

Cultural Memory and Group Identity in Q

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Abstract

The Q Document includes a significant number of references to characters and events of Israelite history. The purpose of that intense recollection of the past was to construct a new social identity. Social memory studies have made an important contribution to the understanding of this process by which groups construct their identities. In this article some basic conclusions of social memory and social identity studies are applied to the analysis of the Q references to Abraham (Q 3:8; 13:29.28), to the persecuted prophets (Q 6:23; 11:33-34, 47-48, 49-51), and to non-Judean individuals and groups (Q 10:13-14; 11:30-32).

Over the past thirty years, studies on social memory have developed the insights of Maurice Halbwachs (Olick & Robbins) and the results of this research are now being applied as a heuristic tool for analyzing ancient Christian writings (Duling 2006; Kirk & Thatcher). Recent studies show the usefulness of this perspective to increase our knowledge of earliest Christianity as reflected in the ancient texts (Esler 2003, 2005, 2006). Since collective memory is an important factor in the process of group identity formation this approach can be especially useful to explain the construction of new collective identities that defined the groups of Jesus' disciples after his death.

Following the path opened by this previous research, I will try in this study to show how the group(s) of Jesus' disciples that preserved and transmitted the Q Document defined and constructed their own identity through a peculiar appropriation of the past. To that end, I will analyze the Q sayings that refer to persons and events of the past in the framework of what social psychology has discovered about the way collective memory contributes to shaping the identity of a group. I start by showing how references to the past play an important role in the traditions assembled in Q.

The Q Group as a Memory Communion

During the last fifty years the Q Document has been studied as an independent literary composition. Research in

this area has tried to explain the formation process of this document and to ascertain its content and wording; it has also attempted to identify its date and place of composition, and to define the shape of the group behind it (Kloppenborg 2000). Scholars disagree on how they understand some of these issues, but at the same time they agree on a few basic points. This paper presupposes three basic points upon which most Q scholars would agree.

The first has to do with the possibility of reconstructing the extent and wording of Q. Regarding the extent, it is commonly assumed that Q included basically the verses that Matthew and Luke have in common. On the possibility of reconstructing the exact wording, most scholars would assume that the verses that Matthew and Luke attest together allow us to establish an "archetypical text," a version of Q that predates those known to Matthew and Luke. Although

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retrieving the text of Q in its different versions is an impossible task, source and redaction criticism can do a lot to bring us closer to the form that the Jesus tradition assumed in this composition, as the work of the International Q Project and the recent “critical edition” of Q has shown (Robinson, et al).

The second point of agreement on which this paper is based is that Q was composed in an oral context. Although Q was most probably a written document (Kloppenborg 2000: 56–60), it was composed, not for private reading but for public performance in an oral context (Draper: 182–86). Early Christian documents were written in an oral culture, and therefore they must be read keeping in mind the role played by collective memory in the process of composition and transmission of the traditions they have preserved (Achtemeier; Dunn). This is particularly true of Q, because it is one of the earliest documents in which the oral tradition about Jesus was recorded.

Finally, the composition of Q cannot be explained without the existence of a group of disciples for whom the memories of Jesus preserved in this document would have been significant. The nature and the composition of this group, as well as its geographical and social location, have been a matter of discussion and debate among Q scholars in recent years. Later in this article I will have to say more about this, but for now I will only assume the commonly accepted fact that behind this collection of sayings and anecdotes of Jesus there was a group of disciples for whom the preservation and assembling of these memories were significant (Kloppenborg 2000: 166–213; Miquel).

The analysis that follows is grounded in these three points upon which most Q scholars would agree. The first one will allow me to concentrate on a composition whose archetypical text can be reconstructed. The second one places the Q Document in an oral context, to which also belong the traditions on the common past of Israel. And the third one connects this composition with a group of disciples who remember and update their memories.

This group, like other contemporary Jesus groups, faced the task of defining its own identity (Guijarro: 203–25) in a context in which other Judean groups were undergoing the same process (Baumgarten). The originality of the teaching of Jesus and of his actions and the impact of his violent death—as well as the awareness of his living presence among them and the hope of his coming again—caused a breach of tradition and made it necessary for them to define a new identity (Kirk: 2005). In such a situation, as Jan Assmann has shown, the reconstruction of the past is a power-

ful means to categorize the traits that define a new identity (Assmann 2003: 160–62). This explains the important role that recollection of the past has in Q. Its composition already reveals an interest in preserving the recent past, because the main purpose of this document was to remember the sayings of Jesus and some anecdotes of his life. But there was also an interest in recalling the distant past through a particular vision of some characters and events of the history of Israel. The present and the recent past, which were specific to the group, were thus connected with the distant past, which was an important feature of the shared identity of Israel.

