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Literarised Spaces
Towards a Narratological Framework for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

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Abstract This paper aims to establish a new framework for including narratological methodologies in the study of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, taking as its starting point an overview of narrative and narratological approaches to late and post-Roman worlds. The characteristics of both the sources and the research tradition of those periods make them well suited for such methodologies. The paper identifies three primary levels of possible narratological reflection – single sources, literary movements, and meta-narratives. Key to this framework is the concept of literarisation – progressive shaping of various movements and spaces according to rules similar to those of a genre. Thanks to this structure and the identification of literarising phenomena, narratological approaches, can be included in late antique and early medieval hermeneutics and used for historical argumentation.

Zusammenfassung Dieser Aufsatz soll einen neuen Bezugsrahmen für die Implementierung narratologischer Methodologien in der Erforschung der Spätantike und des Frühmittelalters schaffen, wobei ein Überblick über narrative und narratologische Ansätze in der Erforschung der spät- und nachrömischen Welt als Ausgangspunkt dient. Sowohl die Quellen als auch die Forschungstradition dieser Epochen eignen sich aufgrund ihrer Charakteristika gut für derartige Methoden. Der hier vorgestellte Bezugsrahmen zeichnet sich durch eine narratologische Analyse auf mehreren Ebenen – der Quellentexte, literarischen Bewegungen und Meta-Narrative – aus. Ein Schlüssel hierfür ist das Konzept der *literarisation*/Literarisierung: der zunehmenden Anpassung vieler sozialer Bewegungen und

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> Räume an Regeln und Charakteristika, die literarisch vor-
> gezeichnet sind. Die hier vorgeschlagene Struktur und die
> Identifikation literarisierender Impulse erlauben die breit
> gefächerte Implementierung narratologischer Herange-
> hensweisen in die Hermeneutik und die historische Analy-
> se der Spätantike und des Frühmittelalters.

Introduction

This article and the following collection of papers are prolegomena for integrating
narratological models into the study of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.
Researchers have in recent years successfully established the validity of narratology
as a way forward in historical analyses – both in historical disciplines[1] and in scholar-
ship adopting historical perspectives on literary studies.[2] Here, we want to suggest
a direction by illustrating how narratology fits into the established hermeneutics of
our specific periods.[3] Our paper cannot offer a fully developed methodological con-
cept, nor was it ours or the other contributors' intention to do so. Instead, we will
make a case for a new methodological approach and possible ways forward in our
understanding of these periods.

Narrativity is already an expanding paradigm in the transition period from
Antiquity to the Middle Ages.[4] With advances in research, a much clearer picture
has emerged of narrative patterns and narrative dependencies that shape our source

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1   Cf. Charis Messis and Ingela Nilsson, Byzantine Storytelling and Modern Narratology. An
    Introduction, in: Charis Messis, Margaret Mullett and Ingela Nilsson (eds.), Storytelling in
    Byzantium. Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images, Uppsala 2018, pp. 1–11.

2   Cf. Monika Fludernik, The Diachronization of Narratology. Dedicated to F. K. Stanzel on his
    80th Birthday, in: Narrative 11 (2003), pp. 331–348; as well as von Eva von Contzen, Diachrone
    Narratologie und historische Erzählforschung. Eine Bestandsaufnahme und ein Plädoyer, in:
    Beiträge zur mediävistischen Erzählforschung 1 (2018), pp. 16–37. The new standard here should
    be Eva von Contzen and Stefan Tilg, Handbuch Historische Narratologie, Stuttgart 2019.

3   The appropriation of narratology for specific circumstances (typically periods and genres)
    has recent precedents as well. Cf. Stephan Conermann (ed.), Mamluk Historiography Revis-
    ited. Narratological Perspectives, Göttingen 2018; Maximilian Benz and Silvia Reuvekamp,
    Mittelhochdeutsche Erzählverfahren und theologisches Wissen. Bausteine einer historisch
    spezifischen Narratologie, in: Poetica 50 (2020), pp. 53–82; and Stefan Tilg, Autor / Erzähler und
    Fiktion im neulateinischen Roman. Ein Beitrag zu einer historischen Narratologie, in: Florian
    Schaffenrath (ed.), Acta conventus neo-latini albasitensis. Proceedings of the seventeenth
    International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies (Albacete 2018), Leiden 2020, pp. 68–90.

4   This paper, like the whole collection, differentiates between 'narrativity', understood as "being
    able to inspire a narrative response", Marie-Laure Ryan, On the Theoretical Foundations of
    Transmedial Narratology, in: Jan Christoph Meister (ed.), Narratology beyond Literary Criti-
    cism. Mediality, Disciplinarity, Berlin 2018, p. 347 and 'narratology', the discipline and toolbox
    used to analyse and process narratives.

material.[5] While narratology emerged as a tool to analyse fictional literature, it is now clear that the presence of narrative structures outside this field warrants a broad application of the methodology.[6] Even non-literary artefacts such as maps, pictures, or architecture contain narratives – sometimes more overtly, sometimes more subtly. Therefore, the narratological approach taken in this collection of papers and in our article is both a form of navigation in new waters and a consequent reaction to the stipulations of the narrative turn.[7]

Why Do We Need a Model of Narratology for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages?

Already on the semantic level a surprising connection lies between Late Antiquity, the Early Middle Ages and narratology. And, of course, it all starts with the barbarians. The 'fear of barbarians' is a common motif in our sources and at the same time a strong motivation in narratives, especially as a means to convey a variety of messages – messages that have little to do with any actual fear of barbarians. It is also the title of an important investigation by Tzvetan Todorov, who helped to coin the term narratology in the first place.[8] That fact, as we shall see, is only superficially a coincidence.

