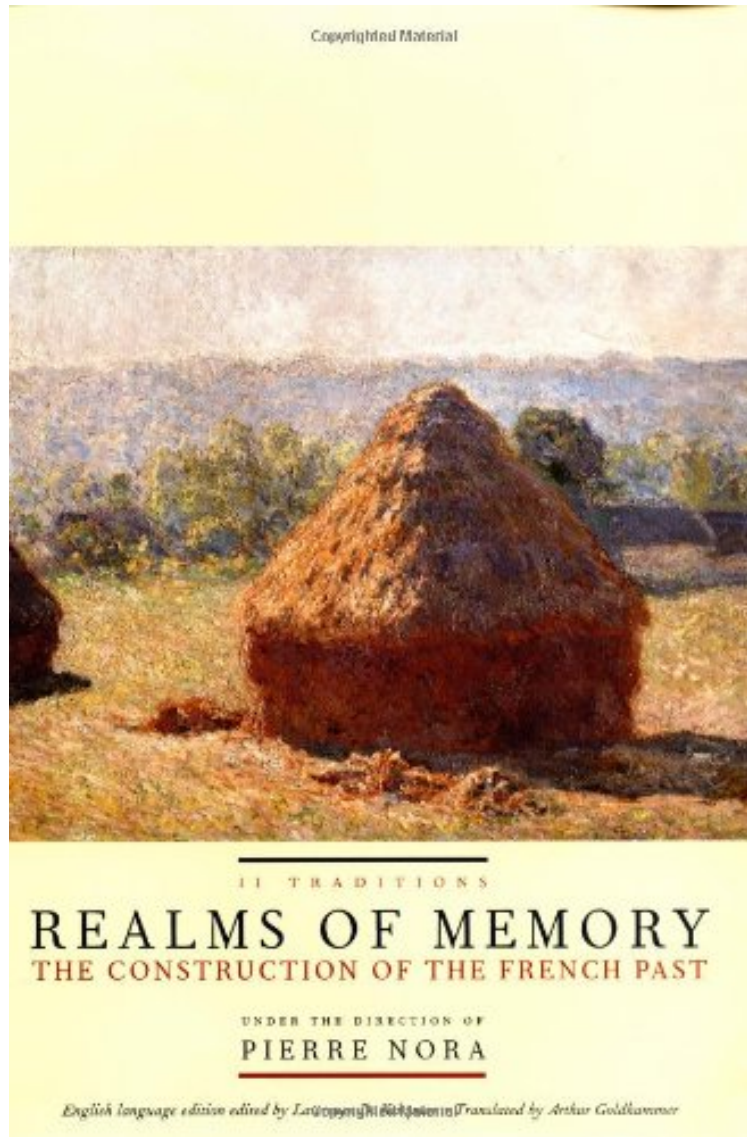


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From Columbia University Press : Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 2- Traditions before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 2- Traditions:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Learning the Meaning of "France," and What it Means to be "French" By Ray This acclaimed work of the 1980's and 1990's, which took over a decade to assemble and is composed