The sayings gathered together in Q mention quite often persons and events of the past. Leaving aside those attested only by Matthew or Luke (Q 10:23–24? and 17:32?), and two other sayings in which the reference to the past is not directly related to the identity of the in-group (Q 10:12; 12:27), we find in Q three groups of sayings in which there is a significant recollection of the past. The first one includes different references to the patriarchs: Abraham, who is mentioned twice, once alone and a second time with Isaac and Jacob (Q 3:8 and 13:28.29), and Noah (Q 17:26–27). A second group of references recall the persecuted prophets (Q 6:23; 10:23–24; 11:47–48. 49–51; 13:34), including one in which Abel and Zechariah are mentioned explicitly (Q 11:49–51). Finally, there is also a third group of references to non-Judean groups or individuals such as the Queen of the South, who acknowledged the wisdom of Solomon (Q 11:31), the Ninevites, who repented following the preaching of Jonah (Q 11:32), and the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, who would have converted had they witnessed the signs of Jesus (Q 10:13–15).

All these references belong to the Israelite tradition that plays an important role in Q. This tradition was recorded in (sacred) texts, but it was also alive in the oral culture (Horsley: 98–104). In Q there are some explicit quotations of (Q 4:1–11; 7:22. 27; 13:35) and allusions to (Q 10:15; 12:51–53; 13:19. 27) Old Testament texts that require a certain level of intertextuality (Tuckett: 15). But, as L. E. Vaage has shown, the use of Scriptures in Q is a peculiar one vis-à-vis that of other early Christian documents, because it only betrays a knowledge of Israel’s epic tradition and does not presuppose the study of specific writings. OT quotations, in fact, do not play an important role in the argument of Q (Vaage 480–81), whereas references that betray a more general knowledge of the characters and events of the Israelite past are extremely relevant for the construction of the in-group identity. In his analysis of Q’s use of the OT texts and traditions Vaage rightly observes that all these

references to the Israelite past belong to the final rhetorical framework of Q and that they appear in statements of polemic and judgement (Vaage: 480, 487). These statements, as I will show, reflect a context in which the Q in-group was defining its identity in confrontation with other out-groups.

Taking into consideration the small size of Q, the reference to nine individuals and three cities known in the history of Israel reveals the importance that this document attaches to the recollection of the past. J. L. Reed has observed that among those individuals neither kings nor priests are mentioned as ideal types. Only Solomon is referred to, but in the two sayings that mention him he is not presented as an ideal to be emulated (Q 11:31; 12:27). Since kings and priests were associated with Jerusalem in the collective memory of Israel, this fact may reveal a precise spatial perspective. On the other hand prophets, the ideal type to which the group of Q attaches itself, were traditionally critical of the priests and kings of Jerusalem. It is worth noting that the only prophet who is mentioned explicitly in Q, namely Jonah, was of Galilean origin. In this context the recollection of the patriarchs is also significant since they belong to the most remote past of Israel. Both the absence of references to the kings and priests, who were more attached to Jerusalem, and the mention of the patriarchs and prophets, who were distant or critical with respect to the holy city, betrays, according to Reed, a Galilean perspective that takes a distant stance toward Jerusalem and a positive one towards the Gentiles (Reed: 208–11). This stance is made clear in the positive evaluation of the attitude of the Ninevites and the Queen of the South, and of the imagined conversion of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon.

The regional perspective of these memories about the remote past is, no doubt, a relevant fact that favors the location of Q in Galilee (Reed: 170–96). But from the point of view of collective memory, it is even more relevant that these references to persons and events of the past serve, as I will show, to emphasize the unique character of the group and its continuity through time. These two aspects reveal that the Q group was a memory communion.

According to J. Assmann, a group can be described as a memory communion when it seeks to

safeguard its past mainly under two aspects: its unique character, and its duration. It will, in its self-image, emphasize external distinctions while playing down internal ones. It will, moreover, establish a consciousness of its own identity down the ages, selecting, and putting in perspective, remembered facts for their analogies, similarities and continuities [2003: 167].