In late antique sources, when the image of the gruesome barbarian appears, we see an uncanny inconsistency. As a form of categorisation, it can be withheld from people one might very well expect to be described as such. It can also be applied to individuals we would not expect to be barbarian, like (ex-)Roman officials. Be it along the lines of religious conflict, political allegiances or ethnic identities, barbarian was a complex and polyvalent attribute that suited many a rhetorical need. Among the best examples of barbarian being a fluid category, we have Victor of Vita's treatment of the Vandal rule[9] and Orosius' outlook on the crumbling Roman power in the Gallic provinces of his time. Orosius is especially prominent and difficult to grasp due to his "shaping the barbarian in function of the narrative". If the question remains what Orosius' genuine opinion about barbarians was, then his text is bound to produce

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5   See for example Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (eds.), Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West, Turnhout 2006.

6   For stepping outside the fictional in narratological approaches see Martin Löschnigg, Narratological Categories and the (Non)-Distinction between Factual and Fictional Narratives, in: John Pier (ed.), Recent Trends in Narratological Research, Tours 1999, pp. 31–48.

7   For an overview of the narrative turn's consequences for historiography see Philippe Carrard, History and Narrative. An Overview, in: Narrative Works 5 (2015), pp. 174–196.

8   Tzvetan Todorov, The Fear of Barbarians. Beyond the Clash of Civilizations, transl. by Andrew Brown, Chicago, London 2010 (originally: La peur des barbares. Au-delà du choc des civilisations, Paris 2008).

9   Tankred Howe, Vandalen, Barbaren und Arianer bei Victor von Vita, Frankfurt a. M. 2007, p. 32.

paradoxes and contradictions.[10] To understand this we can use a document from a very different corner of the empire: a sixth-century papyrus from southern Egypt. It is a petition, surely not a form usually considered to be 'literature', asking for military support against a Roman commander gone rogue. It shows us the wide range of 'barbarian' possibilities. The commander in question is not only called a brute and badly behaved man but also an *omophagos*, an eater of raw meat. Using this particularly barbarian slur recalls both the Hunnic nomads and the wild followers of Dionysus – as classical a notion for a barbarian 'lifestyle' as there will ever be.[11]

For these instances a narrative-focused approach has proven to help render self-contradictory statements understandable and to add nuance to holistic arguments. The image of a barbarian can serve multiple purposes in a single text, becoming a Swiss Army knife of categorisations. The late antique world appears much less antagonistic once we decode some of its black-and-white language. Nevertheless, this narrative approach is not narratology as such; reaching those conclusions does not necessitate narratology. If we want to go further, our task of decoding gets more laborious. In smaller units of text and with more complex 'barbarisations', it becomes increasingly difficult to see through the authors' mixture of reports, stereotypes, and literary allusions.

Let us take Procopius, whose views of barbarians are a subject of potentially endless debate.[12] A closer look at one description of a specific group of barbarians can show us how difficult it is to make sense of his text and how rewarding it can be to engage it in detail from a more narratological perspective. A particularly odd example is a narrative unit that equates Kutrigurs (and Utigurs), barbarian groups active in the Balkans and the northern Black Sea region, with Huns and Kimmerians. What does this strange equation of different barbarian peoples mean? One can easily recognise a direct benefit for a historian in decoding this narrative strategy – in terms of what it meant for both Procopius and his audience. To understand what these Kutrigurs are to Procopius and his audience promises a good return on the invested work, but it is not an easy task, for it is all somewhat puzzling: in a geographical diatribe

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10 Peter van Nuffelen, Orosius and the Rhetoric of History, Oxford 2012, pp. 177–178.

11 For the petition itself see Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, A Cult of Isis at Philae after Justinian? Reconsidering P.Cair.Masp. I 67004, in: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 146 (2004), pp. 137–154. For Huns as raw-meat-eaters see Ammianus Marcellinus, Roman Antiquities XXX.2.1, for Maenads see Albert Henrichs, Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina, in: Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 82 (1978), pp. 121–160.

12 A recent assessment of this is Geoffrey Greatrex, Procopius' Attitude towards Barbarians', in: Geoffrey Greatrex and Sylvain Janniard (eds.), Le Monde de Procope / The World of Procopius, Paris 2018, pp. 327–354; a comparative approach is Alexander Sarantis, Roman or Barbarian? Ethnic Identities and Political Loyalties in the Balkans According to Procopius, in: Christopher Lilington-Martin and Élodie Turquois (eds.), Procopius of Caesarea. Literary and Historical Interpretations, London 2017, pp. 217–237. For a thorough case study see Henning Börm, Prokop und die Perser. Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasanidischen Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike, Stuttgart 2007, esp. pp. 247–275.

near the beginning of the eighth book of the 'Wars',[13] he mentions the existence of a Hunnic tribe that at some point in history split up into two. So far, so good. Each group followed one of two rival princes named Utigur and Kutrigur. Procopius adds that these people were in ancient times called Kimmerians. The story of why and how the two groups shocked the civilised world is then based on the well-known story of the origin of the Huns as also told by his contemporary Jordanes.[14] It seems that two classical interpretations for this narrative mélange are possible. One possibility is that Procopius paints the Kutrigurs as ultimately barbaric fear-infusing and eternal foes of civilisation, with a strange origin story. Such an understanding would pre-suppose a solitary reading, ignorant of other literature. Why then would you add the Kimmerians, a name that is a classic in the literary canon, used by both Homer and Herodotus (and quite differently at that)?[15] Adding Kimmerians muddles the waters and we are in need of an alternative reading: Procopius wants to allude to the fact that there have been many barbarians threatening civilisation before, namely the Huns and even earlier the Kimmerians, by pointing to earlier texts mentioning a similar phenomenon. Thus, he undermines the notion of these peoples being particular at all; he wants his audience to think that they are but garden-variety barbarians. In this case, why be so indirect about it? Why cite the relatively recent Hunnic story *and* the very, very ancient, quasi-mythical Kimmerians? In a nutshell: why is Procopius undermining the 'simple' reading with a name full of connotations, while at the same time undermining a 'complex', intertextual reading with contradicting intertexts?

