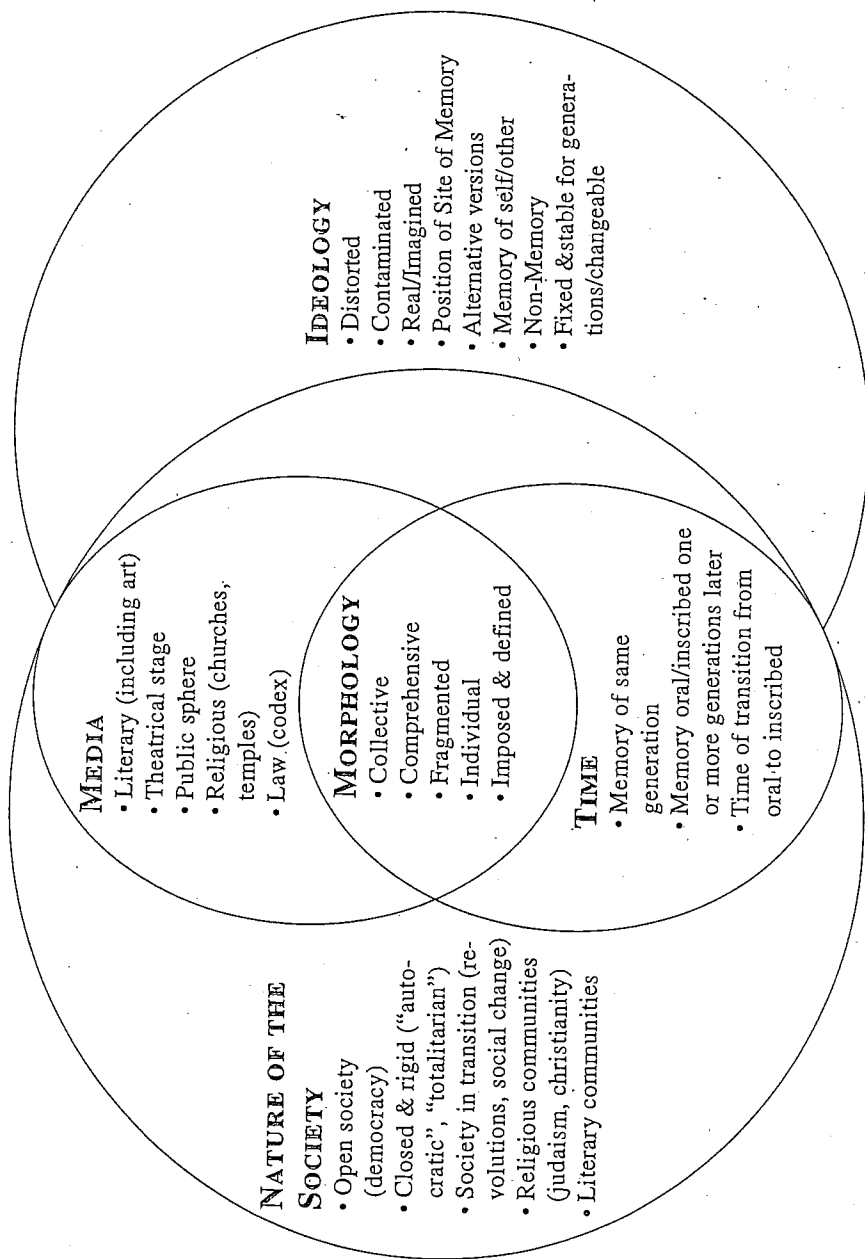


## Public Historical Memory in Antiquity



## Theological Memory Distortion in the Jesus Tradition:

## A Study in Social Memory Theory

ANTHONY LE DONNE

In 1901, Wrede wrote, "[T]he real texture of [Mark's] presentation becomes apparent only when to the warp of these general historical ideas is added a strong thread of thoughts that are dogmatic in quality. In part they merge with the historical motifs and in part they stand alongside and between them."<sup>1</sup> I know of no historical Jesus scholar that would today disagree with Wrede on this point. Nor should the present paper give the impression that Wrede was here misguided. However, what we may take issue with is Wrede's following conclusion. Wrede was convinced that Mark's story was too burdened with dogmatic interests to offer "a historical view of the real life of Jesus."<sup>2</sup> Of course, Wrede's thesis was much more ambitious than this quote conveys, but this is an important quote nonetheless because it betrays the historical-positive notion that reliable historical data is that which is undistorted by interpretative agendas; as if the ideal historical method should attempt to filter out interpretations and creative perspectives until only facts remain. Of course, few today think this is totally possible or advisable, so the notion takes the following form: the less the data is distorted by interpretation, the more reliable it is. This notion underlies much of HJR. My paper will suggest that recent developments in the study of memory will show that theological interpretation can and should be expected at a very early stage of the Jesus tradition.

