

ONE

INTRODUCTION: SOUVENIRS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In 2005, my now-husband traveled to Italy with some friends from college, drove around Tuscany for two weeks, and came back with a souvenir for me: a snow globe of the towers of San Gimignano (Figure 1). Above a base displaying the rolling hills and sunflowers of Tuscany, as well as the inscription “S. GIMIGNANO” on a scroll meant, perhaps, to give it a certain Renaissance flair, the snow globe contains a miniature version of the town with seven towers looming over clumps of small, red-roofed buildings. To my eyes, it is tacky, certainly not something I would have bought for myself; my husband is lucky I married him given that was all he brought me back from that trip!

When I came into possession of the snow globe, I had never set foot in San Gimignano. It could not remind me of *my* visit to this quaint town with its towering relics of its elite medieval residents’ competitive architectural tastes. Yet it was nonetheless a souvenir, a thing that was given to me and that I kept as a reminder of a place and of a person. It called San Gimignano to my mind when I looked at it, and it also called to mind my husband. The souvenir snow globe became a running joke between us, to the extent that I was lucky enough, or unlucky enough, to receive other gag souvenirs from my husband on future trips, which is how I came to be in possession of a seldom-worn “My boyfriend went to Jerusalem and all he got me was this lousy t-shirt” t-shirt.

For years, my only experience of San Gimignano was the little snow globe. It sat on a shelf in our home, obscured by other items the appearance of which



1. Author's snow globe from San Gimignano, Italy. Photo: Maggie Popkin.

I find more aesthetically pleasing. But whenever I came across it, I relived my husband's trip to Italy. The snow globe acted as a vicarious souvenir, allowing me to experience imaginatively a place, and a particular trip to that place, neither of which I had experienced personally. It also, however, constructed for me a vision of San Gimignano that centered exclusively on the city's medieval towers. Does the city's Duomo appear in the snow globe? No. Any of its museums? Certainly not. Before I ever set foot in San Gimignano, then, my little vicarious souvenir taught me that if I ever did make it there, what I was supposed to go see as a tourist were the towers.

Five years after receiving my snow globe, I finally made it to San Gimignano – with my husband, on our honeymoon. What did we do? We climbed up the Torre Grossa, of course. After watching the sun set over those lovely Tuscan hills, we descended the dark, damp staircase to find that we, and three British tourists, were locked in. I will spare you the details; suffice it to say that there is only one woman who holds the key to the tower, and she had driven home for the night. After several hilarious phone calls made by our British companions to their friends in a bar on the main piazza, some haphazard communication with the friendly Italian bartenders, a drive by another saintly

Italian to retrieve the elderly lady with the key, and the passing of three hours, we finally emerged to a piazza full of people clapping and cheering at our release. We proceeded to a nearby wine bar, ordered a lovely bottle of Vernaccia di San Gimignano, and all was well.

When I look now at the snow globe, all these stories layer and intersect. From a vicarious souvenir of an imagined experience and a representation that primed my expectations of the town of San Gimignano, this little object transformed into a direct souvenir – something tied to a personal experience of my own. It has also, over the years, transformed into a treasured object that I could never throw away. I have attached too many memories to it.

I have told you a story about one of my souvenir objects to suggest the multiple and evolving meanings souvenirs can hold for people – and you surely have many of your own, some combination of hilarious, sentimental, private, and performative. Perhaps you have been a tourist visiting a resort town on the coast of Italy. You saw the sites, dined with friends, relaxed, maybe engaged in slightly more hedonistic activities, and, at some point during your stay, purchased a souvenir with scenes of the city you so enjoyed, something you could bring home with you to show your friends and family. Or you may have visited one of the world's most famous religious shrines. Your personal belief may have been deep or superficial, your pilgrimage religious, secular, or somewhere in between, but regardless, you purchased a memento, perhaps a miniature replica of the shrine, to testify to your presence at this site after you departed. Or maybe you have been a sports fan, attending games and acquiring keepsakes at the stadium or at a store afterwards, to capture your experiences and to broadcast your fandom to people in your day-to-day life.

Scenes like these unfold around the world today all the time. Tourists to the Italian coast can buy Cinque Terre magnets or Amalfi Coast platters. Pilgrims and tourists alike can purchase miniatures of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, souvenirs of the Kaaba in Mecca, or mementos of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Fans of professional sports around the world don replica jerseys and caps, affix bumper stickers to their cars, and consume beverages out of branded mugs.