For a historian, this seems strange, like a puzzle that either cannot be solved with the familiar historical methodologies or one that delivers distorted pictures. To understand what the Kutrigurs are supposed to represent in Procopius' account, one needs instruments that account for this strangeness. Narratology can furnish such an instrument. It offers a path through the complex state of texts between Christian and pagan beliefs, between new concepts of genre and a stable canon of fixed archetypes, and between an age-old language of history and new historical paradigms. Procopius might still seem strange, but his logic of Kimmerian subversion becomes justified when we see it as catering to contradicting narrative requirements. The Kutrigurs can be read as referring to roughly contemporary political and ethnographical pre-occupations. On the other hand, the Kimmerian subset of connotations aims at a different level of expression, one that engages the early Byzantine penchant for ancient Greek myth and antiquarian curiosities. Procopius fuses both interpretations of the issue, which is quite understandable given his political and literary disposition. This

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13 Procopius, Wars, VIII.5.

14 Jordanes, Getica, XXIV.

15 Homer, Odyssey, XI, 12–19 has the Kimmerians as cave-people living on the edge of *okeanos*, and Herodotus, Histories, IV.11–12 explains that they lost a confrontation with Scythians and had to move to Asia Minor. Compare also Strabo, Geography, I, 3.21, linking the Kimmerians to the death of legendary Anatolian king Midas.

strategy is narratively extremely effective. However, it produces a strange outcome for an unprepared reader.

The strangeness in our minds, the defamiliarisation in the face of our sources, is a feeling we get from many texts and objects from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.[16] Encountering defamiliarisation in our sources can lead to the undermining of our expectations. Instead of seeing those passages as exclusively purely fantastic or purely factual, a narratological approach draws our attention to the act of subverting literary and historical expectations, the role this uncanny effect has on our research narratives and their place in the textual communities.[17] This language usage (be it textual or visual) that differs so much from our expectations, coming both from 'classics' and from our historical methodologies, necessitates or at least allows for a new methodological foray into even well-known texts. Simply put, many sources are uncanny when we dissect them,[18] but there are still ways to see meaning in them.

We will find it in Procopius, as shown above, but also in Gregory the Great's pagan-crushing methods from his letters or in the Roman wall builders of Gildas. Gregory, in his letters, alternates between leniency and strict measures against the remaining pagans, presenting conflicting narratives and sudden changes of mind.[19] His narrative strategies and conflicting intertextualities are also, at least in part, responses to contradicting expectations. Gildas uses difficult and scholarly Latin betraying a thorough classical education, yet he seems to get so much about the Roman past of his island wrong – like letting the walls of Hadrian and Antoninus

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16 For defamiliarisation see Viktor SHKLOVSKY, Theory of Prose, transl. by Benjamin SHER, Champaign, London 1990 (originally: O teorii prozy, Moscow 1925), pp. 1–14, and an investigation in its genesis in Douglas ROBINSON, Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature. Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht, Baltimore, 2008.

17 For the concept of textual communities see Brian STOCK, The Implications of Literacy. Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, Princeton 1983, pp. 88–240; for the consequences of this term for the research on antiquity and an overview of trends, see Jane HEATH, "Textual Communities". Brian Stock's Concept and Recent Scholarship on Antiquity, in: Florian Wilk (ed.), Scriptural Interpretation at the Interface between Education and Religion, Leiden 2019, pp. 5–35.

18 While the term itself is derived from Sigmund Freud, over the twentieth century it has undergone a process of conceptualisation in literary theory and narratology that has changed its applicability and understanding, see Annneleen MASSCHELEIN, The Unconcept. The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory, New York 2011, pp. 7–11, 53–71. Identified in Nicholas ROYLE, The Uncanny, Manchester 2002, p. 1 as a "peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar", it is applicable to the defamiliarisation experienced when faced with the unexpected undermining of established concepts in the works of Procopius and alike. In particular, the structuralist poetics of the uncanny is applicable in our contexts, see MASSCHELEIN, pp. 78–85. Tzvetan TODOROV, The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, Ithaca 1975, p. 46 wrote about situations where uncanny occurs in literary sense as "events […] which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, […] unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar".

19 Cf. Gregory the Great, Letters IV.26, XI.37, XI.56.

be built in the wrong order.[20] This perplexing lack of attention to history becomes easier to understand when we start reading his work in the right *genre* of homiletics. When trying to unravel those features of the source, narratology offers us a way out of simple binary conclusions. As a methodology, it also opens a possibility to understand why authors resorted to such strategies in the first place. It can lay bare the inner dynamics of uncanny passages, making them valuable and strategic objects of rhetoric and text – objects that researchers can analyse and evaluate. What is seen as inner contradictions can be finally understood as multi-layered strategies of managing narrative expectations.

The case of the uncanny serves as one of the examples of engaging with sources of our timeframe. However, in no way is the utilisation of narratology limited to situations of the 'apparent fantastic'. There are multiple points of departure and multiple possible outcomes and a multiplicity of possible objects and narrative units to analyse, from paragraphs to chapters and books, from texts to genres, and from literary to all kinds of other narratives. Although narratology is a development of literary studies, it can serve as an instrument for many disciplines. If we apply a broad understanding of narrative, it becomes a vehicle for genuine interdisciplinarity. If we accept not only that fictional texts are narratives but also that 'factual' texts, legal texts, and indeed objects transport or contain narratives, new possibilities emerge. In that case, narratology is one methodology that can provide a common ground – for literary studies, philology, history, patristics, Jewish studies, art history, media studies and indeed archaeology.

