Mateusz Fafinski/Jakob Riemenschneider (eds.): The Past Through Narratology. New Approaches to Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing 2022 (Das Mittelalter. Beihefte 18). VI, 240 p., 11 ill., 4 maps, 3 tables. € 44.90. ISBN: 978-3-96822-107-6.
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This volume offers a narratological approach to a variety of texts and other materials not usually studied with that methodology in the expectation that such an approach will produce fresh insights into the structure, themes, and communication procedures of those texts. The materials studied range from the third to the eleventh century and take in a wide range of genres and subjects, primarily religious in nature – hagiography, ecclesiastical histories, a Christian-Jewish dialogue, stories from the Babylonian Talmud – but also secular texts – law codes, letters, a fourth-century epigram. The book's remit also extends to visual and material culture, in the cases of the Peutinger Map and a group of third-century graves from central Germany.

The first chapter, by the editors of the volume, Mateusz Fafinski and Jakob Riemenschneider, explores the benefits that a narratological methodology can be expected to provide and furnishes examples that anticipate some themes that recur later in the volume ("Literarised Spaces. Towards a Narratological Framework for Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages", pp. 7–23). For instance, narratology allows a critic to explain contradictions in a historical text that appear to defy integration into a consistent factual narrative. Fafinski and Riemenschneider also raise the issue of the relation of narratives to the formation of communities, their identity and development, with particular reference to monasticism.

Two contributions address important hagiographic texts: Sihong Lin writes of Audoin's *Life of Eligius of Noyon* ("Rereading Absence. Silent Narratives in the 'Life of Eligius of Noyon'", pp. 27–39), Andreas Abele of Sulpicius Severus's early hagiographical classic, the *Vita sancti Martini* ("The Semantisation of Space in Sulpicius Severus' 'Vita Sancti Martini'", pp. 57–72). In the case of the *Vita Eligii* Lin draws attention to a digression in the first book that concerns the heresy of monotheletism, Pope Martin's attempt to oppose it, including summoning support from Gallic Christians, and the pope's eventual martyrdom in Constantinople. Lin argues that Audoin's emphasis on Martin's piety and antiheretical zeal serves to elevate the status of

Eligius, who immediately after the digression is described similarly combating heresy, in his case in Gaul. At the same time, Eligius's failure to respond to Pope Martin's call for support is explained away in the text with the words "He would have gladly made the journey, if some reason or other hadn't hindered him" (*nisi ei quaedam causa impedimenti fuisset*, *Vita Eligii* 1.33). Lin sees the vague phrasing here as an attempt to cover up Gallic lukewarmness at the time toward the anti-monothelite stance of the pope. From a narratological perspective the whole digression is treated as prolepsis, or fast-forwarding, since separate evidence indicates the bulk of the digression postdates the stage the main narrative has reached. While this is true, it is worth noting that nothing in the text points to the monothelite episode as a fast-forwarding. The only temporal references are "at the beginning of this reign [i. e., of Clovis]" (*sub huius regni principio*, *Vita Eligii*, 1.33) to start the digression and "at about the same time" (*per idem fere tempus*, *Vita Eligii* 1.35) to return to the main narrative. Viewing the digression as a prolepsis requires access to extratextual knowledge.

Abele's chapter looks at the spatial dimensions of narrative, studying three episodes from the *Vita sancti Martini*, Martin's encounter with robbers in the Alps, his meeting with a pagan funeral procession, and his vision of the devil, extravagantly attired and claiming to be Christ. Abele's approach adopts an analysis of the spatial associations of narrative owed to Birgit Haupt.[1] In it space is seen as evoking a mood or atmosphere, as the location of action or motion, or as the object of vision or other sensory response. The approach works best in episodes that have a significant spatial dimension. In the story of the conversion of the robber the action moves from the trackless Alpine wastes (*devia*) to still more remote locations *(remotiora*, *Vita sancti Martini* 5.4); in the meeting with the funeral procession motion and the negation of motion play a central role. The false Christ story, however, contains only the briefest spatial reference: just that it takes place in Martin's cell. An aspect important to the first two narratives that is not covered in Abele's analysis is the gestural, even though it too involves motion in space, if not the change of location that he concentrates on. Incorporating the gestural into such spatial analyses has the potential to enrich them, I would suggest.