The ease of travel and the prevalence of mass production in today's world may mislead us into thinking that these activities are something new, something uniquely modern. Yet these scenarios could just as easily have occurred in the Roman Empire, where travel souvenirs, miniature replicas of religious statues and monuments, and spectacle keepsakes were widely available. A Roman visiting the resort town of Baiae on the Bay of Naples could purchase a glass flask engraved with scenes of the city to bring home to Spain, North Africa, or Germany. At Ephesus, one could visit the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and leave with a miniature silver replica of the shrine. At Athens, that same person could acquire a miniature

terracotta version of the famous shield sculpted by Pheidias for his Athena Parthenos.¹ Fans of gladiatorial combats and chariot races could own oil lamps or drinking cups with their favorite stars, and enthusiasts of theater could collect sets of actor figurines.

Like social media today, these ancient souvenirs offer a unique resource for exploring the experiences, interests, imaginations, and aspirations of people living in the Roman world beyond elite, metropolitan male authors.² A fundamental aspect of souvenirs, today and in antiquity, is that they capture what people want to remember and what people want to project about themselves. Roman souvenirs offer invaluable evidence of how people of widely varying backgrounds around the empire presented curated images of themselves to others. They demonstrate choices about self-expression that would otherwise be lost to scholars, and they illuminate ancient perceptions of religion, place, and spectacle that we would miss if we relied solely on literary sources, elite art and architecture, and coins. In Roman times as today, souvenirs had the potential to transcend time and space, making places, events, and experiences possessable, portable, and sharable.

Yet in the Roman world, where literacy was limited and visual communication was therefore essential, souvenirs offered an accessible but potent means of self-expression and shaped collective memory and knowledge to an extraordinary degree. No prints or photographs circulated in the Roman Empire, and such travel guides as existed remained inaccessible to many people of limited literacies.³ Conversation would have transmitted knowledge and shared memories, but such oral communications are difficult, perhaps impossible, to trace in the surviving textual and material records. If we think of visual knowledge transmission, however, and of objects as conversation pieces, then souvenirs – the objects themselves, their images, their inscriptions – would have been a vital way in which many Romans learned of various sites, monuments, and events. They are, therefore, critical to understanding how people perceived and conceptualized places and pastimes in the Roman Empire, and even the idea of the empire itself. Their formal and visual characteristics and portability enabled Roman souvenirs to act as proxies for the “originals” they represented. In turn, souvenirs enabled people across the Roman Empire from different backgrounds to possess their represented subjects and simultaneously constructed those subjects as shared cultural markers.

ROMAN SOUVENIRS *AVANT LA LETTRE*

A Roman Concept of Souvenirs

Many of our words today for describing objects that function as keepsakes derive from Latin words related to memory and recollection: “souvenir” from

subvenire (“to come to one’s mind” or “to assist or aid”), via the French *souvenir*; “memento” from *meminisse* (“to remember or recollect”); “memorabilia” from *memorabilia* (“memorable deeds”) and *memorabilis* (“worthy of being remembered”). Yet there is no Latin or Greek equivalent for the modern term “souvenir.” Given this linguistic lacuna, did Romans themselves have a concept like ours – of objects that can remind one of past experiences, places visited, or other people or things beyond one’s physical presence?

Few scholars have paid attention to this question. Modern souvenirs have attracted the bulk of scholarly attention over the past fifty years, owing largely to the pioneering work of anthropologist Nelson Graburn on ethnic and tourist arts produced by native peoples subsumed by modern nation-states.⁴ Subsequent studies have viewed souvenirs through the lenses of consumerism, tourism, museum collection and display, and post-colonialism, interrogating their role as mediators of the complex relationships between often marginalized producers and wealthier consumers.⁵ Histories of souvenirs tend to begin with Constantine’s legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire and the florescence of Christian pilgrimage; any brief excursions into antiquity serve merely as precursors to discussions of medieval pilgrimage souvenirs or modern souvenirs.⁶ A few exceptional studies have considered ancient souvenirs more extensively.⁷ To date the most comprehensive treatment of Roman souvenirs is Ernst Künzl and Gerhard Koeppel’s *Souvenirs und Devotionalien: Zeugnisse des geschäftlichen, religiösen und kulturellen Tourismus im antiken Römerreich*.⁸ This wide-ranging volume considers how objects commemorated travels, places, and experiences around the Roman Empire. Künzl and Koeppel demonstrate the vast range of objects that might have acted as souvenirs in an ancient context, but they leave open provocative questions about the socio-cultural significance of souvenirs and memorabilia in the Roman world.