In many places, this shift has already happened. Narratology is not a newcomer in Classics, Byzantine Studies, Religious Studies, Medieval German Studies or modern and contemporary history, and it has had considerable impact in bringing different traditions of interpretation together.[21] The same approach has to still reach studies of

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20 Gildas, De excidio et conquestu Britanniae, 15 and 18.

21 See for example the edited volumes Jonas Grethlein and Antonios Rengakos (eds.), Narratology and Interpretation, Berlin, New York 2009; Charis Messis, Margaret Mullett and Ingela Nilsson (eds.), Storytelling in Byzantium. Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images, Uppsala 2018; Constanza Cordoni de Gmeinbauer, Narratology, Hermeneutics, and Midrash, Göttingen 2014, or articles such as Simon Hornblower, Narratology and Narrative Techniques in Thucydides, in: Simon Hornblower (ed.), Greek Historiography, Oxford 1996, pp. 131–166; Jonathan M. Newman, Narratology and Literary Theory in Medieval Studies, in: Albrecht Claassen (ed.), Handbook of Medieval Studies. Terms – Methods – Trends, Berlin, New York 2010, pp. 990–998. Particularly interesting is the direction of Lively, who tries to firmly root narratology in ancient authors such as Aristotle, Plato and Horace, thereby reversing the usual relationship between it and historical sources, Genevieve Liveley, Narratology. Classics in Theory, Oxford 2019. For narratology and literary studies see for example Peter Hühn et al., Handbook of Narratology, Berlin, Boston 2009; Matthew Garrett, The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory, Cambridge 2018. For examples of the use of narratology in early modern history, see Liv Willumsen, A Narratological Approach to Witchcraft Trial. A Scottish Case, in: Journal of Early Modern History 15 (2015), pp. 531–560 and in contemporary history, see Katarzyna Chmielewska, Contemporary Historical Discourse on Polish Communism in a Narratological Perspective, in: Teksty Drugie 1 (2016), pp. 99–115.

Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages to the same extent. Yet, apart from disciplinary overlap[22] and philological case studies, narratology is largely absent from the study of our periods.[23] There are many possible reasons for this. For the six hundred years from Diocletian to Charlemagne, there is no classics, and no 'Germanistische Mediävistik', no 'interdisciplinary disciplines', so to speak, that could offer a common ground for adopting a mixture of methodologies. Philologists of late antique and early medieval Greek and Latin have tended to focus on the traditional philological fields of 'poetry' and 'fiction' (in themselves often ill-defined categories). There was in some sense no natural point of entry for a literary approach like narratology nor interdisciplinary conversations. However, especially when it comes to interdisciplinarity, there is much to be gained. In terms of reading all available sources in ways until now considered unorthodox – e.g. patristic sources for history, historiography for literary analysis, and poetry for intercultural exchange – many more connections can still be made even on well-trodden ground.[24]

Based on those considerations, as a workable and formative approach to the multiplicity of applications of narratology to Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, we identify a three-level structure. At its foundation lies a single-source level that analyses particular narratives such as those shown above with the example of Procopius. Such an approach takes classical narratology and brings it to new genres of text and new disciplines. On the other end of this hierarchy, at the head of the structure, we see a meta-level, which analyses research narratives and the interdependency of small-scale research to the period's grander narratives.

Before we move to the level of analysis situated between these two stages, we need to consider this meta-level in more detail. Of course, every historical period is a discretionary (but not arbitrary) model, but Late Antiquity, as a relatively young one, is small enough to be able to see well the coalescing of its defining characteristics and the development of its inner narrative. Thus, Late Antiquity as a 'research history' can also be analysed through a narratological lens.[25] Periods are not static;

22 For example Byzantinists looking 'back' at the sixth century, like Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksen, Dramatic Narratives and Recognition in the Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist, in: Charis Messis, Margaret Mullett and Ingela Nilsson (eds.), Storytelling in Byzantium. Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images, Uppsala 2018, pp. 91–109, or classicists looking 'forward' at Latin poetry like Péter Hajdu, Corippus's Attempt at Writing a Continuous Narrative Again, in: Latomus 60 (2001), pp. 167–175.

23 Although narrativity has been used as a point of departure already for over a generation, see e.g. Walter Goffart, The Narrators of Barbarian History, Princeton 1988 and Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, A Rhetoric of the Scene. Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages, Toronto 1989. Both spurred by the framework laid down in Hayden White, The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality, in: Critical Inquiry 7, 1 (1980), pp. 5–27.

24 A perfect example of such an endeavour with the help of narratology is the recent volume Christoph Brunhorn, Peter Gemeinhardt and Maria Munkholt Christensen (eds.), Narratologie und Intertextualität. Zugänge zu spätantiken Text-Welten (Seraphim 7), Tübingen 2020.

25 Late Antiquity has existed as a term since the mid-nineteenth century (which still makes for a relatively short 'research history'), but it was not until the publication of Peter Brown, The

they undergo constant renegotiation. In this process, terms are redefined, borders (both spatial and chronological) change and the interpretations of our sources and the narratives of the past of our discipline transform. Terms like *Völkerwanderung* go out of use,[26] are redefined,[27] and possess their inner narrative dynamics.[28] The history of historical research is therefore largely dependent on narrative structures as well. Be it the 'migration of peoples', the 'fall of Rome', or the 'transformation of the Roman world' – these are all essentially stories that structure the way we frame our research. It would only be natural to dissect said stories with tools that were made for such a task. Using narratology to analyse our way of approaching the source and the narratives that guide us is, consequently, only a logical next step. The way our discourse about the epoch is structured, the way the meta-narrative about the past functions, is also within the remit of narratology.

