

Introduction

We tend to forget how much of what surrounds us is narrative-driven – both in our past and in our present. But the stories we tell shape our perceptions and behaviour. They also underpin the sources we work with, and they are the foundation of our disciplines. Narratives permeate our work and, following the narrative turn, they became important factors in historical practice. The readiness to acknowledge narratives has been changing rapidly, with an ever-growing number of different narratives laid bare and with new research paradigms rushing onto the scene. Hence the need for a perpetual rediscovery of the narrative, which requires a constant search for new frameworks.

The following collection of essays is the result of a conference held in Innsbruck in November 2019, which tried to offer a platform for such a search. The initial gathering was designed to bring together scholars of various disciplines in order to discuss the broader implications of narratological perspectives in their fields for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. While narratology is a widely acknowledged theoretical and methodological stance in some disciplines, like philology, it has yet to make a real impact in others. This uneven distribution of methodological and theoretical reflections turned out to be one of the main positive aspects of the whole endeavour. The conference discussions soon focused on the practical consequences of the narratological framework and its implementation. The key takeaway was the immediate effect of a change in perspective. The deep-dives into the structural complexities of texts and the intricacies of storytelling turned out to be only one of the many ways forward. One can discover new meaning simply by considering the narratological consequences of our sources. This makes for a low threshold to enter the paradigm in the first place, while never limiting the reach of detailed narratological analysis.

It was a logical consequence of such a spirited, interdisciplinary, and international discussion to gather its results together. This collection is then perhaps first and foremost proof that narratology works well as a platform for an exchange of ideas. The book that you hold in your hand is a great example of how narrativity and narratology as frameworks can be applied to a broader scope of topics, sources and periods than previously thought. Many areas of social life and interactions are dictated by rules and traditions that resemble the many facets of literature and the

rules and traditions that govern its production. And so, this collection starts with a form of methodological prolegomena, framed as guiding principles for the impact of narratives on Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages underpinned by the concept we will call “literarisation”. The structure we propose – mirroring the methodological reflections of our contributors – is threefold.

The first part follows the traditional understanding of narratology as developed by scholars of literature. Sihong LIN, Sabina TUZZO, and Andreas ABELE each dissect one text, highlighting their authors’ narrative strategies and how they influence both the form and the message of their respective sources. Sihong LIN recovers hidden traces of ecclesiastical conflict and the spread of the monothelete heresy in Gaul by interpreting the proleptic features of a famous excursus in the hagiography of Eligius of Noyon. Its author had rearranged his material by shifting the focus to certain times and protagonists to avoid the association of his hero with – from a later perspective – controversial figures. He thus produced telling silences. Sabina TUZZO analyses erotic epigrams and the philological traditions surrounding them, showing well the disciplinary roots of this methodological framework. She also emphasises the fluidity and continuing relevance of Greek myth even in the face of a predominantly Christian society. Andreas ABELE then utilises theories of space to distinguish between three different spatial settings in Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of St. Martin*. Each setting allows Sulpicius to show Martin’s saintly power in a particular way, and ultimately his ability to determine the spatial configuration of his opponents. Martin reigns not only over God’s enemies but also over their active capacities in the narrative.

In the second part, the focus changes by zooming out of the level of single sources in order to bring into our view the phenomena called literary movements. Literary movements are here a variety of practices and intellectual efforts that modern research can profitably analyse with narratological eyes.

At first glance, Veronika EGETENMEYR is looking for the emotional strategies of two Gallic aristocrats, Sidonius and Ruricius, and their correspondents. But what she unearths as well are the narrative structures and the semantics of ostensible Romanness and of *amicitia*. Being Roman and performing *amicitia* are also literary movements, movements that are essential to building and maintaining (a sense of) community. Jelle WASSENAAR’s paper on the changing nature of urban communities in the post-Carolingian world and the reflection of those changes in narratives shows how this understanding of community as a literary movement also perseveres at the very end of the Early Middle Ages. By pointing out which particular narrative strategies were used when describing inhabitants of towns and cities, WASSENAAR shows how those strategies reflected a creation of a community. Michail KITSOS’ reading of one particular example of the *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues also analyses narrative markers. He shows us the main storytelling devices of the text and how they make the text effective, and at the same time, he also unveils the common traits that bind the whole genre together. With his analysis in mind, researchers can look at the genre and see the literary movement of performative Christianity in fictional debates.