Despite the paucity of attention to ancient souvenirs in modern scholarship, however, Romans evidently had a concept of the souvenir *avant la lettre*, that is, before the word “souvenir” existed, as we will see throughout this book. The absence of a Latin or Greek equivalent for the term “souvenir” might result from the humble nature of the objects in question – lamps, figurines, and drinking vessels, for example – which are decidedly not the monumental marble and bronze Greek statues or celebrated cities that many ancient authors deemed worthy of attention. Yet these humble objects could evoke memory powerfully. An epigram in the *Greek Anthology* describes a quoit, or iron ring, that a man named Asclepiades acquired among the Romans, which had originally been given by Aphrodite to Anchises as a “μνημήτιον” of their affair. Μνημεῖον, which means a memorial, remembrance, or record of a person or thing, tends to refer in Greek literature to lofty matters such as public memorials, tombs, or records of oaths.⁹ Yet the epigrammatist’s choice of this word to describe an iron ring, however mythological its pedigree, suggests that small,

seemingly mundane objects could be conceived of as records of a person, thing, or event – in short, that objects could act as souvenirs in the sense of the modern term.¹⁰

Other ancient authors provide clues that Romans manufactured and purchased objects related to gods, artworks, travel, and spectacles that correspond in many ways to modern souvenirs.¹¹ The author of the Acts of the Apostles records a silversmith at Ephesus who made miniature silver replicas of the celebrated Temple of Artemis to sell to visitors to the site.¹² During the famous *Cena Trimalchionis* section of Petronius's *Satyricon*, a satirical novel written during the Neronian period, the rich freedman Trimalchio boasts of cups he owns that commemorate fights of his favorite gladiators.¹³ The author known as Pseudo-Lucian, probably writing in the late third or early fourth century, recounts wandering the streets of Knidos perusing the trinkets offered by the town's potters.¹⁴ Other mementos might have been manufactured to be given as gifts on special occasions, such as festivals or dinner parties. The Latin *apophoreta* (from the Greek ἀποφόρητα, “to be borne away”) refers to festival gifts or party favors given at private events and public festivals.¹⁵ Among the *apophoreta* handed out at the Saturnalia that Martial describes in a collection of epigrams are knives, lamps, drinking and serving vessels, and terracotta figurines.¹⁶

Alongside these suggestive literary passages stands a wide body of surviving material evidence that supports my contention that Romans conceived of many objects as souvenirs and memorabilia: as things that, whether acquired on-site or long after the thing's initial manufacture, had the capacity to evoke memories of a place, person, event, or experience. Susan Stewart divides souvenirs into two categories: sampled souvenirs and representative souvenirs. Sampled souvenirs are naturally occurring objects that a person simply takes, such as a pebble from a beach. Representative souvenirs are purchasable and tend to employ figural representation.¹⁷ David L. Hume proposes two additional categories: crafted souvenirs and purely representative souvenirs. Crafted souvenirs are commercially available and represent a subject but are crafted from an endemic material, while purely representative souvenirs encompass those manufactured from a generic medium.¹⁸ The material I analyze in this book necessarily consists primarily of representative souvenirs, whether crafted or purely representative, made in durable materials and thus more likely to survive to us. Representative souvenirs in perishable materials almost certainly existed in the Roman world (the famed textiles from Patras, perhaps), as did sampled souvenirs, such as honey from Mt. Hymettus at Athens.¹⁹ Still other sampled souvenirs would be nearly impossible to recognize as such in the archaeological record, even if they survived. A fragment of stone brought home as a memento from a visit to the Egyptian pyramids would appear to an archaeologist as just a piece of rock.

Despite these challenges, numerous commercially available objects survive that represented and reminded people of places, events, and people – in short, that could act as representative souvenirs. Some were designed very much as souvenirs in the commonly used modern sense, that is, as objects created to commemorate and celebrate a specific place or spectacle. Others evoked more generically a favored pastime, such as chariot racing, and need not have been purchased by somebody in attendance at a historical chariot race. It is impossible to know whether every object discussed in the following pages was viewed by its owner as a souvenir. All of these objects, however, had the potential to be used as souvenirs, and they would have shaped memories and knowledge of their represented subjects regardless of the intent of the purchaser and any subsequent owners. Moreover, the scale of their production, their patterns of distribution, their portability, and their economic accessibility suggest that in many cases their manufacturers intended this function.²⁰