1 B. Haupt: Zur Analyse des Raums. In: P. Wenzel (ed.): Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse. Kategorien, Modelle, Probleme. Trier 2004 (WVT-Handbücher zum literaturwissenschaftlichen Studium 6), pp. 69–87.

A second paper also considers the representation of space but in a largely visual medium, the map. Salvatore Liccardo's contribution draws attention to the presence of Alexander the Great in the Peutinger Map's portrayal of the far eastern extent of the world ("Narrating Frontiers of Geographical Imagination. Remembering Alexander the Great in the 'Peutinger Table'", pp. 143–160). Captions identify three "altars of Alexander" (p. 152) in two different locations; near the paired altars a further double caption reports "here Alexander received a response [i. e., warning him not to proceed further]" and "so far Alexander [sc. went]." (p. 154) In these cases visual and verbal combine in fragmentary allusions to the deeds of Alexander the Great, what Liccardo calls "bits and pieces of stories" (p. 159). The viewer/reader who is familiar with the Alexander Romance is invited to recall the relevant information and is thereby drawn into an intimate relationship with the map and its associations.

Sabina Walter's contribution concerns what might seem an unlikely subject for a narratological approach, the law, as evidenced in the Theodosian Code and the legislation of Theoderic contained in Cassiodorus's *Variae* ("Conflicting Narratives in Late Antique Law Concerning Jews", pp. 93–106). Like Fafinski and Riemenschneider she employs narratology to address a contradiction, or at least tension, in the texts she studies. Laws on violence done to Jews and their property insist on the preservation of order and the protection against such acts afforded by the law, while at the same time including highly prejudicial language about the Jews as a people. She explains this as a conflict between two imperial narratives, of the just ruler who maintains impartially the law and the Christian ruler as the defender of orthodoxy. Interestingly, Walter raises the question of whether such formulations can properly be called narratives and concludes that they fit the description because they "create expectations for and connections between the actions of people" (p. 104), inviting, it is implied, more detailed realizations of the broad narrative pattern. Walter's discussion is a good illustration of how a narratological approach can open up new perspectives on familiar texts.

Walter raises the possibility of identifying master narratives in legal codes that recur in different forms throughout the constitutions. The same term comes up in Philipp Margreiter's very different paper, concerning the interpretation of a group of related third-century graves in central Germany ("Soldiers of Rome? Ein Forschungsnarrativ über die Haßleben-Leuna-Gruppe und dessen Entstehung", pp. 181–204). Traditionally these graves

have been understood as belonging to auxiliary troops who had fought in Gaul for the third-century Gallic emperors before returning to their native region, to which they brought the Roman goods they had acquired in their military service. This master narrative, as Margreiter documents, fails to stand up to examination. Its only textual support derives from the highly unreliable *Historia Augusta*; the grave goods themselves are somewhat heterogeneous in nature and contain nothing to clinch the identity of their owners as former Roman soldiers. Margreiter argues that the prevalence of a master narrative about these burials served to distort their interpretation and discourage a more nuanced account of their origins. The example demonstrates that the apparent coherence of a narrative can lend it a spurious credibility until critical examination of the evidence undermines the appearance of coherence it relies on.

Jelle Wassenaar's chapter brings a diachronic perspective and a concentration on group activity to the reading of narratives ("Townspeople, Group Belonging, and Collective Agency in Post-Carolingian Historiography", pp. 123–142). He studies the characterization of urban populations in a series of historical texts largely of the tenth century from Reims and nearby towns in Lotharingia, observing a movement from a primarily passive role attributed to the *populus* of a town to a more active for what is termed its *cives*. Narratives can serve to shape a communal identity, for instance, to produce "an orchestrated performance of diocesan-urban unity" (p. 139), though that unity may be vulnerable in the case of competing narratives of urban activity. As is the case with other contributions to this volume, the formation of community and identity plays a significant role in Wassenaar's reading of narratives.