The same is true for the Early Middle Ages. Ian Wood's 'The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages' from 2013 is an excellent example of an analysis of the founding myth of the period as rooted in French, English and German attitudes of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and deeply connected with contemporary politics. Those narratives of periods (and not only the periods in question here) can be analysed as histories of historiography, as in Wood's approach, but they can also be analysed through a narratological lens: their inner logic is a crucial, but rarely conceptualised, factor in everyday research that needs to be fully understood. One can say that this logic also finds its embodiment in the two principles of narrative: succession as well as transformation.[29] A narratological approach can then not only help us understand why the narrative of 'the transformation of the Roman world' succeeded the narrative of 'decline and fall' but also why the meaning of the 'migration of peoples' has changed dramatically in the last forty years.

In our case we also deal with a peculiar case in which those two periods, Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, overlap at least partly chronologically and spatially. The discussions on where one period begins, and another one ends – or, in other words, how historians model their periods for the timespan c. 300 to 800 – also

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World of Late Antiquity, New York 1971 that it experienced first a formalisation as a period and second a true flourishing of its own research narrative. This is not to say that forerunners such as Henri-Irénée Marrou, Saint Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique, Paris 1938, did not contribute substantially to this process of formalisation.

26 On the limited usability of the term see Walter Goffart, Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?, in: Thomas F. X. Noble (ed.), From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms, London 2006, pp. 78–79.

27 Mischa Meier, Geschichte der Völkerwanderung. Europa, Asien und Afrika vom 3. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert n. Chr., München 2019, p. 15–123.

28 On the dynamic and evolution of historical concepts see Reinhart Koselleck, Begriffsgeschichten, Frankfurt a. M. 2006, esp. pp. 9–104.

29 Tzvetan Todorov, The 2 Principles of Narrative, in: Diacritics 1 (1971), p. 39.

influence the methodologies used.[30] Since the choice of terminology is not neutral, we believe that is precisely why we need to include both periodisation approaches when thinking about a model of narratology for this time and space. The narratives of our disciplines (and our periods) can be seen as prejudgements that guide the way we order, model, and read our sources, the relationships between them and the outputs of our predecessors, and how we build our own periods. The existence of those prejudgements is necessary for our understanding of the concepts we are analysing. To exist free of our traditions is impossible.[31]

Similarly, it remains an illusion to try to ignore the influence of the contemporary world around us on our research – an attempt to do so will only make us victims of our subjectivity. The difference lies in whether or not we reflect upon the existence of the prejudgements that shape our traditions and our world.[32] Our concept of narratology for these periods can do precisely that: on the level of research narratives, it can help us remember that we also move inside a meta-narrative, that stepping outside it is impossible, nor is it necessary as long as we acknowledge its existence.

While those two levels, the single-source level and the meta-level, remain crucial and present clear areas where researchers encounter narratives and can fall back on narratology, there is another level that gains particular prominence in this collection. In our praxis we notice a constant need to employ narratology on a level lying between the other two, a level that lies at the centre of the particular features that characterise the hermeneutics of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. This is the level of literary movements.

Literarisation, Literary Movements and the Advent of Narratology to Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

In our view, the critical component to the three-layered narratological approach advocated here is the concept of literarisation: a process in which non-literary phenomena begin to function according to literary rules. We posit that both the time and space we look at are particularly literarised. By the process of literarisation we do not mean a sudden change but a continuous development of fractions of the public sphere into

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30 See Averil CAMERON, The 'Long' Late Antiquity. A Late Twentieth-Century Model, in: Timothy WISEMAN (ed.), Classics in Progress. Essays on ancient Greece and Rome, Oxford 2002, pp. 165–119; Ernesto SESTAN, Tardoantico e Altomedievale. Difficoltà di una periodizzazione, in: Ernesto SESTAN (ed.), Italia Medievale, Napoli 1968, pp. 15–37; and Andrea GIARDINA, Esplosione di tardoantico, in: Giuseppe MAZZOLI and Fabio GASTI (eds.), Prospettive sul tardoantico, Como 1999, pp. 9–30.

31 Hans-Georg GADAMER, Truth and Method, London 2004 (originally: Wahrheit und Methode, Tübingen 1960), pp. 267–304.

32 Jürgen HABERMAS, Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften, Frankfurt a. M. 1982, p. 283.

what, in essence, are narrative-driven genres.[33] One of the direct consequences of this process is the change in the rules of public communication. Those rules are adapted to become akin to the diverse rules that govern the production of works of literature according to the given genre. In this sense, the *exempla*, the *mos maiorum*, and the traditional rules of civic behaviour turn into a form of self-positioning in a world of literary precedent, of canonical authority, and *mimesis*. We can only give limited evidence here, but to us it seems clear that, considering the output that we have at our disposal, societies in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages increasingly relied on utilising narrative tools. The process of literarisation fosters the development of textual communities, "microsocieties organised around the common understanding of a text".[34] This *translatio* of the rules of a genre goes beyond the simple rules of composition and influences the creation of a tight network of textual communities both by catering to their expectations and simultaneously changing these expectations. However, as a phenomenon, it is much broader than just a proliferation of such microsocieties. It is responsible for the emergence of the rules that make this reliance on narrative tools possible.

One does not have to look far to find examples of this reliance. From our perspective, among the most vital indicators of literarisation is the evolution of Christian heresies. While heterodoxy also built on performative differences and questions of praxis (the controversy surrounding Donatists and re-baptism comes to mind),[35] the disputes that have driven Christianity from its beginning were centred on texts and authors. Be it Origen, the Theopaschite Formula or the adherence to the Council of Chalcedon – to point out heresy and orthodoxy, one needed to know what authors, texts, and words your side and the other side used.

