



## MEMORY AND FUTURE OF HISTORY

KHALED AZAB

The study of History is the outcome of the uncountable questions raised by the past, making the many aspects of learning history itself questionable. Until this day, historians rely on books, scientific or cultural journals, and newspapers, as a means to provide a glimpse of what took place in the past, or offer a detailed explanation of a historical event. With today's technological breakthroughs, new ways provide a rich substance that draws more attention to history.

In the past, the main purpose of documenting history was to praise a ruler or glorify a State. Therefore, historians did not pay much attention to documenting the daily life of human beings, and history became selective. Today, the definition of the study of history is progressive, defined as the science that studies the conditions of past communities, or the study of human evolution, and the achievements of civilizations and their impact.

Books on History are detailed stories narrated by historians, who provide treasures of knowledge, and take us way back to the past. This is not all that matters to historians today, as the contemporary definition of History is formed out of need for not only obtaining a documentation of the past, but presenting an interpretation of its events.

The question is: Why do we care about History?

The study of History can be conducted for sheer scientific purposes, or to know the events of the past, or to examine the positive and negative sides of the history of mankind, or simply because it is a vital

cultural component of any population. All the above can provide us with a main answer to the question we face today; in fact, the realistic answer would be that all of the above is only due to our interest in history.

No matter what the reason, history is a key ingredient in educating societies, and guiding them to understanding the rules of peace and war, the management of State affairs and planning for the future. From this point, and because of its connection to State affairs and its components, the concept of history is transformed from the scope of theoretical sciences to practical sciences.

Thinking about history often comes in the form of a question that alternates between what is history, and to whom it belongs to; such questions are necessary for the presence of history. If the past was problem- or gap-free, then the mission of historians would not be complete; since history is considered as some sort of debate between past and present, and between what already happened and what will happen in the future.

Historians narrate stories to convince readers with a number of ideas, they fairly provide the truth even if it offends some, they present works that aim at attracting attention, in their target to reach a captivating scenario that fits the context of the past. However, we may conclude that history is not just a story being narrated, it is confusing and unorganized, reaching a degree of complexity as the life we live in. It offers a feeling of confusion through the endeavors to reach a model, context, meaning and story that is easy to understand.

The definition and content of history has changed dramatically since the times of Herodotus until now, but the real change came in the transition between the Industrial Revolution and the contemporary State. The transformation defined history as part of the humanitarian sciences, in its modern form which acts as one of the mechanisms of power that works on controlling the society through

education, discipline, and rearranging the memory of the society and its perceptions.

## The Future

If history has changed throughout the ages, why can't it change again now?

Actually, the past can be retrieved for the present, and a connection between them can be established, especially because the process of writing history is full of questions, and there is an element that draws us back to the past, and drives us to the study of history where people did not live the way we live today.

To grasp the idea of connecting worlds of the past and present together, we need to understand the transformation resulting from various technological inventions in the world of documenting history. Printing, for example, changed the life of mankind; so did the telegraph and television, as they all played a role in increasing literacy and culture, changing the nature of communication between societies, and transmitting events and facts to people no matter where they were located. Eventually, by applying such technologies, documentaries came to light, becoming an excellent means of recording and narrating history, especially in World Wars I and II.

In the past, folk tales played the same role of documentaries to entertain audiences, but narrators often added their own touch to the story, beside the original context, an act similar to what is known today as historical TV series. As the development of the human skill of documentation emerges out of the will to make use of the accumulated stock of knowledge and human experience, I believe that history is somewhat the memory of the community.

Therefore, the future of history will not rely only on text available in books, but it will adopt a new type of historical books known as *Coffee Books* (for entertainment and knowledge during free time), which

encompass pictures and drawings (graphics), and may include a CD or DVD of a film or a recording of an event related to the subject of the book.

### History Today

In the past, nations stored their historical documents in their national archive centers. Nowadays, each country seeks to provide such documents to everyone, making them available on the Internet. In this context, manuscripts will be available through digital libraries on the Internet, and every nation will have its comprehensive history website. The role of historians in this case will be confined to academic studies and specialized research, or in helping in the provision of historical material on the Internet, in addition to explaining history and looking into its lacunae.