In the past twenty years philosophers of history have adopted a theory called Social Memory first developed by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1925.<sup>3</sup> The present study will not go into great detail as to Halbwachs' original theory as it is less important than what contemporary historiographers have done with his theory. These would include Jan Assmann, Pierre Nora and Barry Schwartz.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (trans. J. C. G. Greig; London: James Clarke & Co., 1971 [01]) 130-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1925); *On Collective Memory* (trans. and ed. Lewis A. Coser; Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. B. Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory", *Social Forces* 61.2 (1982): 374-402; J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992); *idem*, "Ancient Egyptian Antijudaism: A Case of Distorted Memory," in *Memory Distortion* (ed. Schachter; Cambridge &

However the key to understanding SM both for Halbwachs and for more contemporary Social Memory theorists is a phenomenon called localization.

Halbwachs' conception of memory was hinged on the process of localization. In this process, mental images associated with the past are anchored to specific mental frames of reference. By themselves, these images are abstract and incomplete until they are set firmly within a context of meaning. These contexts (or frames) of meaning form fragmentary ideas into complete and unified memories. Functionally, this process reinforces images associated with the past by localizing them within contexts that are meaningful and intelligible to the present train of thought.

Social Memory theorists argue that most of our memories are context-dependant. Most often, our memories are spurred by external social and environmental cues. This is why amnesia patients are often advised to return to a familiar environment for recovery. External environments prompt the memories required to operate within them. Fentress and Wickham call this the "present continuum" of memory sequencing. In their words, "The external environment itself takes over the job of ordering memory into a sequence: we remember things in the order in which they habitually appear." In these cases, the context for memory localization is the perception of the external. In order to remember images and information once we leave these contexts the images must be internalized conceptually. This becomes what Social Memory theorists refer to as conceptualization. This is done by localizing the information within internal conceptual sequences. These sequences are best remembered when they are categorized, ordered and encoded within frames of meaning. In this way, memory could be characterized as a process of conceptually locating images associated with the past within frames of meaning evoked by the present sequence of thought.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, localization has two equally important functions: (1) to reinforce the mnemonic capacity of information, and (2) to shape and give meaning to perceived images.

What I consider the central importance of Social Memory for historiography is its ability to analyze seminal perceptions of historical events and figures. Fore-shadowed Vico and coming to fruition with Collingwood, the idea that has won

London: Harvard University Press, 1995) 365–78; idem, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zehn Studien* (Munich: Beck, 2000); P. Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (ed. Thomas Butler; Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 97–114; J. Fentress, and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); M. Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History," in *Memory Distortion* (ed. Schachter; Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995) 329–45; D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); P. Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, (ed. Kritzman; trans. Goldhammer; New York: Columbia Press, 1996); M. Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in *Memory Distortion* (ed. Schachter; Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 346–64; Y. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 78.

the day is that the historian's intent to interpret is the very motivation and guiding principle of his/her research. What Social Memory has added to this picture is that historical interpretations do not begin with the historian, but within the perceptions, memories and articulations of the first witnesses. If this is so, then the historian's task is not simply to sift through the data looking for facts (from which they will create their own interpretations), but to account for these early interpretations by explaining the perceptions and memories that birthed them. Social Memory does not provide all of the tools necessary for this task, but, in my estimation, it provides a methodological step in the right direction. Since history is largely built on testimony which has been localized within social dialogue, a better understanding of how memories are shaped can aid our analysis of this data. In my opinion, Social Memory provides a middle ground between Historical Positivism (which places no emphasis on the historian's intent to interpret) and the New Historicism (which overemphasizes the historian's interpretive role).

Now, it must be made clear that the phrases Social Memory and Collective Memory are simply metaphors which help historiographers describe certain aspects of history which share traits with the phenomenon of individual memory.<sup>6</sup> With this in mind the balance of this paper will only speak of collective memory with an eye toward historiography.

Perhaps an illustration of localization will help at this point. For instance, when one observes an academic lecture, that person's memory functions well enough for their own interests. If the lecturer says something that happens to overlap with one of the observer's own interests, then their memory of the lecture will be reinforced by that previously established mental frame. If someone were to ask the observer about the lecture a day later, they would probably most easily recall those details which fit within the frame of meaning that was evoked by those details. In this case, the memory of that lecture has been localized within an already established frame of meaning. Moreover, *both* the frame of meaning and the new information are reinforced by this process. Unfortunately for the lecturer, a month later, most people will not remember anything about the paper except the title – and more realistically, not even that, maybe a fragmentary phrase from the title. Perhaps a single phrase from the title will become a mental suitcase in which to carry vague images of the lecturer's face, voice and topic. In this way, language itself acts as a frame of meaning. And if the observer remembers nothing at all about the lecture a single phrase might be more easily recollected. If the observer has

