

## IN SEARCH OF HISTORY AS MEMORY

For many a late twentieth century historian it is difficult to understand at all times precisely which thought processes were responsible for intellectual revolutions in the modern history of the world. This may be a result of the fact that we tend to merely take for granted that with which we are preoccupied. The historical transformations of memory is a good example. In exploring this theme P.H. Hutton makes the thought provoking observation, that:

Print culture textualised the past. By removing ideas, personalities, and events from the milieu of oral tradition and giving them a specific time and place in collective memory, texts enabled readers to comprehend the history of the past in a more profound way. The textualizing of collective memory deepened the readers' awareness of temporality, and this in turn led to the recasting of mnemonic schemes, previously conceived spatially; onto timelines on which historical events served as places of memory.<sup>1</sup>

The historiographical exposure of these thought processes have been underway for a considerable period of time.<sup>2</sup> In France historians who have kept themselves busy with intellectual history (*histoire mentalité*), paved the way for the earliest experimental research. Hutton describes this development process in an article which is published in the current edition of *Historia*.

It might possibly generate an interest with the reader to take note in the process of Jacques le Goff's *History and memory* which was originally published in 1977, but only translated into English in 1992. For Le Goff, who is an outspoken protagonist of comparative studies, the focus on memory may pave yet a new way for historians who refuse to remain confined to an exclusively European or Western historical tradition.<sup>3</sup> The creative potential of the interaction between history and memory was recently displayed by Simon Schama in his study *Landscape and Memory*.<sup>4</sup>

An accent on memory is currently important for two very different reasons. In the first place it has a bearing on the opening up of potential symbiotic areas of interaction amongst historians in recording the history of our heterogeneous South African society. In the second place it is probably necessary for historians to take note of the rapid development in the fields of computer and internet technology. This was, to a considerable extent the result of new techniques developed in respect of artificial memory. In view of this it is necessary for us to pause and consider a related thought function - human memory - which is of intrinsic value to the discipline of history.

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P.H. HUTTON, *History as an art of memory*, (University of New England Press, Hanover, 1993), p. 19.

For an example of the latest trends in the area of collective memory, see S.A. CRANE, "Writing the individual back into collective memory" in *American Historical Review*, December 1997, pp. 1372-85.

J. LE GOFF, *History and memory* (Translated by S. Randall en E. Claman, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992) p. x.

4 Alfred Knopf, New York, 1995.