This description of a memory communion explains the way in which Q refers to Abraham, to the persecuted prophets and to non-Judean groups of persons, and for that reason the Q group can be described as a memory communion. The recollection of the past was for its members a means to construct a new group identity. It was part of a social process that can be better understood knowing what social psychology studies on collective memory and group identity have to say about it.

Cultural Memory and Group Identity

Studies on social memory started with Maurice Halbwachs during the first half of the last century (1925; 1950; cf. Olick & Robbins). Halbwachs discovered that individuals can remember in a coherent and lasting way only within a group context. The groups to which they belong provide them with the suitable context, the motivations, and the clues to recover their past. These groups are the "social frameworks" of individual memory. Individual recollection occurs, therefore, in a social context and follows social patterns. But, in addition to this socially patterned individual memory, there is also a collective memory that helps groups to establish their continuity in time. The consensus about a common past plays an important role in the cohesion of a group, because shared memory is an effective instrument of social differentiation (Olick: 11–12). Those who belong to the same group share the same past, since the memory of a group and its identity are united and are mutually interdependent (Assmann 2003: 162–69).

Halbwachs drew a clear distinction between collective memory and historical memory. According to him, collective memory views the group inwardly, looking for similarities in the past and emphasizing continuity in time. Historical memory, on the contrary, is interested in change and has no concern for the identity of the group. For Halbwachs, history was not memory, because for him memory was always directly related to the identity of a living group. According to him these two forms of recollection belonged to two different moments, so that history began when the past was no longer claimed as collective memory by a living group. History was objectified memory, and as such belonged to tradition, together with other forms of objectified memory (Assmann 2003: 169–72).

Building on Halbwachs' basic description of collective memory, J. Assmann has revised this distinction between memory and history. He proposes to understand "collective memory" as a generic category including two forms of mem-

ory that are related to groups: the “communicative memory” and the “cultural memory”. The first one, which covers basically what Halbwachs called “collective memory,” is based exclusively on everyday communication and has a limited chronological horizon. Cultural memory, on the contrary, is characterized by its distance from the everyday. It concentrates on fixed events of the past whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rituals, monuments, etc). These cultural products are the result of collective experience that is relevant for the identity of a society. The concept of cultural memory includes, therefore, “that body of re-usable texts, images and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image” (Assmann 1995: 132).

Cultural memory plays an important role in the definition and preservation of group identity.

Assmann assigns to cultural memory the following characteristics: (1) concretion of identity, for it preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives the awareness of its unity and peculiarity; (2) capacity of reconstruction, because each generation relates to the immovable figures of memory differently; (3) capacity of objectivation, because the crystallization of collective shared meaning is a prerequisite of its transmission; (4) capacity of organization, which implies specialization and institutional support; (5) obligation, because the normative self-image of the group engenders a system of values that has a binding character; and (6) reflexivity in the sense that it can draw on itself to explain and revise how cultural memory is constructed, and also because it reflects the self-image of the group (1995: 130–32).

We may conclude, then, that cultural memory plays an important role in the definition and preservation of group identity. Social identity has been another important topic of research in social psychology. This research has shown that personal identity has a social dimension, because to some extent it is shaped by group affiliations. H. Tajfel defines social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (255). Social identity has, therefore, three dimensions. It has a cognitive dimension, by which the individual knows s/he is a member of the group. It has also an evaluative dimension, which is

perceived by comparison with other groups in which differences are emphasized. And finally it has an affective dimension, which involves emotional attachment to the group.

The basic mechanism at work in the definition and maintenance of group identity is categorization, a basic tool of the human mind by which differences among various objects are played down and similarities are emphasized in order to control them and handle them more easily (Pérez Pérez: 110–13). H. Tajfel discovered that this mechanism is at work in inter-group relations, so that by the fact of belonging to a group, members tend to diminish the differences among themselves and emphasize what distinguishes them from other groups. In this process the three aforementioned factors each play a distinctive role, so that the identification of the traits common to the members of a group, the identity descriptors (cognitive dimension), are accompanied by an attitude of favoritism towards the in-group (evaluative dimension) and a positive sense of belonging (emotional dimension) (Morales Domínguez: 57–69).