The Library of Congress became interested in this subject, and sought establishing a universal heritage library in cooperation with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, as a strategic partner, and UNESCO. This Library, the "World Digital Library", contains the anecdotes of the world heritage of each nation on the Internet, where each country participates by submitting its best historical and archival documents.

Establishing history websites, digital libraries, or a historical memory for each country on the Internet is a new method with various positive advantages. It copes with youth's attempts to form their culture and knowledge through digital media, and not the previously used forms of transmitting knowledge and science. The variety of historical sources and materials also makes the Internet a perfect method to connect materials together and constantly provide multi-integrated results for only one search item, from various entries.

Radio and television broadcasting, Internet archives, journalism, photographs, films, and documentaries are considered one of today's best historical sources; in addition to the traditional ones, including

books, periodicals, documents, coins, and stamps. All these means can be search items to find targeted search objects on history websites.

Main subjects can also be used as search categories in the homepages of history websites, and such subjects may include political, economic, social, cultural, and scientific affairs, in addition to major events and public figures. The search can also be carried out according to selected material, such as pictures, documents, films, audio recordings, speeches, newspapers, magazines, maps, stamps, books, medals, covers, posters and advertisements.

All the above should be enhanced by objective historical data which simply explain all that is related to the country. In addition, a special icon can be added to include articles and studies conducted by historians to explain a certain issue or event.

Reading history from a book might only reflect the views of its writer; it is a way that does not interact with the reader, limited in distribution, and is subjected only to the current generations. A history website offers readers the opportunity to compose their own views through the available material, its information can be corrected and modified; it is interactive and enables readers to add their own material, it is widespread and not limited, and has a variety of applications that serve one subject.

History website browsers can use them to interact with each other via e-mail, or by accessing the subject of any historical event or matter for discussion, especially controversial historical events. Digital history websites can also be used as a national register for keeping all that is related to the history of the nation in a memory that does not vanish or burn throughout the years, or for any reason.

As documents can be saved in national archives, and televised materials can be archived at national television stations, and money is kept in central banks, the digital library becomes a keeper that maintains all the materials related to the memory of the nation. This

digital historical memory is some sort of a film that interacts with the memory of its spectators, who forget some of its scenes and remember others in certain situations.

The historical memory will take nations way back in years and retrieve their past that they were not part of, where they did not witness their countries at the beginning of their modern renaissance, and have not observed their ancestors fight for their rights. We will be able to display scenes from the daily lives of our great grandfathers in detail; we will visit their cities and villages, and see them as actual people who fight, suffer, and struggle.

This is how the future of history will be, an image from that past brought to the future generations through a computer screen. I do believe that this should be the way we introduce history to societies in the coming years.

### The Memory of Man, Creativity and the Making of History

One query that arises every now and then regarding the question of how knowledge grows. Today, a new concept is proposed which challenges the prevailing notion claiming that biology alone has led to the evolution of mental skills. It demonstrates that abilities, such as creativity, linguistic skills and work are the outcome of a continuous process of cultural insemination through interaction with the world we live in, be it with other people or other physical objects.

This notion maintains that the human brain is in a constant state of flux, interacting with every variable offered by life, whether this variable is cultural, an object, or new technologies. This is similar to how humans interacted with the innovation of papyrus to record their daily lives as a document that elevated transactions between humans to a higher status of civilizational achievement. It is also similar to humans' daily interaction with the mobile phones with their multiple technologies that have changed concepts of communication and information transfer.

Archeologists assume that the first human appeared on Earth around 200000 years ago, of which 140000 years passed without great transformation in the lifestyle of humans, or the emergence of any signs of steps predicting any progress in their lives. What, then, happened and led to this transformation in humans' ability to think and innovate, such as the innovation of stone tools and cave drawings?

This question has created much controversy among numerous scholars in a scientific debate held at Cambridge University in the UK during 2007, entitled "The Wise Human Brain".