of contributions by scores of expert authors, sets out to describe how the French people have "constructed" their history through symbols, allusions, and associations, and then have subsequently shifted that constructed memory into the modern public consciousness. The series, which took up seven volumes in the original French, has been routinely described as "monumental," and there can be little doubt that this description is completely correct due to its size, scope, and coverage. But it is not just its size and scope that make the work "monumental." This is a set that is also superbly written by authors who have uniquely and expert knowledge of the subject matter, and the choice of topics, and the depth into which each is examined, easily makes this a de-facto standard work for anyone today wishing to have a true understanding of how the French themselves define what it means to be "French." It is certainly Pierre Nora's magnum opus, and if you possess anything more than a passing interest in French history, "Frenchness," and French semiotics, you will not want to pass on this work. The current English translation here is, unfortunately, taken from a subset of the original seven volumes, reduced to three large volumes. Nora defends the reduction as maintaining the spirit of the original, in spite of the collection's selection list from the larger original. He may be right. But it is nevertheless unfortunate that the complete set was not translated into English. But, on the bright side--and indeed, it is bright--the translation here by Arthur Goldhammer is absolutely superb, with virtually no trace of the grammatical oddity that can occur when translating between French and English, and vice-versa. The text reads as smoothly, accurately, and clearly as though it was originally written in English (a characteristic of most of Goldhammer's acclaimed French to English translations). The content is absolutely superb. Volume 1 starts off on politics, minority religions, and divisions of time and space, which probably doesn't mean anything when you first hear it, but once you read the preface and get into the content, the rationale for these choices of topics and chapters is quintessentially French. (For example, why do the French overwhelmingly regard the Gauls as their ancestors, yet rarely have any historical landscape markers to the Gauls in a country replete with historical signposts in every village? And we thought it was not the Gauls, but the Franks, who were the progenitors of the French nation! So, is it Gauls, or Franks? And what about the belief that the political "left" and "right" originated in the French Revolution, yet earlier references in French works seem to identify this concept as previously existing in England? And what about the tension between Gaulists vs. Communists, Catholics vs. Seculars, French vs. Foreigners, the Ancient Regime vs. the Revolution?) Volume 2, the book reviewed here, focuses on French traditions. The text is broken into three parts: Models (the land, the cathedral, and the court), Books (covering some key books by the Ozoufs, La Blanche, Proust, Guiomar, and Nora himself), and Singularities (covering the Tour de France, street names, monuments, and so on). This makes volume two of the three volume English language set a bit more abstract than the first and third volumes, as volume one covers key historical events and volume three some of the most famous aspects of French identity today. Having said that, it probably does make sense, however, to read these in the listed order, starting with volume one. (But this set, being an edited series, has been written in a manner that allows entry at virtually any point, as long as you understand the purpose and approach of the set.) But this brief listing of topics should in no way lead you to believe that Nora's book is typical "fare" when it comes to books about France. This series is about the realms of memory, the manner in which memories, beliefs, conceptions, and views are constructed of France by the French themselves. Some of these--many of these--are CONSTRUCTED memories, and they have come to mean things today that might not have been apparent in their original contexts. This is a book as fascinating to read as it is beneficial to learning, and it really should be on your list if you wish to understand France as the French views it. And although the volumes can be quite expensive, you can occasionally find a few copies in the used market in very good shape at a good price. I highly recommend this series as one that is fascinating, complex, evocative, and unusual. An easy five stars for what must be considered a monumental and influential work.

This text is the second of three volumes looking at the history of France. This volume examines how and why events and figures become part of a people's collective memory. It emphasizes the shared aspects of French history and cultural instrumental in the development of a national identity. It includes 14 essays on subjects ranging from Proust's Remembrance of Things Past to the Tour de France.

"This unusual book deals fascinatingly with everything from the creation of the rousing anthem "La Marseillaise" to the changing role of Joan of Arc in France's collective memory. Even the Eiffel Tower shines forth in surprising new facets." -- "Chicago Tribune" "A magisterial attempt to define what it is to be French." -- "Times Literary Supplement" "A magnificent achievement.... [The essays included] are the high-carat jewels of the project." -- "The New Republic" "This is an indispensable guide to understanding France and the French. As usual, Arthur Goldhammer's translation is superb." -- "Foreign Affairs" "A magnificent achievement.... The essays included are the high-carat jewels of the project." -- "The New Republic" "A magisterial attempt to define what it is to be French." -- Times Literary Supplement "A magnificent achievement.... [The essays included] are the high-carat jewels of the project." -- The New Republic "This is an indispensable guide to understanding France and the French. As usual, Arthur Goldhammer's translation is superb." -- Foreign Affairs "This unusual book deals fascinatingly with everything from the creation of the rousing anthem "La Marseillaise" to the changing role of Joan of Arc in France's collective

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