<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to point out that the expressions 'Social Memory' and 'Collective Memory' have slightly different nuances: Halbwachs used the qualifier *sociaux* to describe the ways that group ideologies inform individual memories. Collective Memory, rather, was used to connote memories shared and passed down by groups. As these concepts are given to overlap, the terms 'collective' and 'social' are often used synonymously in current discussions. In fact, they are currently used synonymously with such frequency that their nuances vary from author to author. Of late, another term, 'Cultural Memory' has gained considerable currency. The implied distinction here simply broadens the scope of Collective Memory.

kept the abstract or taken notes and they review these, their memory will be reinforced and eventually almost entirely localized within these artifacts. Or perhaps they discussed the lecture with a colleague over coffee and this interaction will provide another frame of reference to overlap with the physical artifacts and thus that lecture will be doubly reinforced in their memory.

So in this example we've seen four types of localization (1) previously established frames of meaning associated with your interest, (2) the capacity of language to act as a suitcase of meaning (3) data reinforced and localized within surviving artifacts, and (4) frames of reference created by social interaction.

One more brief word on Social Memory: In order for images associated with the past to make sense in the present state of mind, the localization process must reinforce memories with plausibility and integrity. Since the actual past can not be conjured up to verify such reinforcements, the imagination is held in check by the combined memories of the social group of which it is a part. If a particular individual memory is not rendered plausibly in social dialogue, it will be corrected and in some cases rejected. Therefore, as an individual memory becomes a collective memory through this dialogue it is corrected and completed by previously established collective memories. Social groups, therefore, stabilize individual memories by providing parameters for their formation. As Halbwachs conceived it, Collective Memory is an intricate complex of social norms, interpretations and attitudes which spur and constrain this imaginative process. Thus collective memory creates what Halbwachs called "social frameworks" in which individual memories must be localized if they are to be meaningful to society.

So the next question to be asked is this: Does the localization process have the capacity to distort one's memory? The answer to this is not only yes, but always.

### What is Memory Distortion?

The study of Social Memory presupposes that memory is not merely the cognitive preservation of past events. Rather, as Michael Schudson explains, "memory is a process of encoding information, storing information, and strategically retrieving information, and there are social, psychological, and historical influences at each point."<sup>7</sup> Borrowing from the fields of Neurology and Psychology, Social Memory theorists use the term ['distortion'] to mark difference between memory of the past and past actuality.<sup>8</sup> Granted, the phrase might evoke the notion of brain washing, or false memory. These topics certainly have a place in this discussion. However, these are only extreme and rare manipulations of memory distortion.

<sup>7</sup> Schudson, "Dynamics," 348; cf. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 1–40.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Schachter, "Memory Distortion: History and Current Status," in *Memory Distortion* (ed. Schachter; Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995) 1–46.

Memory distortion is most often utilized by historians to show the relationship between Social Memory and political power.<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, political regimes have been and are in the business of the intentional distortion of the past as a means of controlling public opinion. Yet, memory distortion is not necessarily malevolent,<sup>10</sup> nor does it always need to be consciously strategic in nature.<sup>11</sup> Returning briefly to the concept of false memory – since we are using memory as a metaphor for history it may be useful to liken brain washing to revisionist-history. Like false memory, revisionist-history is only an extreme form of memory distortion, and is by no means distortion's most prevalent manifestation.<sup>12</sup> *It is necessary to shake the negative connotations from the word "distortion" in order to understand its necessary and beneficial function.* Distortion is, most commonly, a natural and benign function of memory selection.

Memory distortion, in its most prevalent form, can be likened to the convex shape of a lens that receives and refracts light by the parameters of its design. When performing its proper function, a telescope lens distorts an imaged object in order to magnify it. Depending on the quality of the lens, the viewer is able to perceive an approximate distortion of distant objects not visible to the naked eye. The fact that the lens does not "report" the object's image exactly how it was received is exactly its value. In the same way, memory distorts the past to render it intelligible to the present. This analogy is perhaps idealized; some of our memories are more like kaleidoscopes, distorting uninteresting shapes into interesting abstractions. Yet most memories must lie somewhere between these two models. If these two models represent two extremes of a spectrum (Telescopic on one end, Kaleidoscopic on the other), memories are closer to the former, more "objective", model of the telescope. This must be so because memory's primary function is to render the past (which is invisible to the naked eye) intelligible to the present. Such intelligibility demands an acceptable approximation of the past to maintain a certain level of diachronic continuity with the present. Our memories demand a high degree of continuity in order to tie all of our shifting frames of meaning together. It is the integrity of this chain that determines its reliability. I can account for where and who I am now (and why) by analyzing the continuity of this chain.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Assmann, "Ancient Egyptian Antijudaism," 365–78; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 127–37; Kammen, "Distortion," 329–45; J. Miller, *One, by One, by One: Facing the Holocaust* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 9; Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 616–618.