Those maintaining that the human brain developed biologically claim that it took humans 140000 years for their brains to grow biologically. However, during this long period of time, human communities formed, groups became tribes, and they gained experiences in moving as groups in forests and wildernesses.

The experience of dealing with human surroundings is the experience that required many years of human life for the human memory to begin the phase of retaining the memories of the past, learning about the present offers, and planning and conceptualizing the future.

The difference between humans and animals, in terms of mental ability, is the translation of human communal life into a joint force towards the good of humans. It is far more effective than the motion of groups of animals whose role is either limited to escaping other predatory animals, or launching an individual attack on other animals. Humans learnt to cooperate in many tasks, such as using the unified force of a number of individuals to move heavy objects, or to hunt together. Here the gap between humans and animals appeared, for the latter are only able to imitate, whereas the former managed to develop their skills over the years. The ability to learn is the most prominent merit of humans, which helped them develop their memory and build cumulative experiences on its repertoire, whereas animals learn from

random observation of what other animals do. It is very rare for animals to recognize the value of innovation.

Human beings realized the ability to predict the intentions of others. In the process of instruction, for instance, both the teacher and the student realize the intentions of the other. The student's perception of the teacher is not a random observation, for indeed the alert student adds to himself more than just observation, for it becomes a form of reasoning about what is presented. The process of learning, thus, becomes more effective.

Dwight Read, Anthropologist at UCLA, maintains that the decisive moment in the history of the development of civilization emerged 10000 years ago, when the relationship between humans and the objects surround them changed drastically. It was during that time when groups of hunters and gatherers exchanged hunting tools for the domestication of animals. They started setting up barns for these animals, and cultivating and reaping crops, instead of simply picking fruits off the trees. With this, humans' actions turned into accomplishments. Dwight Read adds that, "Accordingly, solving problems became an alternative for moving from place to place". This led to the emergence of the ability to learn systematically, the ability to work, and the ability to solve problems. The ability of the mind to adjust with cultural change emerged, and human genius was born.

Posing another important question about the relationship between the human ability to innovate and language, Dietrich Stout *et al* at London College scanned of the brain, as three anthropologists were making tools similar to those of the Stone Age. They concluded that those areas of the anthropologists' brains that became active are the self-same areas used in language. Stout maintains that "the formation of a complex sentence, and the making of a tool are similar challenges, and hence the main process underlying both is similar as well, for it depends on overlapping areas of the brain."

Scott Frey, from the University of Oregon, studied patients with brain injuries, found after scanning healthy individuals, that the areas of the left hemisphere of the brain are decisive in the human's ability to use tools. These areas also function as a driving force for our ability to produce signs and symbols, and if these areas sustain damage, the human's ability to move is impaired.

The speech areas in the human brain illustrate that language is a principle component in humans, just like the other senses that have similar centers in the brain. Thus, it is possible to claim that language is a purely human innovation, a statement that may need further proof as to its validity. Language, at the beginning, was as limited as humans' need of it. It is only day after day that humans developed language, adding to it new vocabulary items that reflected the development of daily life. Language is a living organism that evolves, and daily acquires something new.

At the beginning of human civilization language was nothing but a means of communication between individuals, then between the group and other groups, and then among nations. With the increase and advancement of humans, languages diversified and interacted with their surrounding environments.

The ability of humans to think distinguishes them from other beings. The areas responsible for thinking are located in the outer cortex of the brain. Together with the centers of memory in the brain, they help us connect the past and the present, and visualize the future.

The question, at the end, is why the individual did not develop his memory biologically as the earliest primitive humans or the caveman did; some scientists believe that memory in these early humans developed biologically. Or were humans created with memory constituting an integral part of them?

## The Future of History

The past raises many questions. The past has a science that studies it, namely history, which in turn has also become a domain of many interesting queries. To this day, history is presented through the writings of historians, whether in books, academic or cultural journals, or newspapers. Yet, with the progress in modern means of technology, documentaries have become rich material that attract many to history.

