

Maria Grever, Carla van Boxtel, ***Verlangen naar tastbaar verleden. Erfgoed, onderwijs en historisch besef*** (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014, 151 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 462 6).

Heritage studies, as the much younger sibling of history, still has a lot of ground to cover. One of the insufficiently studied subjects, maintain the authors of *Verlangen naar tastbaar verleden. Erfgoed, onderwijs en historisch besef* (Longing for the tangible past: Heritage, education and historical awareness), Maria Grever and Carla van Boxtel, is heritage education. How is heritage – here used in the sense of material objects, monuments and historical narratives – integrated into Dutch educational programmes? What is the role of teachers and educational curators in the courses? How do students appreciate this confrontation with the past? On the basis of three NWO-financed research projects carried out at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, with the present book the authors aim to answer these questions and to provide theoretical and practical recommendations for teachers and educational curators involved in heritage education. Educational projects about slavery and the Holocaust provide the case studies. They provide numerous examples of heritage education in museums and on heritage sites – sometimes to explain how not to teach children and teenagers about the past, more often to show best practices – resulting in a kaleidoscopic impression of what is already available in the field of heritage education (one third of all Dutch museums offers heritage education).

However, the book is more than a handbook for teachers. In order to both advise teachers and museums curators on how to actively engage students in heritage education and transfer historical knowledge, Grever and Van Boxtel deem it necessary to first study the historiography of scholarly ideas on historical awareness. This was a happy choice, ensuring a fine balance between empirical examples and a theoretical overview of past and present academia on memory culture and historical awareness, featuring a who's who of key authors on the subject (Koselleck, Huizinga, Ginzburg, Ricoeur, Assmann et cetera).

The empirical examples are not limited to current practices of heritage education. Delving into the (recent) past, *Verlangen naar tastbaar verleden* reveals the way in which history education in the Netherlands has developed from the 1960s onwards. This research on half a century of history in the classroom and the changing perception of how pupils can be best taught about the past bears all the hallmarks of a cyclical development. In the sixties the rather nationalistic perspective and focus on encyclopaedic knowledge was

replaced by an emphasis on methodology, contemporary history and a broader range of subjects. However, not everyone was pleased with this far-reaching shift. Around the turn of the twenty-first century criticism mounted and a committee chaired by Piet de Rooij argued that the focus should once again be on historical knowledge and awareness. Pupils' familiarity with chronology and principal historical eras was advocated. These eras should be devoid of historical heroes, so as to avoid an uncritical canon. Fascinatingly, not long afterwards, Frits van Oostrom led another committee that established exactly such a Dutch canon. In response to the two contradictory reports that the two renowned professors produced, a typical compromise was reached by politicians and policy makers in 2010: future history education was to combine the historical eras of De Rooij with the canonical 'windows on the past' of Van Oostrom. These politicians and policy makers moreover, enforced schools encouraging 'bekendheid met en betrokkenheid bij uitingen van de Nederlandse cultuur' (familiarity with and commitment to expressions of Dutch culture).

In line with Grever's earlier contribution to the *Controverses rond de canon* (2006), the authors are critical of such contemporary developments. The various regional canons that followed the creation of the Dutch canon, reinforced identity politics, causing cities, neighbourhoods and provinces to compete with each other over the question of whose history was more important. Paradoxically, while academic historians have unmasked the nationalist framework as an ideological instrument, the world beyond academia seems to prefer a presentation of the past through a nationalistic lens. This clearly bothers the authors. While politicians and policy makers conveniently assume that canons and heritage education improve social cohesion and hence strengthen a shared Dutch identity, the reality is far more complex. What children and teenagers understand and remember of a visit to an historical museum differs greatly. While one child feels transported back into the past, another is offended by what he or she witnesses. A third pupil might be indifferent to (or quite simply bored by) the installation or exhibition. This also means that the focus in the heritage branch on 'experience' – the authors do not exaggerate when they speak of the 'experience paradigm' – is unsatisfactory for audiences and historians alike. What works for some, does not work for others. It is one of the most important conclusions of the book, which should, if adhered to, change heritage policies in the Netherlands.

There are more problems with this single-minded emphasis on the experience of the past. The authors claim firstly that the reasons why heritage sites and museums often choose a presentation that aims to involve audiences by means of heritage entertainment, is not necessarily geared towards the creation of historical awareness or understanding; more often the reason is commercial. Grever and Van Boxtel warn of the effects of over-commercialised

presentations of the past and associated (ethnic) stereotypes. They advocate 'multi-perspectivity' with, for instance exhibitions on slavery enabling pupils to associate with all protagonists, be it the slave trader, plantation owner or a slave. A second problem the authors point out is the fact that this unilateral focus on the experience of the past – which is all too easy with the many multi-media instruments available nowadays – automatically means an emphasis on bridging the time gap instead of highlighting the differences between the past and the present. Huizinga already mentioned the importance in the process of understanding the past of both recognition of and detachment from the past. In other words, while it is important for the creation of historical awareness to relate to the past by empathising with the past (more recently coined the museological 'fast food' as this often involves an 'experience of the past' through heritage entertainment), historical, cognitive distance ('slow food') is just as important.

Although it is often hard to disagree with the authors, their thesis and the recommendations are not always sufficiently grounded in (discernible) data. Many of the recommendations oppose an over-commercialised presentation of the past, but we want to know exactly why such a presentation is harmful? Equally, it may seem evident that when history touches on the lives of students it is better to work with assignments that tap into their creativity rather than only their cognition; however, which research demonstrates this is indeed so, and would the research perhaps have had a different outcome if different case studies had been used? Slave trade and the Holocaust are heavily politicised and very emotionally laden subjects. It might well be that if pupils are taught about other epochs and historical themes (sedentary life during the Neolithic period, or the medieval guilds) very different teaching methods would be effective. One wonders moreover, whether the five concluding recommendations are hands-on enough for teachers. The last one – the recommendation to improve the content, didactics and quality of heritage education – is a case in point. At the same time it must be stressed that this is a book that offers far more than just recommendations, and not only to teachers. This is heritage studies reaching maturity.

Hanneke Ronnes, University of Amsterdam