<sup>10</sup> Kammen, "Distortion," 329.

<sup>11</sup> Schudson, "Dynamics," 351.

<sup>12</sup> The designation 'memory distortion' may also conjure notions of 'false memory' that have been made famous by cases of false allegations of child abuse. In these extreme cases, hypnosis and suggestive role-play have spurred false memory. Aside from demonstrating how influential external contexts can be on memory, these extreme cases should not be appealed to as common representations of distortion. For a study of this nature see Ceci, "False Beliefs" in *Memory Distortion* (ed. Schachter; Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995) 91–125.

Even so, all memory is selective. Matters of emphasis, perspective and interpretation are the very basis for memory's existence. It is simply impossible to know every detail about any object. Or put another way, it is impossible to see an object from every vantage-point. In the same way, it is equally impossible to recollect an object without emphasizing certain details, or to recall an object without perspective or interpretation. With this in mind, Michael Kammen relents, "[We] do not know where veracity ends and distortion begins."<sup>13</sup> Yet this statement perhaps betrays a false dichotomy between "veracity" and distortion. It must be stated in no uncertain terms that memory is distortion. This is so regardless of any claims to veracity. If the criteria for veracity were defined by a given memory's lack of distortion all discussion about the past would be rendered futile. Schudson aptly describes the issue at stake: "The notion that memory can be "distorted" assumes that there is a standard by which we can judge or measure what a veridical memory must be."<sup>14</sup> Assmann muses, "[T]he notion 'distorted memory' seems to presuppose that there is something like 'undistorted memory.'" <sup>15</sup> Schudson concludes that such a standard is nonexistent since "[d]istortion is inevitable. Memory is distortion since memory is invariably and inevitably selective."<sup>16</sup>

With this in view, it is necessary to examine further the types and roles of distortion in memory and history. Schudson suggests four categories of distortion:<sup>17</sup> (1) distanciation: the tendency for memories to become vague or for details to be forgotten; (2) instrumentalization: the tendency for memories to be reinterpreted to serve the present better; (3) conventionalization: the tendency for memories to conform to socio-typical experiences; and (4) narrativization: the tendency for memories to be conventionalized through the constraints of story telling. And I would add a fifth, (5) articulation: the tendency for memories to conform to language conventions.

In my opinion, distortion research can aid New Testament studies in several ways. For example, studies such as early church commemoration and the development of religious identity might be greatly aided by utilizing Social Memory theory. However, in the interest of this paper, I will focus presently on memory distortion as manifested in the fourth and fifth categories listed, these being narrativization and articulation. Granted, all five categories are given to overlap, but given my limited parameters, I will try to limit my focus to these only.

<sup>13</sup> Kammen, "Distortion," 341.

<sup>14</sup> Schudson, "Dynamics," 346.

<sup>15</sup> Assmann, "Ancient Egyptian Antijudaism," 366.

<sup>16</sup> Schudson, "Dynamics," 348; however, Schudson (361) rejects the notion that such a position demands an agnosticated approach to memory (or history). Rather he asserts, "If interpretation were free-floating, entirely manipulable to serve present interests, altogether unanchored by a bedrock body of unshakable evidence, controversies over the past would ultimately be uninteresting. But in fact they are interesting. They are compelling. And they are gripping because people trust that a past we can to some extent know and can to some extent come to agreement about really happened."

<sup>17</sup> Schudson, "Dynamics," 348.

### Articulation and Narrativization

Jan Assmann conveys a central tenant of Social Memory theory by positing, the "past can never be preserved in a pure, complete, and authentic form but must always be reconstructed from [a particular] viewpoint and within the semantic frames of a changing present."<sup>18</sup> The "semantic frames" to which Assmann refers are perhaps the most influential of Halbwachs' previously mentioned "social frameworks." This is so because memories are most often localized within language conventions.

Crucially important here is that when the memory is translated into language, this articulation must conform to the accepted semantic frameworks of its context. Thus issues of vocabulary, syntax, grammar, metaphor and genre act as social frameworks. The very nature of communication demands that memory is rendered intelligibly. Thus the transition from memory to language involves not only translation, but also interpretation. The meaning and significance of the memory is formed (and reformed) by the context(s) of articulation.