The role played by collective memory in the process of shaping and maintaining a social identity reveals its diachronic dimension. M. Cinnirella has explored this diachronic dimension of social identity and has shown that it is related not only to the past, but also to the future. To explain it he has proposed the category of “possible social identities,” which include “conceptualizations of the social categories and groups an individual might have been a member of in the past, and could become a member of in the future.” They can “pertain to potential group membership (both past and future) as well as current group memberships and thoughts about how these might have been different in the past and could develop in the future” (230). The precise shape of this diachronic dimension in the construction of group identity is determined by its temporal orientation, so that a group oriented towards the past will tend to identify itself or will compare itself with other groups of the past. References to the past or to the future reveal the need that individuals and groups have to establish continuity in time, and explain why they tend to create group stories that relate past, present and future in a coherent story-line (235–37).

The clues offered by social psychology about the diachronic dimension of group identity are a useful tool to explain the peculiar recovery of the past that we find in Q. The references in Q to the past concentrate on the cultural memory of Israel, which had crystallized in texts, rituals and monuments, and was transmitted in the context of an oral culture. The disciples of Jesus who composed and transmitted the Q document took up that common deposit of knowl-

edge, rituals and symbols as part of their cultural memory, but at the same time they reconstructed that memory in accordance with their new group identity. Their recollection of the past belongs to a process by which a new group identity is formed. This process can be discerned not only in the way the Q group recovered the past and imagined its future (diachronic dimension), but also in the prescription of norms that describe the behavior acceptable for the members of the group (identity descriptors). It can also be perceived in their confrontation with other groups described in a generic way: "this generation"; or more concretely, Scribes, Pharisees. It can also be seen in the sense of belonging to the group that characterizes the members as "sons of God." All these aspects confirm that the Q group was undergoing a process of group identity formation (Kloppenborg 1987: 166–68).

The Cultural Memory of Israel and the New Identity of the Q Group

In the social context of the Q group there were at least three factors that favored the construction of a new group identity. The first one was the temporal orientation of Mediterranean society towards the past (Pilch & Malina). The second one was the collectivistic character and the dyadic conception of the personality that defined individuals within that society in terms of their group memberships (Triandis: 43–80; Malina & Neyrey: 72–83). And the third one was the oral context, in which the cultural memory of Israel was transmitted and updated, because this oral context facilitated its reformulation. Taking into consideration these factors and the mechanisms at work in the process of creating a new group identity, I will now examine the Q references to persons and events of the past.

Abraham

Among the sayings that mention figures of the old patriarchal stories, those related to Abraham are the most relevant because they show that the reference to him was a matter of dispute between the members of the Q in-group and the members of an out-group that claimed an association with him.

The first reference is found in a saying of John the Baptist (Q 3:8). The saying is related to the announcement of the judgment directed against those who reject the preaching of John (Q 3:7–9) (Kloppenborg 1997: 102–07; Tuckett: 109–16). In Q, John the Baptist and Jesus appear united and are opposed by those who reject their preaching (Q 7:31–35). Therefore, those who reject John belong to an

out-group with which the in-group behind Q is confronting itself in order to define its own identity. According to the words attributed to this out-group, they defined their identity in terms of lineage and ethnic identity, and labelled themselves as children of Abraham: "we have as forefather Abraham!" (All quotations of Q are taken from Robinson et al, *ad locum*).

For first century Judeans, Abraham was above all the common ancestor (Isa 51:2). His status as father of the people was linked to the covenant with God, by which Israel became the chosen people (*PsSol* 9). The association to a common ancestor is a key factor in the definition of an ethnic group, whose members also share a history, a culture and a homeland of origin which are common to them. In the recalled past of Israel the figure of Abraham was related to all these aspects of ethnic identity and was, therefore, important for the definition of that identity. This means that Abraham was an essential component of Israel's cultural memory and that the association with him was crucial for its definition as an ethnic group (Esler 2006: 25–27).

By accepting John the Baptist's answer to those who claimed this kind of ethnic association with Abraham, the Q in-group rejects their exclusivist appropriation of him. They oppose the vision of the out-group when they affirm that "God can produce children for Abraham right out of these rocks" (Q 3:8). It is by calling on the power of God that they make clear their disagreement with this ethnic appropriation of the figure of Abraham. They do not reject the importance of Abraham for the collective identity of Israel. What they reject is the association with him in terms of lineage and ethnic identity. This attitude of the Q group is similar to that adopted by Paul in Galatians. In both cases the association with Abraham is described in terms that do not include those who understand it only in ethnic terms. In Galatians believers are associated with Abraham because of their faith in God, and in Q the in-group is associated with him as a result of God's action (Esler 2006: 29–32). The relationship with Abraham has not been deleted from the collective memory of the Q group. It has been redefined, emphasizing the aspects that better reflect the new identity of the group.