A similar point can be made for two other fundamental phenomena of Christianity: asceticism and holiness. Both relied on precedents furnished by biblical texts (as well as notoriously elusive forerunners such as Philo's Therapeutae or the Essenes). However, with time one can notice how asceticism (or rather its primary textual expression at our disposal: hagiography) developed strong narrative

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33 This idea rests on texts from theorists like Paul Ricœur, Der Text als Modell: hermeneutisches Verstehen, in: Hans-Georg Gadamer and Gottfried Boehm (eds.), Seminar: Die Hermeneutik und die Wissenschaften, Frankfurt a. M. 1978, pp. 83–117 and Richard Harvey Brown, Society as Text. Essays on Rhetoric, Reason, and Reality, Chicago 1987. Yet, we also want to quite clearly differentiate in the context of our periods: we do not want to read society solely via semiotics per se, as Ricœur proposes, nor do we see 'text' as the most apt metaphor for the functioning of society, like Brown. We posit that there existed in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages a societal process that led to a convergence of societies (or their sections) with their literary production, thus making them open to narrative analysis.

34 Brian Stock, History, Literature, and Medieval Textuality, in: Yale French Studies 70 (1986), p. 12.

35 And the narratives surrounding those disputes could survive the timeframes of the actual controversies, see in case of the Donatists Robin Whelan, African Controversy. The Inheritance of the Donatist Schism in Vandal Africa, in: The Journal of Ecclesiastical History 65 (2014), pp. 504–521.

patterns – narrative patterns that are not necessarily a reflection of the actual saint's life but crucial for the literary tradition the ascetic and the account of his life follow. It is neither coincidental nor surprising that Cyril of Scythopolis' hermits are very often born to parents who were gifted only a single child late in their marriage, or that all of them reach a biblical age.

To be clear, literarisation is not limited to the exclusively religious aspects of society. Deeds and charters, both those known to us from the late antique papyrus records of Egypt or the early medieval parchments of the West, develop into flexible but nevertheless genre-like forms of administration. Both their formulaic character and their sometimes surprising diversity are reflections of the process of administration being influenced by literarisation. Keepers of records aligned their formulations with the narratives of power through invoking intertextual precedents. The scribes of charters also transferred the literary narratives into their documents, aligning their output with the literary rules. Sharing common Roman formal ancestors, the charters of the West developed into a genre where similar self-positioning was possible as in other literary genres. Their evolution is an excellent example of how this phenomenon continued well into the Early Middle Ages. The elaborate ninth-century Mercian charters, "formidable documents, laced with sophisticated literary devices",[36] show how even governance could be executed in line with the rules of a genre. Thus, literarisation could reach areas that were not directly connected with religious practice.

Literarisation is not an all-encompassing feature, nor is it spread out evenly across the field. Instead, it hinges on strong literary traditions and the (perceived) continuity of values and ideas. In Late Antiquity, we see literarisation nonetheless as more acute and more pervasive than so far postulated – with an eye to establishing specific genres in an already highly literary sphere.[37] It is then a phenomenon touching on multiple levels of society but not a universal one.[38]

Literarisation does not stand alone. The other component of our interpretative paradigm is movements. Movements are usually conceptualised as social movements. This means placing them in the context of collective action and the short-term investment of social actors in political or economic strategies with varying degrees of coherence. Movements are thus characterised by overarching goals and ideas and by a presence of a substructure of "heterogeneous and fragmented" social groups with differing micro goals and ideas. Additionally, they "often consume a large part of

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36 Ben SNOOK, When Aldhelm Met the Vikings. Advanced Latinity in Ninth-Century Mercian Charters, in: Mediaevistik 26 (2013), p. 138.

37 As in Manuel BAUMBACH, Andrej PETROVIC and Ivana PETROVIC, Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram. An Introduction, in: Manuel BAUMBACH, Andrej PETROVIC and Ivana PETROVIC (eds.), Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram, Cambridge, New York 2010, pp. 1–19.

38 For official documents such as petitions, this argument has been made already by Jean Luc FOURNET, Between Literary Tradition and Cultural Change. The Poetic and Documentary Production of Dioscorus of Aphrodite, in: Alasdair A. MACDONALD, Michael W. TWOMEY and Gerrit J. REININK (eds.), Learned Antiquity. Scholarship and Society in the Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West, Leuven 2003, pp. 101–114.

their energies in the effort to bind such differences together".[39] It is tempting, though, to use the term 'movement' for diachronic phenomena as well. It is loosely defined and open enough to play a significant role in discussions of long-term developments that transcend narrow social groups or classes and are not limited to networks of people that can be traced directly. The classic example of a 'movement' in this understanding, i. e. being used for a historical phenomenon (albeit not explicitly grounded methodologically), is the monastic movement. Monasticism emerged and evolved in different locales and in different ways and quickly spread in a way that could no longer be simply explained as a network of personal relations. It is no wonder, then, that monasticism is difficult to define. Usually, a detailed description of the different variants of monasticism replaces an actual definition. For a phenomenon of people following a similar goal in a lot of diverging ways at the same time while also seeing themselves in one single tradition, the term movement is indeed very fitting. We can even trace how, in a narrative and genre-specific way, inside monasticism a large amount of energy, time, and resources was spent to bind its differences together. Monastic rules or ecclesiastical canons constitute emanations of those attempts.[40] It is important to note that this rings true only if we treat 'movement' as an analytical concept.[41]

Therefore, we understand multiple historical actors linked through various, sometimes contradictory structures and traditions when we speak about a historical and diachronic movement.[42] This means that among the movements and the structures that bind them, we see societal groups, genres and performative practices. Those movements and the relationship between them under the influence of literarisation constitute the fragmented public sphere of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.[43]

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39 Cf. Alberto Melucci, Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the Information Age, Cambridge 1996, p. 13.