However, as we delve more deeply, it becomes apparent that the early stages of articulation not only aid a memory's reception into society, but language also acts as a hermeneutic for the memory's conveyor. Along these lines, Halbwachs recognized the essential interdependence between memory, perception and language. For Halbwachs, being able "to give names to objects and to distinguish one from the other by means of their names" is an integral part "of understanding their significance."<sup>19</sup> Simply put, "speech is an instrument of comprehension,"<sup>20</sup> "Hence verbal conventions constitute what is at the same time the most elementary and the most stable framework of collective memory."<sup>21</sup> When articulating memory into a social setting, unconsciously, memory conforms to patterns familiar to the present group.<sup>22</sup> In this way, stereotypical patterns of communication have the capacity to shape memory. When such memories take the form of stories, the process of narrativization accompanies articulation.

Gedi and Elam helpfully draw out a passage from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to demonstrate this how narrativization has the capacity to distort memory:

[Rostov] described the Schoen Graben affair exactly as men who have taken part in battles always describe them [...], as they have heard them described by others, and as sounds well [...]. He began his story with the intention of telling everything exactly as it happened, but imperceptibly, unconsciously and inevitably he passed into falsehood.

<sup>18</sup> Assmann, "Ancient Egyptian Antijudaism," 366.

<sup>19</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 127.

Tolstoy goes on to explain that the story that Rostov conveyed was exactly what "his listeners expected to hear."<sup>23</sup> Granted this is a fictive example, but the implication is that story-telling has the ability to distort memories unbeknownst to the story-teller. According to Elam and Gedi, this is so because stories follow stereotypical patterns which, "are an indispensable part of our cognitive mechanism, rational patterns according to which our impressions are modeled."<sup>24</sup>

Functionally, the term narrativization is not dissimilar to the term "fictionalization" referred to by Bengt Holmberg in his critique of Dunn's *Jesus Remembered*.<sup>25</sup> Holmberg here borrows the idea from Jens Schröter.<sup>26</sup> However, I prefer Schudson's term because the fictionalizing process does not render a memory-story fiction, it merely renders the memory to look like fiction does. That is to say that both memory-stories and fictional stories are narratives. So I think the designation narrativization more aptly describes the process under discussion.

Narrativization not only shapes our memories as we retrieve them in story-telling, but it also provides a grid by which we interpret our environment and our role therein. And in the same way that a telescope lens often goes unnoticed when performing its function, the grid provided by narrativization is most prevalent on a subconscious level. Lowenthal insightfully posits that "stories appear to us as just a natural way of thinking about things, a way of ordering our knowledge [...] and representing them in our minds." He continues:

The fact that we assimilate stories so readily, accepting them as representations of reality [...] renders their function as containers of memories all but imperceptible. [...] Yet the function of memory in stories is all the more important for being so largely invisible. Stories do more than represent particular events in a general fashion. Stories provide us with a set of stock explanations which underlie our predispositions to interpret reality in the ways that we do.<sup>27</sup>

As such, pasts worth remembering are so because they bear resemblance to interesting plots, characters and settings in our mind's eye. These resemblances function as "mnemotechniques", or vehicles for memory. This is explicated by Fentress and Wickham:

[A] plot functions as a complex memory image, and learning a repertoire of plots is equivalent to learning a large-scale mnemotechnique that permits the ordering, retention, and

<sup>23</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (trans. Rosemary Edwards; Harmondsworth, 1971) 279.

<sup>24</sup> Gedi, Noa and Yigal Elam. "Collective Memory – What is it?" *History and Memory* 8 (1996): 30–50 [46].

<sup>25</sup> Bengt Holmberg, "Questions of Method in James Dunn's *Jesus Remembered*", *JSNT* 26.4 (2004) 445–57.

<sup>26</sup> Jens Schröter, "Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus und der Charakter historischer Erkenntnis" in Andreas Lindemann (ed.), *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus* (BETL, 158; Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 2001) 207–54 [esp 228–33].

<sup>27</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 223.

subsequent transmission of a vast amount of information. [...] Internal contexts, such as narrative genres, exist as the typical patterns in which we experience and interpret events of all kinds. Accommodating remembered facts into predisposed internal contexts may impose a radical reordering of that memory at the outset.<sup>28</sup>

Narrativization is therefore highly distortive but also highly mnemonic and therefore functionally vital.

With this in mind, the impact that metanarratives and archetypes have on perception is paramount in their distortive and mnemonic capabilities. *The climactic moments of our lives are measured against, and interpreted by, the climactic moments of great stories and indeed history itself.*

Peter Burke observes that, "In early modern Europe, many people read the Bible so often that it had become part of them and its stories organized their perceptions and their memories." Burke tells a story which provides a compelling instance of typological narrativization.