Another possible avenue forward is the observation of narrative motifs through different texts. Be it in a literary environment or in texts with a more factual, seemingly story-less, face to them, there exist nonetheless stories and motifs. Sabina WALTER shows how Roman and Ostrogothic laws are permeated by traditional – and conflicting – narratives of what good rulers are supposed to do. The difficulty of interpreting these laws can only be grasped and dealt with when acknowledging the impact of these narratives on the actual legislation. Reuven KIPERWASSER and Serge RUZER approach the traditional Jewish and Christian storyworlds of modern-day Iraq and Syria, laying bare age-old motifs of human interaction with the mythical and dangerous maritime world. These motifs morph into new elements with different meanings, continuously adapting to customary and eschatological needs but always remaining a visibly shared stock for Near Eastern societies. That such pieces of narrative travel through different media is proven by Salvatore LICCARDO, who shows that the Peutinger Table contains traces of the legends about Alexander the Great, especially in the context of Far Eastern regions with their mystical appeal to Mediterranean observers. Even small symbols on large maps transport narratives that span time and space.

This reflection leads us to the final part of this collection, where meta-narratives receive their deserved attention. Philipp MARGREITER's paper on archaeological research narratives showcases the robustness and prevalence of certain notions in archaeology. By closely analysing one particular assemblage, he unpicks how its current and past interpretations are deeply rooted in self-serving paradigms. Ekaterina NOVOKHATKO and Rutger KRAMER take hagiography and analyse it not only as a set of narratives and a genre but also as a medium, ordered by a set of meta-narrative principles that influence the lives of saints but also the research narratives. Their paper shows that narratological approaches are particularly well suited for interdisciplinary research and for opening doors to other kinds of frameworks, in this case media-oriented ones.

While the papers presented in this collection form a logical and coherent whole, as do its three parts, each is also a gateway to further interdisciplinary research. We hope that they will serve as an example of the new possibilities and chances that can be reached by exploring a narratological framework. They can all be read in different ways, and they also build connections outside of the linear structure of this collection. For example, Sihong LIN looks at narrative silence and how it can help us elucidate the problems of religious disagreement, especially in a multicultural environment. When read together with Andreas ABELE's paper on space in the *Vita Sancti Martini* and Ekaterina NOVOKHATKO and Rutger KRAMER's paper on Breton hagiography as a medial genre, it offers a vision of an interdisciplinary, narratologically driven approach to the lives of saints. It shows how historical arguments can be made through narratological frameworks. In a different juxtaposition, we see how Veronika EGETENMEYR also contextualises friendship, the rules of which were already highly formalised before, as a genre to be performed. One can be not only a member of a friendship *circle* defined through networks but also a member of the

friendship *genre* through literary performance. The same happens with historiography: common emotions about space and past become an entry ticket to a community. We then appreciate Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages as periods during which authors and movements operated in sophisticated, deceptively modern categories of narrative. As Salvatore LICCARDO shows, maps can carry not only spaces but emotions, historiography, and expectations. Not only making them but also reading them makes you into a member of a narrative. We discover a different kind of a public sphere: while disjointed and ruled by different and specific means of literary production, it is nevertheless one where, thanks to literarisation, the chief category is the ability to decode, and therefore belong to, a genre.

These are just some of the possible ways in which the papers in this collection enter a dialogue and form new narratives, crossing genres and disciplines. We hope that more will be discovered and that this book will further stimulate the discussions about narratological frameworks for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

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Berlin, 15 February 2022