A similar approach can be observed in Q 13:29.28. In this saying of Jesus that closes the exhortation to enter by the narrow door (Q 13:24–27), Abraham appears, together with Isaac and Jacob, in a future situation by which a "possible social identity" of the Q in-group is described:

And many shall come from sunrise and sunset and recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, but

you will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

The saying is polemical, and so the in-group must be identified, not with the target audience (you), but rather with those who come from sunrise and sunset to sit at the table in the Kingdom of God, together with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the context of the Q Document, this saying is addressed to those who claim a direct relationship with Jesus, but who have refused to enter through the narrow door (Tuckett 1996: 189–95). They are most probably another out-group, to which the members of the Q group compare themselves in order to define their own identity.

The group described in this saying represents what the members of the Q in-group could become in the future, a “possible social identity” (Cinnerella) that contributes to construct their identity in the present. This in-group is associated with three Patriarchs who are also mentioned in the revelation of God to Moses on Sinai (Exod 3:6; 16:16; Mark 12:26), but now they are seated at the banquet of the Kingdom of God, which is a central topic in the teaching of Jesus to his disciples (Q 6:20; 7:28; 11:1; 12:31; 13:18. 20). This representation of Abraham has nothing to do with ethnicity or lineage, but with sharing in the Kingdom of God. In this way, the members of the Q group imagine their future by imagining attitudes of Abraham that best fit their identity, such as sharing in the banquet of the kingdom of God or welcoming Gentiles. The memory of Abraham has been transformed and redefined.

Thus, in the two references to Abraham the members of the Q in-group reinterpret the cultural memory of Israel. They don’t deny the importance of the relationship with Abraham, but define it in new terms, playing down his role as prototype of an ethnic group. The association with Abraham is God’s work and takes place through the participation in the banquet of the Kingdom announced by Jesus, a banquet at which the Gentiles also will sit (Tuckett 1996: 189–95). In this redefinition the traits of in-group identity are clarified by highlighting the differences with other out-groups. At the same time, those who belong to the Q in-group are associated with real characters or events of the past and imagined ones in the future to show their unbroken continuity through time.

Persecuted Prophets

The most characteristic trait of Q’s collective memory is the reference to the persecuted prophets. In four of the

six sayings in which prophets are mentioned as a group they are referred to as persecuted or assassinated (Q 6:23; 11:47–48. 49–51 and 13:34). This recurring reference to the persecuted prophets belongs to the Deuteronomic interpretation of the history of Israel. This interpretation discovers a process by which (a) the people of Israel withdraw from Yahweh, (b) Yahweh sends prophets to call them to repentance, (c) Israel rejects the prophets sent to it, and (d) Yahweh punishes Israel or announces its punishment. This interpretive pattern is characteristic of the Deuteronomic historiography and can be found in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, but as H. O. Steck has shown, it is also a distinctive trait of the redaction of Q (284–89).

The reference in Q to the persecuted and assassinated prophets is clearly a redactional theme that contributes to the literary unity of the composition (Jacobson: 72–76). This observation is especially relevant for this research, since it reveals that those who composed the Q Document were interested in emphasizing this precise aspect of the cultural memory of Israel. One of the reasons that may have inspired them to do so was the need to explain the death of Jesus, which they viewed as the last expression of this secular antagonism of Israel against God’s envoys (Kirk 2005: 191–95). But, as I will demonstrate, these passages also reflect the process of construction of a new identity.

In the two references to Abraham the members of the Q in-group reinterpret the cultural memory of Israel.

The first saying that mentions the prophets is addressed to the in-group. The reference belongs to a beatitude that seeks to counteract the cognitive dissonance produced by the experience of hate, persecution and defamation suffered by the members of the in-group. When faced with these setbacks, they are encouraged to react with joy, hoping to receive a greater reward in heaven. To reinforce this exhortation, a phrase was added at the end of the beatitude in which the members of the Q group are identified with the persecuted prophets: “For this is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Q 6,23b) (Kloppenborg 1987: 173). This brief remark points to and emphasizes a concrete aspect of the Israelite memory about the prophets; it is not the most important but the closest to the experience of the Q group, namely the persecution suffered by its members. Thus continuity is established between the persecuted prophets and the

members of the Q group in such a way that they may also be considered prophets: "the prophets who were before you". Through this connection the prophets of Israel become a part of the in-group, and the members of the Q group strengthen the diachronic dimension of their identity through this association with the persecuted prophets of the past.

