Introduction
Memory, Family, Identity in Early Modern Italy and Europe

The theme of memory in relation to the early modern age is slightly different from that which prevails when considering contemporary times. In relation to the twentieth century the term memory is used mostly to refer to particular episodes of collective memory, which are also basic (even if reactive) to a certain type of identity: the extermination of the Jews, for example, or the world wars.\(^1\) Or better known is the concept of memory places, essentially invented by Pierre Nora and then taken up in Italy by Mario Isnenghi: places in the broad sense, that may be physical places, or individuals, concepts, symbols, myths tied to a particular aspect of memory and anchors for the identity of a community or a nation.\(^2\)

From a methodological point of view the theme of memory, especially collective, has returned forcefully to stage front since the 1990s, with the taking up and development of the ideas that had been originally elaborated by Maurice Halbwachs in his two fundamental works: Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire, published in 1925 and La mémoire collective, posthumously in 1950.\(^3\) It was basically Halbwachs who made the first precocious attempt to theorize the existence of collective images of memory. In this vision memory is a factor of

\(^{1}\) Just see for example F. Lussana, “Memoria e memorie nel dibattito storiografico,” Studi storici 41 (2000), pp. 1047–1081: 1047 (“The memoirs on the Nazi massacres, the discussion about Shoah, and the public use of history in historiographical revisionism are among the many cases which can be taken as an example to demonstrate the methodological and interpretative usefulness of the relationship between history and memory. We will try a reconstruction of the most recent discussion about these three historiographical cases”); G. Corni and G. Hirschfeld (eds.), L’umanità offesa. Stermini e memoria nell’Europa del Novecento (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003); J. Winter, Sites of memory, sites of mourning. The Great War in European cultural history (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); G. Mosse, Fallen soldiers. Reshaping the memory of the World Wars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); G. Corni (ed.), Storia e memoria. La seconda guerra mondiale nella costruzione della memoria europea (Trento: Museo Storico, 2007).


identity and of the cohesion of a group, but it is also an expression of these values since it represents the projection of present needs, interests, and aspirations into the past.  

Concrete research on this argument relative to the early modern age is instead oriented by and large in four or five directions: there is a branch of study that works on memory in general, and its ways of functioning, and studies past methods aimed at rendering human memory more efficacious through the acquisition of a series of techniques: the theme of the art of memory (in the classical world it served orators and politicians, in the Middle Ages mostly priests and mystics, and later every sort of intellectual) which has been the object of study of historians of culture and philosophy such as the pioneering Frances Yates and Paolo Rossi, and more recently Lina Bolzoni.  

Another branch deals with distinctly autobiographical memory. According to contemporary definitions, autobiography is the “narration of one’s own life or part of it, above all as literature.” Thus it is as a branch of literary history that it has been mostly approached, taking into consideration first the writings that had more explicit literary value, and then considering also other works having perhaps lesser stylistic value, but a certain documentary importance. For historians, Georg Misch’s early 20th-century voluminous Geschichte der Autobiographie, that covers up to the end of the 19th century, remains a point of reference. His primary concern was with works consciously autobiographical, and meant for publication, by historians, philosophers, politicians, and men of letters. The theme that most interested him, also in the wake of his teacher Dilthey, was the birth of individual self-consciousness in western culture. While recent developments in studies on autobiography have been

---

4 See below, chap. 7, pp. 148–150.
8 On Misch (1878–1965) and his relationship with Dilthey one can see now M. Mezzanzanica, Georg Misch. Dalla filosofia della vita alla logica ermeneutica (Milan: Angeli, 2001); A. Marini, 