The science of history takes as its field of study the conditions that prevailed in ancient societies, the study of the evolution of Man, his cultural achievements, and the impact of these achievements on the development of contemporary civilization. This definition is highly advanced in comparison with earlier topics studied by the science of history in older times, when the main purpose of history was to hail praise on the ruler and glorify the State. This is why ancient historians did not pay much attention to the daily lives of humans, and history in ancient times was selective, for historians selected the events and facts they recorded (the stories that historians narrate of the past), focusing on those events that attract our attention. This is why we tell these stories to our contemporaries.

For these reasons, history books are buried treasures. They are detailed works narrated by historians. These books always overwhelm us for they bring us happiness, and make us nostalgic for the past. This is not all there is for contemporary historians, for we do not only need to present the past, we also need to explain and interpret it. To attain a broader context for the story is not simply limited to its sequential events, but relates also to the significance of these event, in particular since the aims of the science of history today are much broader and more diversified.

The question that poses itself now is: Why are we concerned with history?

There are several answers to this question, some of which are extensive in the response. For instance, the interest in history aims to attain abstract truths. However, this answer would be a complete answer if the aim was merely scientific, to learn about the past and its feats, to study the merits and demerits of human history, or because it is a principle cultural component of any people. In fact, all of these are just a preliminary answer, since the actual answer is that all of the above is nothing but a result of our interest in history. History is the basis for educating society, guiding it to the rules of war and peace, the rules for managing State affairs, and enabling it to plan for its future. The concept of history, thus, shifts from the realm of theoretical sciences into the realm of practical sciences, as it is connected to the existence of the State and its elements, represented in the land, the people and the political authority. These are all expressed in terms of the country identity and existence.

That is why when the present returns to the past, the past becomes a strong center. Often thinking about history occurs in the form of a question vacillates between "What is history?" and "Who does history belong to?"

Such questions are essential for the existence of history. If the past were without lacunas or problems, the historian's task would not be complete. For history is a kind of controversy, a controversy between present and past, and a controversy between what has actually occurred and what will happen in the future.

Historians narrate stories, seeking to convince you with some ideas. The methods they follow are based on truth; they present it fairly even though it may offend some. They also have to arrange them chronologically and geographically, presenting works that attract attention, in an attempt to present an interesting and entertaining context that is in agreement with the past.

We may conclude from this that the past is not merely the story that is narrated, but is in its entirety muddled and disarranged to a

certain extent, and as complicated as the life we are living. History creates a feeling of bewilderment, due to the endeavor to find a model, a context, meaning and easy stories for the reader. We can, thus, return to the past to understand the reality of history in the past.

The concept and content of history have changed from the times of Herodotus to the present day. Yet, the real change occurred during the transitional period moving into the times of the Industrial Revolution and the contemporary state. It has become part of what is known as the humanities in their modern form, as part of the mechanisms of authority that work towards controlling society through education, discipline, the reordering of perceptions and the communal memory.

### The Future

If history has changed throughout the ages, why is it not changing now again?

In fact, the past is recalled in the present, where the connection between the two is re-established, in particular since the process of writing history is full of questions. There is an element that attracts us to the past, and urges us to study history, when people did not live as we live today.

To understand this, we need to understand that printing has changed human life. The printed book, newspaper, pamphlet, invitation card and other types of printed material, created societies totally different from the societies that existed before printing. Humans have become educated readers and good communicating beings. Similarly, the telegraph has changed the nature of communication between communities and States. The radio has invaded every corner of the daily life of humans, and the television delivers visual images of incidents to people in faraway places. All of these tools have indeed become a historical reference to which we now return to watch history live, or read it in original sources, and not through a mediator. With the appearance of documentaries, in

particular the movies of World War I and World War II, these have become an excellent means to narrate history. The live image, together with a solid scenario and a narrator, have become the major tools of influence for historical events.

In the past, urban legends played the role of documentaries in entertaining the public. Yet, the narrator in urban legends embellished the narration with an entertaining plot beyond the real context of the historical event. This is similar to what is today known as historical series. Thus, real history is the history that clarifies various matters to different peoples. The development of human skill in recording the past is the criterion for human desire to benefit from the accumulating repertoire of human knowledge and experience. History, then, is for society the equivalent of memory.