The second and third references to the persecuted prophets belong to a cluster of sayings (Kloppenborg 1987: 139–47), which includes a series of woes against the Pharisees (Q 11:42.39b.41.42–43) and against the Scribes (Q 11:46b.52.47–48), and concludes with some remarks about the rejection of Wisdom's envoys (Q 11:49–51). Prophets are mentioned in the last woe against the Scribes (Q 11:47–48). The context is very controversial, and the saying reflects a dispute between the Scribes and the Q group about enlisting the prophets into their own in-groups. The Q group blames the Scribes for recalling their past as a group in an inconsistent way:

(47) Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets, but your forefathers killed them. (48) Thus you witness against yourselves that you are the sons of your forefathers.

The Scribes claim continuity with the prophets by erecting mausoleums to their memory. Funerary monuments are a privileged way of preserving the cultural memory because they objectify the memory of persons with whom a social group wants to be associated (McCane: 77–81). This objectified memory usually serves to consolidate a version of the past that supports the interests of a group. Both the Scribes and the members of the Q group are engaged in a process of cultural memory construction, but from the point of view of Q the Scribes are inconsistent in their recollection of the past because their forefathers killed the prophets and now they build mausoleums to honor them. By setting themselves against this way of remembering the prophets, the members of the Q group make a positive evaluation of their in-group social identity, and by associating themselves with the persecuted prophets of the past they emphasize its unique character.

The curses against the Scribes end with the announcement of the judgment directed against those who have rejected Wisdom's envoys (Q 11:49–51). The announcement also follows the pattern of the Deuteronomic interpretation of the history of Israel. Wisdom has sent prophets to this generation, but they have been murdered by those to whom they were sent, and as a result of their rejection a settling of accounts will be required from them for the blood poured out.

This conclusion is related to the preceding curses through a redactional seam ("therefore...") and so we can presume that the objects of this harsh judgement are those mentioned in these curses, namely the Pharisees and the Scribes.

In this passage, past history "from the founding of the world up to this generation" is seen as one of continuous rejection of Wisdom's envoys. They are "prophets and wise men," but in the second half of the saying (Q 11:50–51) the attention is centered on the death of the prophets:

(50) Therefore also... wisdom said: I will send them prophets and sages and some of them they will kill and persecute, so that a settling of accounts for the blood of all the prophets poured out from the founding of the world may be required from this generation; (51) from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, murdered between the sacrificial altar and the House. Yes, I tell you, an accounting will be required of this generation!

In this saying we find in the first place a general announcement of the judgment against "this generation" uttered by Wisdom as a result of their rejection of the prophets from the founding of the world (Q 11:50). Then the limits of this period of time are defined by mentioning Abel and Zechariah (Q 11:51a). And finally it is Jesus who speaks to reinforce the judgement against "this generation" (Q 11:51b). The last part of the saying is clearly a redactional addition that reveals the author's interest in emphasizing the contrast between the in-group and "this generation." Q 11:51a, which could also be redactional, comments on the general statement of Q 11:50 showing by examples how the persecution of the prophets has been a trait of Israel's history (Kloppenborg 1987: 144–46; Tuckett 1996: 171–72).

In this saying it is most remarkable that Abel is labelled "a prophet." In the Israelite collective memory he was remembered as the firstborn of Adam and Eve and the one who was blessed by God and murdered by his brother (Gen 4). Throughout history different Judean groups have emphasized some of these characteristics, trying to establish with him a communion of memory and identity. In the same vein, some early Christian groups recalled this significant figure as a prototype of their group identity. In Hebrews, for example, he is presented as a "just man" and as a model of faith (Heb 11:4), and his death is recorded in sacrificial terms (Heb 12:24). The characterization of Abel as a just man is relatively frequent in contemporary Judaism (*IHen* 22:7; *AscIs* 9:8; 1 Jn 3:12), but he is not presented as a prophet (Esler 2005: 166–69). For the Q in-group, however, he was the first of a series that includes all the rejected

prophets, including the members of the Q group. Enlisting Abel in the group of the persecuted prophets has the effect of including him in the Q in-group. In this way the temporal dimension of the in-group identity is reinforced and extended back virtually to the creation of the world.