Johann Kessler was a Swiss Protestant pastor of the first generation. In his memoirs he tells the story of how, as he puts it, 'Martin Luther met me on the road to Wittenburg'. He and a companion stayed the night in the Black Bear at Jena, where they shared a table with a man who was dressed as a knight but was reading a book [...] and prepared to talk about theology. 'We asked, "Sir can you tell us whether Dr Martin Luther is in Wittenburg just now, or where else he may be?"' He replied, "I know for certain that he is not at Wittenburg at this moment" ... "My boys," he added, "What do they think about this Luther in Switzerland?"' The students still don't get the point until the landlord drops a hint. My own point, however, is that consciously or unconsciously, Kessler has structured his story on a biblical prototype, that of the disciples who met Christ on the road to Emmaus.<sup>29</sup>

Burke also points out that the autobiography of John Bunyan "made use of schemata; Bunyan's account of his conversion is clearly modeled, consciously or unconsciously – it is difficult to say which – on the conversion of St. Paul as described in the *Acts of the Apostles*."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, when reading Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* one is hard-pressed to find a single autobiographical account without allusion to biblical characters or motifs.

Notice that at this point in the discussion the terms typology, archetype, and metanarrative have become necessary to describe memory. Admittedly, these are normally employed in a literary sense and therefore might confuse the issue. However, I can think of no better way to describe the narrativization process.

<sup>28</sup> Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 72, 73–4.

<sup>29</sup> Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (ed. Thomas Butler; Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 103.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

### Metanarrative and Typology

Metanarratives are stories that are so culturally significant and so well known that they become standards of significance, by which all similar stories are measured and interpreted. It is this interpretive process that elevates certain key characters of such stories to the status of archetypes. Typology is a means of interpreting the roles of relatively new characters (in the narratives of story and history) through the precedents set by great characters of metanarratives.

In the cases of Bunyan and Kessler the narrativization of their personal stories were localized within, and given meaning by, the legendary stories of their religious heritage. Here we witness the marriage of individual memories to historical narratives. As seen previously, the localization of individual memories into social frameworks is facilitated by conceptual reinforcement. As this study has suggested, the remembering process most commonly disguises such frameworks. Narrativization is most commonly as unnoticed as the telescope lens. However, as in the examples of Kessler and Bunyan, the climactic moments of personal stories often require uncommon and grand localizations in order to give appropriate meaning to these memories. At such times, the metanarratives which have shaped one's worldview are manifested much more recognizably. The narrativized grid-lines are laid bare, and beg to be recognized. This is the function of typology – it is a recognizable appeal to the metanarratives and archetypes that have shaped a given worldview.

Further, this kind of grand narrativization is not only limited to religious experience. Zerubavel has recognized a similar typological manifestation in times of national / political crisis. She points to a recent episode in Israel's history (1920) where accounts of the battle at Tel Hai had immortalized a one-armed military hero named Yoseph Trumpeldor.<sup>31</sup> Zerubavel explains that a group of settlements in Northern Galilee were under siege but successfully defended by a small band of soldiers led by Trumpeldor. The victory was so welcomed by the public that "the outpouring of oral and written literature that began soon after the [battle] – speeches, articles, poems, and songs – reveals the frequent use of the term *aggada* (legend) and *aggadati* (legendary)."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the oral and written literature about Trumpeldor often created a link between him and the famous Jewish heroes of Antiquity. Trumpeldor was called the "great-grandson of the ancient heroes" and described as "a soldier in Bar Kokhba's army who has come to us from previous generations." [... It was written that] "there is not much difference between two thousand years ago – Judah and Maccabee and Bar Kokhba, and one year ago – Yoseph, the one armed."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Y. Zerubavel, "The Historical the Legendary and the Incredible: Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (ed. J. R. Gillis; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994) 105–125.

<sup>32</sup> Zerubavel, "The Historical the Legendary and the Incredible," 107.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

Zerubavel cites many such associations with ancient lore and evaluates:

Trumpeldor's presentation as the modern reincarnation of the ancient heroes elevated him beyond the immediate historical situation and assured him an honorable position in the pantheon of Jewish heroes. The "legendary framework" served to legitimize the chronological incongruity of condensing two periods, historically separated by two thousand years, into a single heroic lore.<sup>34</sup>

As Zerubavel has alluded, the conflation of tradition with contemporary history does not only run in one direction. Such implementation of sacred texts can become a powerfully distortive lens when interpreting the traditions themselves. When Trumpeldor's generation evoked Bar Kokhba to interpret his character, they inevitably reinterpreted Bar Kokhba in light of Trumpeldor. Israel had to reinvent its tradition (however slightly) to accommodate for the new addition of Trumpeldor. However, as Zerubavel argues, the invention of tradition is not free from the constraints of the older tradition(s). The successful invention of tradition requires a close proximity to the older tradition so that its reception into the society is a smooth one. If an invention is too radical it will be largely rejected. An invented past will fail if the "society becomes aware of [its] fabricated character. Such awareness may lead to doubts about the appropriateness and validity of [the invention's] commemoration of the past."<sup>35</sup> Thus, depending on how central a collective memory is to a cultural identity, the conditions by which a tradition can be reinvented are particularly narrow. Innovative reinterpretation of tradition is only successful to the extent to which it is accepted.