Souvenirs, Mementos, Memorabilia

In the following pages, I use our Latin-derived terms for keepsakes – souvenir, memento, and memorabilia – more or less interchangeably to describe the Roman material. Drawing precise distinctions between these terms is difficult, because the objects they seek to define are conceptually rich in overlapping meanings. A souvenir, memento, or piece of memorabilia might be purchased, gifted, or taken from nature. It might be connected to a personal experience of its owner or associated with an event from history that owner has *not* experienced. Even objects that today we might categorize as branded merchandise, such as sports merchandise, can act as souvenirs of personal experience or historical persons.²¹ While acknowledging that our contemporary English definitions of the terms are not identical to each other, I have chosen to conflate them for two reasons. First, even today, souvenirs, mementos, memorabilia, and branded merchandise overlap considerably, and how one classifies an object often depends as much upon the intent of its manufacturer, purchaser, and/or owner as upon any inherent quality of the object itself. This slippage works well within ancient contexts too. Without firm object biographies for most artifacts and without the ability to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, it is seldom possible to make clear distinctions between categories such as souvenir and memorabilia – or between the numerous roles these objects could have fulfilled for their owners.

Second, terms such as souvenir and memorabilia become useful heuristic devices when liberated from overly narrow definitions; they help us tease out the extraordinary capacities of otherwise seemingly ordinary objects. The Roman objects in question were commercial objects intended to remind people of cities, monuments, events, celebrities, and experiences, whether

the beholder had encountered the represented subject in person or was envisioning it from the object alone. The term “souvenir” captures this essential aspect of their character. Roman souvenirs looked different and functioned differently in their historical context than modern souvenirs, but there are also striking similarities. It is a major contention of this book that, even if technically anachronistic, the term “souvenir” captures an essential element of many surviving objects from the Roman Empire that we too often overlook: namely, their capacity to enable possession of places and experiences and to permit wide participation in a shared cultural *koine*.²² Using the term “souvenir” encourages us not to classify the objects in question as purely decorative or purely religious, for example, but instead invites us to consider their ability to straddle multiple spheres of Roman life involving memory, knowledge, place, and identity.²³

DIRECT AND VICARIOUS SOUVENIRS AND POSSESSION BY PROXY

Romans cared deeply about visiting sites and leaving their mark. This desire manifests itself particularly evocatively in the numerous graffiti in Greek and Latin that they wrote on the Colossus of Memnon in the Theban necropolis in Luxor, Egypt. After suffering damage from an earthquake in 27 or 26 BCE, this fabled statue emitted a high-pitched sound at sunrise, which ancients believed to be the voice of Memnon himself. It was visited by travelers from around the Roman Empire, including civilian and military officials, artists, administrators, businessmen, religious pilgrims, and even emperors.²⁴ At Luxor, visitors claimed a proprietary stake in the monument by inscribing their name, marking and making visible to others their experience of the Colossus of Memnon. Such a graffito could then act as a proxy for the writers once they had traveled on, standing in for the departed tourists. One inscriber, a certain Maximus, even commanded future viewers to utter his name, thereby perpetuating his presence at the monument.²⁵ Such graffiti attest to the deep emotional ties people felt for places, monuments, and experiences in the Roman Empire.

While graffiti made people present in Luxor when they were in fact absent, souvenirs could make a place present when *it* was absent, acting as proxies for that which had been experienced but would no longer be possessable were it not for the souvenir. In many conceptions of the souvenir, scholars place authenticity of this “original” experience at stake. “We might say that this capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience is, in fact, exemplified by the souvenir. The souvenir distinguishes experience,” according to Stewart.²⁶ Souvenirs, however, do not help people recapture an essential, authentic experience, because no such experience exists. Many souvenirs evoke places we have never been or an event we did not directly experience. Thus, while souvenirs can be direct, as it were – that is, they can recall a place, person, or event their owner has experienced personally – they can also be

vicarious – representing something the beholder has not experienced personally. These vicarious souvenirs, as I will call them in the following pages, allow beholders to experience imaginatively something they have not experienced in person. The emphasis here is not on the souvenir itself, but on the beholder's relationship to its referent. The same object can act as a souvenir or vicarious souvenir, depending upon individual beholders and their personal experience.