Finally, the death of the prophets appears in an invective against the city of Jerusalem (Q 13:34–35). This saying also follows the pattern of the Deuteronomic interpretation of the history of Israel: sending of the prophets, rejection and murder, and judgment. But the saying also has some peculiar features such as the characterization of the city as “murderer” that contributes to objectification of her identity: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her!” (Q 11:33), and also the curse directed most likely against the temple: “Look, your house is forsaken” (Q 11:34). The out-group with which the in-group is confronted in this saying is a different one. It is not “this generation,” as in previous sayings, but in all probability the priestly aristocratic families attached to the temple.

In this saying the confrontation has clear spatial connotations that could be implicit in some of the previous sayings. The death of Zechariah (2Chr 24:19–22), the last of the prophets before the Q group, also took place in the temple in Jerusalem (Q 11:51). And even though Q 11:47 does not say so explicitly, Jerusalem is also the place where the Scribes built mausoleums for the prophets. The Q group seems to be distant from Jerusalem, since in the construction of their collective identity the historical figures related to Jerusalem are completely absent.

Thus, the reference to the persecuted prophets, which from a literary point of view is one of the most characteristic traits of the final redaction of Q, plays an important role in the construction of the identity of the Q group. All of these prophets appear in a polemical context in which the in-group is confronted with different out-groups that in different forms claim the memory of the prophets (Olick & Robbins: 126–28). In this confrontation the Q in-group defined its identity in two ways: on the one hand, they stressed the evaluative dimension of their shared identity by confrontation with other out-groups and, on the other hand, they tried to establish continuity in time by associating themselves with the persecuted prophets.

Non-Judean “Possible Selves”

A third group of references mentions non-Judean individuals and groups whose attitudes are in contrast to the attitudes of those who reject Jesus. The most explicit references

mention the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon (Q 10:13–14), the inhabitants of Nineveh (Q 11:30,32), and the Queen of the South (Q 11:31). All these individuals were non-Judeans, while the cities mentioned were well known for their sins: Tyre was one of the favorite targets of prophetic oracles (Isa 23; Jer 29; Amos 1:9–10), and Nineveh was considered a sinful city (Jonah 3).

The first saying in which non-Judeans of the past are mentioned is the prophetic utterance in which the attitude of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon is compared to that of the inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (Q 10:13–15). This saying, which belongs to the so-called missionary discourse (Q 10:2–16), compares an imagined situation (the conversion of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon) with a real one (the rejection of Chorazin and Bethsaida) and announces the consequences both attitudes will have at the Day of Judgment:

- (13) Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the wonders performed in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they should have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes.
 (14) Yet for Tyre and Sidon it shall be more bearable at the judgment than for you.

Whatever the original setting of this saying may have been, the fact of having been included in a collection of instructions addressed to the Q in-group gives it a precise meaning (Kloppenborg 1997: 195–96). It is addressed to the members of the Q group, to whom two attitudes are presented: one of them is real (the rejection of the Galilean cities), and the other is imagined (the conversion of the Phoenician cities). These two attitudes are presented along with their consequences at the Day of the Judgment. In this way two “possible social identities” are proposed, together with the kind of behavior coherent with the in-group identity. Here the reference to the past and to the future reinforces the identity of the Q group.

The other two sayings belong to a single cluster of sayings (Q 11:16,29–32). In this composition the request for a sign frames a group of sayings in which Jesus praises how the inhabitants of Nineveh responded to Jonah’s preaching and how the Queen of the South recognized Solomon’s wisdom. In the Day of Judgment they will arise together with “this generation” and will condemn it for having rejected Jesus (Kloppenborg 1997: 128–34):

- (30) For as Jonah became to the Ninevites a sign, so [also] will the son of humanity be to this generation. (31) The Queen of

the South will be raised at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and look, something more than Solomon is here! (32) Ninevite men will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the announcement of Jonah, and look, something more than Jonah is here!