In addition to Zerubavel's comments, it should also be pointed out that the typological appeal to Bar Kokhba *et al.* reinforced a heroic memory into Israel's contemporary consciousness. And inversely, the memory of Trumpeldor was localized into the more established collective memory of Israel's heroes. Thus the memory of both figures was reinforced by this typological conflation. The example of Trumpeldor is an apt demonstration of the role that narrativization plays in the historiographical consideration of early Jesus tradition.

### The Typological Jesus Tradition

One of the primary characteristics of recent HJR has been the attempt to explain Jesus' sayings, actions and possible self-understanding by casting his figure against the backdrop of Hebrew Bible metanarrative. By accounting for how contemporary Jews understood and employed certain Scriptures, a great deal of light has been shed on Jesus' religious and political context. And this picture has been filled in to a large extent by the publication of the Qumran library. The study of Hebrew Bible (HB) narratives, proof texts, motifs, and prophecy (and how these were interpreted in the first

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Zerubavel, "The Historical the Legendary and the Incredible," 106.

century) has become a key for interpreting Jesus. Moreover, one's assessment of how Jesus and Christianity related to such scriptures has become a hermeneutic for judging the historicity of the Gospel accounts. Consider the following quotes by two leaders in historical Jesus research, John Dominic Crossan and E.P. Sanders.

Crossan writes:

The individual units, general sequences, and overall frames of the passion-resurrection stories are so linked to prophetic fulfillment that the removal of such fulfillment leaves nothing but the barest facts ... biblical models and scriptural precedents have controlled the story to the point that without them nothing is left but the brutal fact of crucifixion itself.<sup>36</sup>

Sanders writes:

The more parallels there were between Jesus and characters or prophecies in Hebrew scripture, the more likely Matthew, Mark and Luke were to invent still more. They may have reasoned that if there were six similarities, there probably had been a seventh. I think that there is no doubt that they did invent some, though the possibility of overlaps, or of Jesus' own conscious imitation of scriptural types, means that we must often be uncertain.<sup>37</sup>

Crossan estimates a very minimal historical core filled in by fiction inspired by "biblical models and scriptural precedents." Sanders, on the other hand, estimates that a more substantial historical core has inspired other embellishments echoing HB parallels. For Sanders, such embellishments only echo parallels which are already thought to exist between HB narratives and Jesus' conscious imitation of these.

I would argue that when Social Memory theory is applied the Jesus tradition, we are compelled to affirm Sanders' assessment over and against that of Crossan for two reasons.

Firstly, as shown in the previous discussion, echoes to metanarratives and archetypal mimics are well at home within the process of perception, cognition, recognition and retention. In other words, we should expect such typological interpretations of Jesus at a very early stage of personal and collective memory. Burke's accounts of Kessler and Bunyan show that they conflated their own stories with religious metanarratives. And Zerubavel has demonstrated that contemporary political histories can be conflated with historical archetypes. Each of these cases strongly supports the argument that the typological localization of personal narratives within social narratives is often conceived within the life of individual memory. The first two of these narrativizations were imagined by the individuals themselves and not by myth-makers generations later. There is no evidence that Trumpeldor himself appealed to the legendary figures to which he was appended. However, in his case it is clear that these typological connections were made within months of the historical act. In light of this evidence, it can be argued that

<sup>36</sup> J. D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering what happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998) 521.

<sup>37</sup> E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993) 85.

typological narrativization is often a means of process of memory and not necessarily a literary device employed in a far-removed context.

Secondly, recalling the above discussion on distortion, I do not think that such narrativizations transformed the early Jesus tradition into legends of the Solomonic type. Solomonic exorcist legends, like the Testament of Solomon, were composed over a hundred generations after Solomon's life. Memories of Jesus were constrained by the social frameworks created by contemporaries of Jesus. Since one of the crucial elements of distortion is diachronic continuity, it is highly unlikely that wholesale fiction would be added to the tradition within a generation of the historical events. The evangelists, of course, readily exploit such trajectories of distortion. If an Exodus narrativization was at work in early interpretations of Jesus' ministry, one might expect later literary motifs following suit with more explicit Moses typology. In this way, Matthew's infancy narrative represents a fairly late development along this trajectory. This said, many such typological narrativizations are probably already at work in the core of the early Jesus tradition. Because, as Zerubavel has argued, the invention of tradition will ultimately fail if it deviates from the traditional core in any great way. Radical deviations breach the integrity of the diachronic continuity of collective memory.