40 Indeed, here we meet another result of literarisation: the possible regulatory feature of a narrative; a feature, which in the Mediterranean Late Antiquity we see in the core attempts of defining not only Christian, but also Jewish or Islamic orthodoxy and communities. For the regulatory role of the narrative in Mishna see Moshe Simon-Shoshan, Stories of the Law. Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah, Oxford 2012, for the utilisation of established narratives in early Islam see Thomas Sizgorich, Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity, in: Past & Present 185 (2004), pp. 9–42.

41 This is in concordance with Melucci (note 39), p. 21.

42 For an overview of the modern theories and approaches to social movements see Mario Diani, Introduction: Social Movements, Contentious Actions, and Social Networks. 'From Metaphor to Substance'?, in: Mario Diani and Doug MacAdam (eds.), Social Movements and Networks. Relational Approaches to Collective Action, Oxford 2003, pp. 1–20.

43 Under Habermas' understanding the public sphere was an all-or-nothing concept, where exclusion of any group invalidated the use of the term, see Jürgen Habermas, Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, Frankfurt a. M. 1962, p. 156. This condition is not applicable for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The literary public sphere, closely joined with the political aspect (ibid., pp. 87–88), will also be too broad, simply because we cannot observe in our sources the necessary breadth to fulfil or deny the sharp conditions imposed. The clear distinction between the ecclesiastical and the secular also makes no sense in our periods and we are severely

As it is, movement could describe a variety of phenomena in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. In our approach, however, we will narrow our focus to literary movements – while maintaining the claim that a wide range of phenomena deserves to be treated as such. With respect to the high degree of literarisation, we estimate that, in fact, most of the movements in our period are actually literary. There are two reasons for this state of affairs. One is that few of them have left enough traces apart from literature that we are in a position to analyse them without depending on literary evidence (or that the non-literary traces are almost impossible to interpret without it). Furthermore, the second is that due to literarisation, movements tended to shape themselves according to habits and necessities of textual communication. In other words, literary rules dictated what social movements looked like.

Literary movements are, in this understanding, movements that are today (primarily) perceivable as literary output and that follow rules that are dictated by the rules of the production of literature. But this is not all. A lot of them can not only be perceived as such but indeed *were* literary. The most obvious example already made an appearance: Christian orthodoxy and its heresies. But we have also deduced how this literarisation of movements was not limited to religion. Friendship, community creation, cartography, even, as we have seen, the habit of charter practice became literarised and resulted in literary movements over the course of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

A possible objection here would be that literarisation can only be observed if we were to look exclusively at texts. While this is technically true, it is impossible to fully divide the literary movements as we see them today from the literary movements as they were in the past. Moreover, literarisation changed the mode of preservation of output as well. Trying to separate those two points of view – ours and theirs – is perhaps impossible and certainly not the most productive approach to studying the past.

Bringing those observations into the domain of hermeneutics, we can see that Christianity can be analysed as a literary movement. The praxis of Christian religion was experienced through the literary lens[44] – not only through the Bible, a multifocal, polyphonic text that slowly coalesced in Late Antiquity,[45] but also through the

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limited in the observable output. We can therefore only speak of fractions of the public sphere becoming narrative-driven genres. It constituted then what was 'published', what was debated and exchanged. HABERMAS later did propose such 'Teilöffentlichkeiten' as possible forms of the public sphere, making a lack of mechanism to edit and synthesise decentralised messages responsible for fragmentation, see Jürgen HABERMAS, Ach, Europa, Frankfurt a. M. 2008, p. 168. This reflects our understanding of the public sphere. For the pre-modern public sphere see Mayke DE JONG and Irene VAN RENSWOUDE, Introduction. Carolingian cultures of dialogue, debate and disputation, in: Early Medieval Europe 25 (2017), pp. 6–18 and for the pre-print modes of 'publishing', Leighton REYNOLDS and Nigel WILSON, Scribes and Scholars. A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature, Oxford 1968.

44 Cf. the paradigm that biblical texts bear strong narrative shaping and discernible narrative strategies relating to historical issues in George J. BROOKE and Jean-Daniel KAESTLI (eds.), Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts, Leuven 2000.

45 For the Old Testament as a polyphonic text cf. Walter BRUEGGEMANN, Theology of Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy, Minneapolis 1997, for the New Testament it has been

literarisation of the Christian public sphere in liturgy or through the literarisation of its constituent movements such as monasticism. The everyday performance of Christian religion made the believers participants in a literary movement. The public sphere of a religion became a genre. Moreover, participation in that genre was not exclusive to being a member of a Christian religion. We can see it even in the case of an overtly pagan author like Rutilius Namatianus, who in 'De reditu suo' plays inside the Christian public sphere, both in the choice of his classical sources as dictated by Christian sensibilities[46] and in his understanding of the role of Christians in governance.[47] Even criticising Christianity was now done along the literary rules dictated by the new religion. The rules as we observe them had ostensibly changed.

We can now hopefully see how the literary output, the movements both producing and functioning according to that output, and the narratives about these elements correspond to our proposed three-tiered structure of (singular) sources, literary movements, and meta-narratives. This opens doors for narratology to be a tool in analysing historical actor-groups. Those we should never lose from our sight. At the end of the day we might order our available material in new structures to understand it, but this material was not produced by some abstract structures but by actual actors. This agency that we have called before self-positioning or participating in the rules of a genre is detectable to us and allows for identifying literarised spaces. In a literarised space, historical arguments can be made with the inclusion of narratological methods.