In this case, the attitude of the inhabitants of Nineveh and that of the Queen of the South reflect what the shared memory of Israel has preserved about them. The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3) and the Queen of the South came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon (1Kgs 10). But when these attitudes are compared to that of "this generation" the effect produced is similar to the one we have seen in the previous saying. By this comparison, in fact, the in-group is confronted with two "possible social identities." On the one hand, there is the attitude of the Queen of the South who came to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, as well as that of the inhabitants of Nineveh, who turned to God at the preaching of Jonah. And on the other hand, there is the attitude of "this generation" that has not listened to the wisdom of Jesus and has not repented at its preaching. Through the announcement of judgment the members of the Q group are invited to act like the non-Judeans who looked for wisdom and repented. In this way they are encouraged to include these attitudes among the identity descriptors of their in-group.

Thus in the two sayings under consideration the members of the Q group were confronted with two different behaviors. In both cases they were invited to choose the attitudes that were coherent with the values and norms that shaped their social identity: listening to the word of Jesus, repenting at his preaching, and acknowledging his signs. These attitudes were exemplified in the behavior of non-Judean individuals and groups who belonged to the cultural memory of Israel. Some of them were already considered exemplary such as the Ninevites or the Queen of the South. But others were drastically re-defined in order to present them as "possible social selves" to the in-group, as in the case of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon. These "social possible identities" had a double effect in the construction of the group identity. On the one hand, by contrasting the traits of this identity to those of the out-group(s), they emphasized the distinctive character of the in-group. And on the other hand the in-group identity was expanded through time by including those non-Judean characters and groups that belonged to the cultural memory of Israel.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis reveals that the recollection of the past was a powerful tool in the process of defining the group identity of the Q group. The figures and events that were recalled by them belonged to Israel's cultural memory that they claimed to be a part of their collective identity. However, the way of remembering and portraying these persons and events shows that the shared memory of Israel was claimed by them in a new way. In their recollection of the past they applied two strategies. On the one hand, they selected some characters and events while ignoring others (especially those associated with Jerusalem: priests, kings, etc.). And on the other hand, they redefined the selected characters and events of the past, stressing some aspects that were, as far as I know, completely absent in the cultural memory of Israel (Abraham in the heavenly banquet, Abel as a prophet, Tyre and Sidon as examples of conversion).

The intense recollection of the past reflected in Q also shows that this group was constructing its own "past." This, as Jan Assmann has observed, is a characteristic trait of groups that have experienced a "breach of tradition." A breach of tradition takes place when the members of a group undergo new experiences and become conscious of their new situation. In such circumstances groups refer intensely to the past in order to redefine their identity. The group behind Q achieved that goal by emphasizing distinctions with different out-groups, such as "this generation" or the Scribes, and playing down the internal ones in order to reinforce the in-group coherence. But at the same time they strengthened their identity by associating themselves with significant figures and events in the past or in the future (possible selves), stressing those traits that better represented their identity, such as sitting at the banquet of the Kingdom or being persecuted, listening to the wisdom of Solomon, or repenting at the preaching of Jonah.

When the in-group confrontation with other out-groups appears explicitly, it is always related to the cultural memory. It is a dispute about memory. All the references to "this generation" except one (Q 7:31) appear in the context of this dispute about memory (Q 11:29.30.31.32.50.51). The woes against the Pharisees and the Scribes end with a reference to the persecuted prophets (Q 11:47–48), and so does the saying against Jerusalem (Q 13:34–35). The dispute about memory also appears in the announcement of the judgment against other followers of Jesus who have witnessed his mighty deeds and have listened to his preaching but have not converted (Q 10:13–15; 11:24–28, 29–32).

The redefinition of Israelite cultural memory, which can be perceived in most of the confrontations of the Q group with other out-groups, was a means of defining and strengthening their collective identity.

It is worth noting that all the sayings in Q in which there is a dispute about the cultural memory of Israel, belong in all probability to the redactional phase of its composition. Some of them, like those about the persecuted prophets, reflect a vision that must be attributed, not to Jesus, but to the editors of Q. This means that the dispute about memory belongs to an intermediate stage between Jesus and the written Gospels. In other words, the redefinition of the cultural memory of Israel in Q reveals the existence of a group of followers of Jesus who were struggling to construct a new identity.

This process of constructing a new group identity by a particular redefinition of the cultural memory of Israel that I have identified in Q is not unique. It has been recognized also in other early Christian writings such as the Letters of Paul to the Galatians (Esler 2003) and to the Romans (Esler 2006) and in Hebrews (Esler 2005). Further research on how other groups of Jesus' followers defined their social identities by recalling the past and by imagining the future can contribute to a better understanding of this complex and innovative process that characterized the formative period of Christianity.

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