

Chapter 1: Chronicles

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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1.2 SITES OF MEMORY IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES

We have plenty of language to describe the various processes of individual memory, but one of the main problems we have when talking about social memory and cultural memory is that we lack good language describe the structures and functions of those mnemonic systems at the level of society. As such, memory theorists have adopted a number of analogies and terms to describe how societies remember and how individuals and groups interact with memory at the social level.

It is important to remember that because social memory is a social construct we must not equate the remembered past with the events, experiences, and individuals which informed it. Where one might refer to an individual person having “a memory” of a particular event, there is no central repository—be it material or biological—of social memory.¹ As has been

1. See especially Jens Brockmeier, “After the Archive: Remapping Memory,” *CP* 16.1 (2010): 5–35 and James V. Wertsch, “Beyond the Archival Model of Memory and the Affordances and Constraints of Narratives,” *CP* 17.1 (2011): 21–29.

noted by numerous memory theorists, “there is no such ‘thing’ and social or collective memory.”² In other words, when we talk about social or cultural “memory” we are talking about a complex network of social processes and discourses which make up a society’s understanding of the past.

These social processes and discourses tend to center around particular events, places, people, and ideas which the society has imbued with special mnemonic significance. These clusters of discourse are commonly referred to by memory theorists as “sites” of memory. The term “site of memory” is a translation of the French *lieu de mémoire* was coined by Pierre Nora in the 1970’s and has been adopted and adapted by numerous theorists since then.³ Although

2. Ian D. Wilson, *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 14 citing Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *ARS* 24 (1998): 105–40 and James V. Wertsch, “Collective Memory,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 117–37.

3. The term was originally coined by Nora in the work “Mémoire collective,” in *La Nouvelle histoire*, ed. Roger Chartier Jacques Le Goff and Jacques Revel (Paris: Retz, 1978), 398–401, and used subsequently in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992) and “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” in “Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24. For a discussion of Nora’s use of the term and its reception, see Andrzej Szpociński, “Sites and Non-Sites of Memory,” in “Special Issue English Edition: Place and Memory,” *TD* 9 (2016): 245–54.

Nora did not clearly define the term, a “site of memory,” as used by Nora, might better be translated as a “place of remembrance,” or a “place where people remember.” For Nora, modern-day “sites” of memory existed “because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.”⁴ In other words, because modern historical consciousness, by Nora’s reckoning, has all but eradicated “memory,” the preservation of memory in the modern era has been relegated to particular “sites” of memory—monuments, structures, and practices whose purpose is to perpetuate memory. He writes:

Lieux de mémoire are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed they are *lieux* in three senses of the word—material, symbolic, and functional. Even an apparently purely material site, like an archive, becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura. A purely functional site, like a classroom manual, a testament, or a veterans’ reunion belong only inasmuch as it is also the object of a ritual. And the observation of a commemorative minute of silence, an extreme example of a strictly symbolic action, serves as a concentrated appeal to memory by literally breaking the temporal continuity.⁵

Sites of memory, therefore, are not entirely abstract and intellectual, but bear on the practice and materiality of a society in addition to having symbolic significance.

Although Nora’s original use of the term tended to focus especially on sites of memory which bear on so-called “great traditions”⁶ of political and ideological importance such as

4. Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 7.

5. Ibid., 18–19.

6. As coined by Redfield in *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 41–42.

national monuments and archives, the modern use of the term tends to be more abstract and to refer to any “place” where memory discourses occur within a society for the purpose of remembering. Such sites of memory may operate within any number of social/cultural spheres such as national memory (war memorials, national holidays, etc.), religious memory (religious holidays, symbolic ritual acts, etc.), or family memory (traditional foods, birthdays, anniversaries) and may be thought of as distinct, but connected “nodes” of symbolic meaning within a complex network of cultural symbols.