Therefore, if typological narrativizations commonly occur mnemonically and the radical invention of tradition rarely survives social frameworks, it is most reasonable for HJR to take a default position that attributes a large majority of the Synoptics' typological parallels with the HB to the early Jesus tradition. Sanders, then (contrary to Wrede), is correct in saying that the historian cannot simply attribute a passage framed in theological context to the early Church "since Jesus himself was a theologian."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, we should expect that a figure as remarkable as Jesus was compared to great prophets of old even without conscious appeals to these traditions.

### Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, what memory distortion research contributes to historical Jesus research is a working theory of how narrativization influences perception. If memories are indeed localized within conceptual frames of meaning, and metanarratives can act as powerfully mnemonic frames of meaning, how might Jesus have been remembered?

Narratives such as the Exodus story, Elijah/Elisha tradition and the Solomonic exorcist legends might have acted as frames of meaning in which memories of Jesus were localized. As such, memories of Jesus as one who reinterpreted laws from a hilltop, one who was a healer, exorcist and worker of mighty deeds might

<sup>38</sup> Sanders, *Figure*, 97.

have been narrativized into typological appeals at a very early stage. If it is the case that memories of Jesus were localized within Moses tradition, or Elijah tradition, or Son of David tradition, studies on memory localization and distortion (specifically narrativization) provide us with a very useful tool to chart such typological memories. Here we begin by asking "When did the typological localization begin?" If early, are these the result of informal localization or formal localization? Informal localizations would include those traditions of Jesus which were reminiscent of HB precedents by the first eyewitnesses. Formal localizations would include those Jesus traditions brought into being by typological parallels to HB figures via literary device. I contend that such analysis will yield results that do not confuse distortion with non-historicity.

### Works Cited

- Assmann, Jan. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. Munich: Beck, 1992.
- "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique* 65 (1995b): 125–33.
  - "Ancient Egyptian Antijudaism: A Case of Distorted Memory." Pages 365–78 in *Memory Distortion*. Edited by Daniel L. Schachter. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995.
  - *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zehn Studien*. Munich: Beck, 2000.
- Burke, Peter. "History as Social Memory." Pages 97–114 in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*. Edited by Thomas Butler. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*. London: Reaktion Books, 2001.
- Coser, Lewis A. Introduction to *On Collective Memory*. Translated and edited by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Crossan, J. D. *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering what happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998.
- Fentress, James, and Chris Wickham. *Social Memory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- Gedi, Noa and Yigal Elam. "Collective Memory – What is it?" *History and Memory* 8 (1996): 30–50.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Paris: F. Alcan, 1925.
- "The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land." Pages 193–235 in *On Collective Memory*. Translated and edited by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992. Translation of *La Topographie des Évangiles en Terre Sainte. Étude de mémoire collective*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1941.
  - *The Collective Memory*. Translated by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdy Ditter. New York: Harper and Row, 1980. Translation of *La Mémoire collective*. Edited by Jeanne Alexander. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950.
  - *On Collective Memory*. Translated and edited by Lewis A. Cosner. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Hutton, Patrick H. *History as an Art of Memory*. Hanover and London: Univ. Press of New England, 1993.

- Kammen, Michael. "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History." Pages 329–45 in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*. Edited by Daniel Schachter. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *History and Memory*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, [1977] 1992.
- Lewis, C. S. *Out of the Silent Planet*. New York: Collier, 1962.
- Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985.
- Nora, Pierre. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. Translated by Goldhammer. Edited by Kritzman. New York: Columbia Press, 1996. Translation of *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984.
- "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–25.
- Sanders, E. P. *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin, 1993.
- Schachter, Daniel. "Memory Distortion: History and Current Status." Pages 1–46 in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*. Edited by Daniel Schachter. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Schudson, Michael. "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory." Pages 346–64 in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*. Edited by Daniel Schachter. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Schwartz, Barry. "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory." *Social Forces* 61.2 (1982), 374–402.
- Senden, M. von. *Space and Sight: The Perception of Space and Shape in the Congenitally Blind before and after Operation*. London: Methuen, 1960.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *War and Peace*. Translated by Rosemary Edwards. Harmondsworth, 1971.
- Vasina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Watchel, Nathan. "Memory and History." *History and Anthropology* 2/2 (1996): 207–24.
- Weissberg, Liliane. Introduction to *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Edited by Ben-Amos and Weissberg. Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1999.
- Wollheim, R. "On Persons and Their Lives." Pages 299–321 in *Explaining Emotions*. Edited by Rorty. Berkeley: Univ. Press, 1980.
- Wrede, W. *The Messianic Secret*. Translated by J. C. G. Greig; London: James Clarke & Co., 1971.
- Zerubavel, Yael. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- "The Historical the Legendary and the Incredible: Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel." Pages 105–125 in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. Edited by John R. Gillis. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994.