LIVES OF EXOTIC IMAGES AND THEIR MATERIAL EVOCATIONS

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Introduction. The Spaces of Memories

In Greek mythology, the Titaness *Mnemosyne*—who personified memory and bequeathed to us the word *mnemonic*—is associated mostly with language and words and with the muses, including history (Clio) and poetry (Calliope). She is also a goddess of time, which reflects an association of memory and temporality. Yet the *ars memoriae* (art of memory) of the Ancients, inherited with great enthusiasm by Renaissance practitioners, links memory to the additional qualities of space and visuality: memory could also be pictorial and topographic (as well as textual). The Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci famously invoked a sense of space and of the visual to convey and solidify his memory of European and Christian learning, which he carried with him to the East in the late sixteenth century (as a ‘memory palace’). Ricci’s mode of memory was distinctly and vividly graphic and—by dint of his exotic travels—even geographic.¹

In contemplating the qualities of early modern memory, it is helpful to recall the importance of space as well as time—the ‘landscape’ of memory, as it has been characterised in other contexts²—and how a sense of *where* we are (or have been) can shape processes of recollection and memorialisation. For if memory tends to be affiliated instinctively with time—history and our sense of the past—it plays an important role, too, in the perception of space—geography and our sense of place. The first category—time—resonates in all manner of personal, historical, and political registers, of course. Meanwhile, the second—space—allows us

not only to situate our memories (as Ricci did) in concrete spaces; but also to project onto spaces and landscapes memories that likewise incorporate personal, political, and social identities, not to mention national and imperial sensibilities. The significance of space to the project of remembering is justly underscored by Benedict Anderson in his history of collective identity and national memory, *Imagined Communities*. In the revised edition of that canonical book, Anderson includes a chapter on maps and geography to make the basic point that the memorialisation and articulation of space plays a vital role in the construction of ‘imagined communities’. Memory expresses itself, Anderson properly points out, in geography no less than history. *Mnemosyne*’s nine muses, that is to say, might have been augmented.³

Space is critical to an understanding of early modern memory in more ways than one. There were, to be sure, many landscapes of memory and many means of memorialising through space—in early modern Europe no less than in other moments and places in history. But early modern Europe also witnessed the dramatic augmentation of its spaces by dint of its global expansions and its flourishing interest in overseas worlds. Ricci was but one of many who described and memorialised his experiences abroad, and the field of geography thrived in these years. More generally, not only did the field of geography prosper, but so did the spaces and forms used to convey geography: the sites and sources, the methods and media, enlisted to transmit images and memories of the world. Early modern Europe was positively awash in geography; geo-memories (to coin a term) circulated in a dizzying variety of forms, recording Europe’s sense of space and place in an expanding world. These sources included the putatively personal form of travel accounts as well as the less personal yet phenomenally popular genre of ‘descriptions’ of foreign lands; printed maps both terrestrial and maritime, along with cityscapes and numerous other manner of *vedute*; paintings of foreign landscapes and ethnographic subjects; exotic natural specimens and the myriad other objects collected for early modern cabinets of curiosities; and a wide range of material (so-called decorative) arts, which were embellished with exotic motifs and implicitly designed to convey to early modern consumers a sense of the world. Or better, senses of the world, since early modern geography served