Every edge and node within the graph of a society’s collective memory is the product of memory construction. It is an abstraction. In much the same way that historiography offers a schematic narrative of past events which is necessarily selective and intentional about what specific events, people, and ideas are germane to the purpose of the historian, so too social and cultural memory is selective of the particulars which it preserves and constructive in how it presents people, events, and ideas within particular symbolic systems. Thus, sites of memory are social spaces where memory is constructed. For our purposes, and following a number of modern practitioners of memory studies, I will use the term “site” of memory to describe any discrete person, place, practice or idea where such discourses of memory occur.⁷

The Hebrew Bible is replete with sites of memory—ideas, people, places, and practices which have been imbued with significance by numerous societies since antiquity and which

7. Within Hebrew Bible studies, see especially the work of Ehud Ben Zvi as well as his student Ian Wilson, esp. Ehud Ben Zvi, “Chronicles and Social Memory,” *ST* 71.1 (2017): 69–90 and Wilson, *Kingship and Memory*, 25–26.

form a central component to the identities and self-understanding of (especially) Jews and Christians throughout the world. Take, for example, the Exodus from Egypt. Regardless of the historical reality of such an event, the story of the Exodus as recounted in the Hebrew Bible is the central narrative undergirding the biblical rationale for Israel's possession of the Land. Likewise, the Israelites are told to be kind to strangers and sojourners within their community based on the memory of Israel's enslavement in Egypt. Similarly, the Torah could be understood as a distinct (and particularly potent) site of memory found in the Hebrew Bible; the same goes for the figure of Moses. Each of these sites of memory (the Exodus, Torah, and Moses) are distinct but they also exhibit clear relationships within the network of discourses which are found in the Hebrew Bible. And moreover, each site of memory also relates to and bears distinct significance for the various religious communities which hold the Hebrew Bible as a part of their tradition within their distinct systems of symbolic meaning. Remembering these connections and their culturally defined significance is what cultural memory is all about.

1.2.1 King David as a Site of Memory

It is important to note that although the book of Chronicles is a work of cultural memory, it is unquestionably the case that the figure David was a prominent site of memory for ancient Israel long before the book of Chronicles was written. Chronicles, more so than Samuel-Kings, is characterized in terms of "memory" because it is clear that the Chronicler used Samuel-Kings as a primary source and the differences between the sources and the end-product are demonstrable. In other words, because we know that Chronicles is secondary to Samuel-Kings and we can see where the Chronicler departed from Samuel-Kings, it is easy

to characterize those changes as the result of changes in cultural memory. But it is important to remember that even Samuel–Kings is the product of mnemonic construction and the David presented there already functioned as a special site of memory for ancient Israel. In other words, despite the fact that Samuel–Kings functions as a foundational source *for Chronicles*, it should not be treated as if it was the origin of all Davidic traditions.

Even setting aside the biblical material (e.g., Samuel–Kings, Psalms, et al.), it is demonstrably the case that the Davidic *dynasty*—whatever one might think about David as an historical figure—had symbolic meaning in the ancient world which extended beyond the borders of Israel. For example, we know from the Old Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan that the term **בֵּית דָּוִד** “house of David” was used as a dynastic name for the monarchy of the kingdom of Judah in the late ninth or early eighth centuries BCE.⁸ Likewise, it has been suggested that the Mesha Stele, too, refers to the “house of David,” although this reading is not secure.⁹ Although such references have traditionally been used to bolster claims of an historical David, for our purposes it suffices to say that around the turn of the eighth century BCE, “David”

8. The *editio princeps* were published in two articles: the first find as Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, “An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan,” *IEJ* 43 (1993): 81–93, and the subsequent fragments as idem, “The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment,” *IEJ* 45 (1995): 1–18.

9. The reading **בֵּית דָּוִד** was proposed by Lemaire, but his reading is not universally accepted. See André Lemaire, “La dynastie davidique (BYT DWD) dans deux inscriptions ouestsémitiques du IXe s. av. J.-C. C.,” *SEL* 11 (1994): 17–19 and idem, “‘House of David’ Restored in Moabite Inscription,” *BAR* 20 (1994): 30–37. The Mesha inscription is typically dated to the mid-ninth century BCE and thus would be slightly earlier than the reference in the Tel Dan inscription, if

existed as a meaningful eponymous symbol and site of memory with respect to the monarchy of Judah. Thus, when we turn to the biblical portrayals of the figure David (which, by most accounts were products of later periods of Israelite history than Tel Dan and Mesha), it is important to keep in mind that those portrayals are participating in established discourses about David. This is all the more important when we consider the book of Chronicles which represents some of the latest strata of memory preserved in the Hebrew Bible. Thus when we discuss the figure of David as a site of memory which the book of Chronicles engages with extensively, I want to emphasize that the processes of constructing the remembered figure of David did not begin with the Chronicler just as it did it end with the Chronicler.

1.2.2 The Jerusalem Temple as a Site of Memory

1.2.3 Magnetism and Convergence of Mnemonic Sites

Section Conclusions

Lemaire is correct.

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