The future of history, therefore, will not be in books that rely solely on texts. It will depend on a new kind of historical books based mainly on attractive images and graphics. This kind of books is known as coffee books, because one skims through them for entertainment and knowledge in leisure times. They will also become a true competitor of television and the Internet in attracting the reader to watch and read. These books may be supplemented with a CD or a DVD with a film, an interview or a documentary of an event relevant to the topic of the book. Annotated historical books, on the other hand, such as manuscripts, will become part of the digital libraries accessible on the Internet. Thus, the historian's role will recede in the future to be limited to academic studies, specialized journals, or in providing help in the presentation of historical material on the Internet, in addition to his role in interpreting history and researching its lacunas. There will be no nation that does not own a comprehensive historical site on the Internet. This explains the attention the Library of Congress is paying to the issue, not limiting itself to this alone, the Library has sought to establish a universal heritage library in collaboration with UNESCO, which holds the masterpieces of the world heritage from every nation

on the Internet. The States of the world contribute to this Library by providing the best they own in terms of historical, archival and documentary materials.

### History: Where to?

In the past, every State stored its documents in national archives. Today, every State seeks to make these documents available and known via the Internet. There are two approaches followed in this regard. The first is adopted by the USA, namely to make accessible the full documents of what it deems harmless to its current policy on the Internet. The second approach is adopted by the British archive, which makes accessible the full descriptive data of the available documents.

The world is now heading towards what is even broader than this, namely the establishment of electronic sites, digital libraries, or historical repositories for every State on the Internet. These sites have become an urgent need for two reasons: first, due to the need of future generations to foster their culture via a digital medium and not through the traditional knowledge and science bearing media; second, due to the diversity of material and historical sources, which makes computer software a great advantage to link these together; to provide, from various inputs, integral result for any one search entry.

Among the new historical sources one now includes radio and television materials, Internet archives, the press, photographs, feature films, documentary films, in addition to traditional sources such as books, periodicals, documents, coins, stamps, monuments and others.

These sources can all be described in a comprehensive label that includes search words for the user to look up the entry and thus form a reference to retrieve the material through a search on the monitor of a computer. There are also various approaches to design the main page of the main site, such as the thematic approaches, for example, the rulers, prime ministers, and topics such as political, economic, social, cultural, artistic and scientific life, in addition to landmark events and

public figures, as opposed to searches by topic. There is also search by material, such as images, documents, films, voice recordings, newspapers and magazines, maps, coins, stamps, books, medals and decorations, wrappings and labels, and advertisements.

However, all this needs to be enhanced with objective historical materials that explain, in simple terms, everything relevant to the country's history. The user of the site is assumed to be in search of historical material they want to read or learn about, before they can use this tremendous amount of material. If the articles and studies of historians are added through a separate icon, classified according to certain issues, interpretations or explanations of a historical event, the historical website becomes complete.

This is how history will be presented to the society within the coming years. Yet, there are differences between reading history in a book, through a historical text, and between surfing a historical site on the Internet. These are as follows:

The Historical Book	The Historical Site
Stops with the author's point of view on the topic	Allows the reader to form their own point of view through the available materials
Work ends as soon as it is published	Information can be corrected and added to
Does not interact with the reader	Is interactive, allowing the reader to contribute to it
Has limited distribution	Is limitless in dissemination
Its content is limited to its pages	Multiple material serving the same topic, and the diversity attracts the viewer's eyes
For the current generations	History for the future

The library or historical website user can interact with the public via email or open discussions on a certain historical issue. History scholars take part in the discussion with the public, especially in controversial issues. There is an additional advantage to historical digital libraries, they are also a national archive that preserves all that relates to the nation's history in a memory that does not disappear or erode with the passage of time or for any other reason. Documents are kept in the national archives, TV materials at the national television station, money in the central bank, newspapers at the respective newspaper publishers, and so on. A digital library, however, is the repository that combines all these materials related to the nation's memory. This digital library enhances the digital content of the State or the nation on the World Wide Web, which many States and institutions compete over, for each seeks to find a space on the web to establish their identity and presence.