In our three-tiered structure of singular sources, literary movements, and research narratives, narratology offers a way to focus on relationships: between the motifs of the sources, between the structures that bind and separate the movements, and between the sometimes conflicting elements of the research narratives. In all those cases, narratology focuses on historical actors and their traces in the historical record. And this is perhaps the key for including a narratological toolbox in the hermeneutics of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. It offers another way of looking at the connecting tissues of those literarised spaces.

Narratology is, for better or for worse, a fluid discipline. And for it to become a part of our hermeneutics at least some achievements of its postclassical methodology have to be applied.[48] The "question which text can be the subject of narrative analysis

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argued recently as well by Barbara Meyer, Jesus the Jew in Christian Memory. Theological and Philosophical Explorations, Cambridge 2020, especially p. 87; for the creation of various canons of the Bible see papers in Jean-Marie Auwers and Henk Jan de Jonge (eds.), The Biblical Canons, Leuven 2003.

46 Alan Cameron, Rutilius Namatianus, St. Augustine, and the date of the 'De Reditu', in: The Journal of Roman Studies 57 (1967), pp. 31–39.

47 Wim Verbaal, A Man and his Gods. Religion in the De reditu suo of Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, in: Wiener Studien 119 (2006), pp. 157–171.

48 The term "postclassical narratology" was introduced as "pooling the resources of many disciplinary traditions, many kinds of expertise" in David Herman, Narratologies. New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis, Columbus 1999, p. 14, which does not discard the classical narratology but rather opens it up to new possibilities. Especially important for historical research was a reconfiguration of the structuralist models in new light that this enabled and the broadening

has become a part of narratology itself"[49] and our contributors show that very point-edly by testing various limits of the narratological praxis. As such, in a postclassical understanding of this methodology, even those forays that do not explicitly use nar-ratological tools can be a part of this unique model of late antique and early medieval hermeneutics. By applying narratological analysis to meta-narratives, movements and singular sources, we try to enlarge the realm of the possible for narratology in a given frame of time and space.

CHIHAIA has pointed out that while numerous results of cultural production can be analysed as a narrative, not all of them can be analysed as texts. Both of those terms contain multiple phenomena, but texts – even understood very broadly as not only written forms of communication – are more limited.[50] This is an essential point for our attempt here. Narratology can only become a part of the hermeneutics of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages if it is understood as a toolbox for narrative analysis and not just, narrowly, as a toolbox for textual analysis. One could argue that seeing "The Past Through Narratology" has to mean not only applied narratol-ogy of texts but also an analysis of 'narrative consequences' of texts, archaeological finds, research narratives and their respective repercussions. Only then can we truly hope that the use of narratology will bring new approaches to Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. However, there are further idiosyncrasies. When tackling individual sources, literary movements, and meta-narratives, we see that theoretical narratology sometimes gives way to practical narrativity. In other words, far from proposing a totalising approach, we recognise that narratology is not always the correct register. Recognising its validity and applying it is also part of our proposed hermeneutics: a non-dogmatic narratological model, if you will.

Conclusions

The main benefit of introducing new methods (or using old ones in new contexts) is not to discover the 'real truth' about our past. New methods are not brought into play just to discover what is hidden in our sources. Instead, they help to master the experience of working with them.[51] Simply put, new methods make the process of

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of the approaches that could be included under the umbrella term of 'narratology'. In the last twenty years this postclassical approach has both proved to be productive and not contradic-tory to classical narratological analysis, see respectively Jan ALBER and Monika FLUDERNIK, Narratologies. New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis, Columbus 2010 and Roy SOMMER, The Merger of Classical and Postclassical Narratologies and the Consolidated Future of Narrative Theory, in: Diegesis 1 (2012), pp. 143–157.

49 Matei CHIHAIA, Introductions to Narratology. Theory, Practice and the Afterlife of Structuralism, in: Diegesis 1 (2012), pp. 15–31.

50 See, for the text linguistic view, the models and features listed in Robert-Alain DE BEAUGRANDE and Wolfgang U. DRESSLER, Einführung in die Textlinguistik, Tübingen 1981.

51 GADAMER (note 31), pp. 3–8, 340–354.

analysis more refined, the argumentation more comprehensive. Additionally, they allow reinterpretations of the narratives at hand, both on the source and the meta-level. This mastering of interpretative experience was perhaps our chief goal here.

We have proposed to recognise Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages as a particularly literarised space and introduced the concept of literarisation to describe the process of how this state of affairs came to be. This is a space where literary movements can be traced between multiple historical actors and where sometimes unexpected communication strategies serve as means to a literarised end. Inside literarised spaces, narratology can be used to make historical arguments and can make us understand the sometimes surprising communication strategies. But narratology can also make us see clearly that which is already familiar.

In order to reflect those observations in practice, we have proposed a three-tiered model of narratological enquiry: from singular sources, through literary movements to meta-narratives. The narratives discernible in all three levels can be analysed using narratological methods. Of particular importance is the level of literary movements, in which we have identified a dynamic especially well suited to this kind of analysis. Many phenomena, like monasticism, seen through the lens of literary movements, gain a form of interpretative clarity. We have not claimed literarisation to be a universal law of our periods, but its prevalence is hard to deny.

This volume reflects our proposed interpretative structure. Because it is essentially discipline-agnostic (but not discipline-ignorant), its implementation by the contributors often crosses disciplinary boundaries. The results of this narratological experiment that follow are perhaps the best testimony for a need to establish a narratological 'third way' for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. These propositions are not meant to replace but to enrich our methodologies, showing how vibrant a literary movement the late antique and early medieval community is.