Even in cases where a souvenir's owner has directly experienced that which the souvenir recalls, souvenirs reconstruct and reshape memories of places and experiences. Memories cannot, by definition, be frozen, as they instead exist in constant states of transformation.²⁷ As Stewart and Celeste Olalquiaga have argued, souvenirs exist on their own as partial objects; they become complete only when an owner creates a supplementary narrative of the experience the souvenir commemorates.²⁸ Stewart calls this process “the invention of narrative.”²⁹ In short, there is no “original” past experience that exists in the present. A souvenir creates new experiences and new memories, all of which are valid and authentic.

Viewing souvenirs as traces of supposedly authentic past experience – as mere reproductions of the “real thing” – has, I believe, often caused art historians to overlook these objects or dismiss them as serious objects of study, not unlike the ways in which Roman versions of Greek statues were for so long ignored as objects worthy of study in their own right in favor of the Greek “originals” they replicated.³⁰ Indeed, the words we often use to describe souvenirs today – knickknacks, tchotchkes, trinkets – betray a common but impoverished perception of such objects as incidental to social structures and relationships. Yet there is perhaps no greater testament to the authenticity of souvenirs – their genuine, real impact in people's lives – than their capacity to mediate relationships on multiple scales. People can purchase souvenirs as gifts for others, for example, which is how I came into possession of my snow globe of San Gimignano. Souvenirs can mediate highly personal relationships while also inserting people into broader social and economic relational networks involving, for example, manufacture and supply. Souvenirs, in short, can act as agents in social relationships, manifesting, extending, and distributing the intentions and agency of human actors.³¹

If souvenirs constructed narratives and personal relationships, they also, whether direct or vicarious, enabled people to possess places, events, or experiences by proxy. Key to souvenirs' ability to permit possession by proxy is their miniaturization of the represented subjects. There is no set scholarly definition of “miniature” when it comes to Roman objects; miniaturism, like beauty, may be in the eye of the beholder. Here, taking a human beholder as a benchmark, I consider things miniature that can be held and lifted in one's hands. For Stewart, a miniature invites us to contextualize it allusively and imaginatively, that is, to project a narrative on to it.³² As Rebecca Martin and

Stephanie Langin-Hooper have observed recently, miniature representations of a life-sized object demand intimate, sensorial, and highly personal interactions and, simultaneously, evoke pleasure and power. Miniatures combine “wonderment and accessibility.”³³ They enable proximity to things one would otherwise not be able to approach intimately; in turn, I would argue, this proximity allows ownership. When one could buy and hold in one’s hands a glass bottle in the form of the Tyche of Antioch, one could possess that statue and the city it symbolized without being physically present in Syria.³⁴

Annabel Wharton has shown how “proxies” of the city of Jerusalem have acted throughout history as a critical means of possessing that city – as important as literal possessions in the form of military takeovers.³⁵ In the Roman world, miniatures could afford possession of a place, person, or even a divinity, but they could also afford possession of and participation in cultural activities, pretensions, and identities.³⁶ Roman souvenirs acted as proxies, through which a wide range of people living in the Roman Empire, and even beyond, could possess the subjects they represented and thereby imbue those subjects with personal and shared social meaning. Jean Baudrillard argues that the exchange value of objects is socio-culturally determined but that objects, once sold, become singular because their owners recognize themselves in them.³⁷ It was not just the exchange value of a souvenir object that was socially determined, however, but also, for example, its physical form and appearance, and even, to an extent, the individual meaning an owner might attach to it. Roman souvenirs and memorabilia, therefore, simultaneously evoked individual and affective experience or enthusiasm and had wide-ranging social impacts that affected groups, not just individuals.³⁸

CIRCULATION AND CLASS

The Roman Empire’s economic and social networks resulted in an exceptionally robust culture of souvenirs. While visitors to Memphis in the Ptolemaic period could buy small bronze figurines as mementos and visitors to fourth-century BCE Athens could purchase miniature Panathenaic amphoras as souvenirs of the Panathenaic Games, the material phenomenon of souvenirs and memorabilia flourished in the Roman Empire on a scale not seen in ancient Egypt or Greece.³⁹ This burgeoning owes much to the increased possibility of travel in the Roman Empire, which was catalyzed by the empire’s common languages of Latin and *koine* Greek, political and bureaucratic unification, and standardized currency.⁴⁰

As a result, a wide variety of people traveled in the Roman Empire, for an equally wide variety of reasons.⁴¹ Merchants, bankers, and businessmen traveled for work, transporting raw materials, goods, and money. Civil administrators moved around on imperial business. Some Romans traveled for health