The historical digital memory is like a feature movie; it presents images that soon become part of human memory. Some of these images are forgotten, while others are recalled in certain situations.

The memory will take you back across many years, to a past that we were not part of, at a time when our country was starting out on its contemporary renaissance. Our forefathers were struggling for the modernization of the country and the attainment of their rights. When you view images of their daily lives, you will see them as real people who worked, fought, suffered, struggled and lived their lives to the minutest details. It will take you to cities and villages, and show you the future of history; an image from the past, revived on the screen of a computer, to be read by future generations.

## Egypt's Contemporary Memory

Egypt's Contemporary Memory is the greatest digital library, and contains on its web-pages the history of Egypt throughout two centuries, starting with the beginning of Muhammad Ali Pasha's reign in 1805 until the end of President Mohamed Anwar Sadat's rule on 6 October 1981.

The Repository records the history of Egypt in various aspects: politically, socially, economically and culturally. The most important merit of the Repository is its neutrality, highlighting unknown aspects in the history of Egyptians.

There is more than one way to navigate through the Memory of Egypt. By clicking on a ruler, you can view all the events, such as revolutions, achievements, during his rule. You can also find out about the economic, cultural, political and social aspects of that period of time through the general features distinguishing life at the time.

The Memory includes the first documented history of Egyptian Ministries made available on the Internet. Through it, you can trace the history of Egyptian Ministries, Prime Ministers and Ministers from the time of Khedive Ismail, when it was known as *Nizara* to the end of Sadat's rule. It also includes the complete Egyptian constitutions, as well as a documentation of parliamentary life in Egypt from the time of the French Campaign, when the earliest councils and *Shura* councils emerged in Egypt, to the time of multiple political parties.

The Memory covers all political aspects, in terms of the birth of Egyptian political parties, their development and most prominent figures. Its role is not limited to delineating the political aspects of Egypt alone, but extends to depict the cultural features of Cairo at the time, in terms of the planning and development of the city, its most prominent palaces and museums, its famous buildings and prestigious institutions, such as *Misr Bank* and Shepheard Hotel. It also reviews the history and development of major parks and gardens.

The Memory of Egypt documents the history of the Egyptian press, starting with the "Khedive's Journal" published under Muhammad Ali Pasha, considered to be the first step in the history of the official Egyptian Gazette (*El Waqa'ea El Masreya*), to the major press foundations, such as *Akhbar El Youm*, *Rosa al-Yousef*, *El Helal Publishers*, *Al Ahrām* and *Al Akhbar*. Thus, it includes the greatest library about the Egyptian press and the most famous Egyptian journalists, caricaturists and photographers in Egypt.

The Memory holds a collection of over 18,000 documents, most of which are published for the first time. It holds the collection of the late "iron-fist" Prime Minister, Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha, and Prime Minister Boutros Ghali Pasha.

The most distinguishing merit of Egypt's Contemporary Memory is its focus on the cultural and social aspects. For the first time, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina document, through this new memory, the history of the oldest Egyptian football clubs, such as *Al Ahly*, *Al Zamalek*, *Olympic Club*, *Tram Club* and others.

Another important merit of Egypt's Contemporary Memory is the existence of various links connected to each event, topic or ruler, such as the publications available on the topic, the different articles dealing with it, in addition to the documentaries, videos and voice recordings. Very often, it also supplements the topics with various maps, certificates and awards. In addition, the most beautiful thing about Egypt's Contemporary Memory is the set of stamps and coins particular to each historical period.

Through Egypt's Contemporary Memory, the visitor can surf through the folds of history, viewing the political, the social and the cultural simultaneously. Thus, you can review the life of Muhammad Ali Pasha, and the history of Egypt at that time through the diverse topics and events included in the Memory.

The Memory includes so far over 42,000 pictures.

The Memory highlights some of the most significant events in the history of Egypt, especially the Fire of Cairo in 1952. For the first time the cases pertaining to the Fire, that were filed in the courts by the shop-owners who had sustained great damage, are published. In addition, there is also press coverage and footage of incidents that occurred before and after the event, such as the Fire of Cairo in 1952, and the Setback of the 1967 War.