A different type of community forms the subject of Veronika Egetenmeyr's paper ("Constructing Emotions and Creating Identities. Emotional Persuasion in the Letters of Sidonius Apollinaris and Ruricius of Limoges", pp. 75–92). The letters of Sidonius Apollinaris and Ruricius of Limoges that she discusses both appeal, in her reading, to preexisting emotional communities, from which they derive persuasive force, while also contributing to the further formation of such communities. Egetenmeyr invokes the Aristotelian concepts of *ethos* and *pathos* to analyse the strategies of her two letter-writers. Though epistolography is characteristically the domain of *ethos*, Egetenmeyr shows the function *pathos* can perform in letters that have a persuasive content. The analysis of narrative, however, plays little role in her

paper. Although she speaks of emotions as "a narrative persuasion tool" (p. 90), the emphasis is on the emotional not the narrative content of the letters.

The distinctive terminology of classical narratology plays little role in this collection, apart from passing references to focalization and Lin's employment of the concept of prolepsis. The prime exception is Michail Kitsos's discussion of the *Dialoges of Gregentios with Herban the Jew*, an example of the genre of *Adversus Iudaeos* dialogues, dating probably from the tenth century, but with a sixth century dramatic date ("Reading the *Adversus Iudaeos* Dialogues Through Narratology. Creating in Writing a Culture of Jewish-Christian Disputations in Late Antiquity", pp. 107–122). Kitsos examines his chosen text employing Gérard Genette's categorization of narrative temporality in terms of duration, order, and frequency. The five-day long debate (in story time) is much reduced in narrative time. Topics crop up randomly throughout the text without sustained perceptible ordering, while, as regards frequency, the same points recur repeatedly throughout the dialogue. The last two temporal features contribute, in Kitsos's analysis, to the impression of realism. Much of this is persuasive. The application of narratological criteria to the dialogue certainly pays dividends. I would have welcomed, however, some discussion of the appropriateness of such criteria to what seems rather a sequence of arguments that a sequence of events.

The collection contains two treatments that are primarily of a literary nature, though very different in content and approach. Reuven Kiperwasser and Serge Ruzer discuss a group of fascinating stories from the Babylonian Talmud and the Syriac *Life of Barsauma* that concern sea voyages and the marvelous dangers and mysterious secrets they present ("Aramaic Stories of Wandering in the High Seas of Late Antiquity", pp. 161–177). The authors point up common elements in the Jewish and Christian texts, but eschew any hypothesis of direct influence, instead imagining mythological narrative patterns informing separately both storytelling traditions, while subject to different treatments reflecting the different beliefs of the two religions.

Sabina Tuzzo, on the other hand, takes on an epigram from the fourth- or fifth-century collection, the *Epigrammata Bobiensia* ("The Erotic Dreams of Penelope ('Epigr. Bob.' 36 Sp.)", pp. 41–55). Bearing the title *De Penelope*, it poses multiple interpretative conundrums, which Tuzzo addresses in her article. This is not the faithful Penelope familiar from the *Odyssey*, but one subject to erotic dreams and desires, which form the subject of the poem's

narrative. The article primarily discusses from a philological perspective points of contention in the text and interpretation of the poem. From a more narratological viewpoint it might be worth noting that the adverb *saepe* (line 5) indicates a recurrent event is being recounted only once (Genette's category of frequency) and that the second person pronoun in line 9 points to an anonymous internal narratee.

The final paper in the collection is the most theoretical. Rutger Kramer and Ekaterina Novokhatko return to the theme of community, asking how narrative produces a shared identity ("Dead Authors and Living Saints. Community, Sanctity, and the Reader Experience in Medieval Hagiographical Narratives", pp. 205–226). The argument is a complicated one, to which I cannot do full justice. The authors take as a framework the narrative triad of author, text, and audience and explore the complicated relationship between these three poles. Hagiographers appeal to familiar Christian concepts of sanctity, projecting into the past a kind of exemplary ideal, while including local detail to convey an impression of realism. Audiences are prompted to engage with the text and be moved to a shared experience of the nature of faith. Above all and informing all is God. This divine presence, as Kate Cooper says in her Epilogue ("Meaning and Believing in a Narrative. A Coda", pp. 227–231), brings "something distinctive to the idea of reading" (p. 230), whether the text is Christian, Jewish, or Muslim.

From the perspective of someone more used to the analysis of literary, most often poetic, narratives, this volume raises a couple of general points. Firstly, what classes as a narrative? Two contributors show in their language some reservations about the categorization of the materials they study: Walter speaks of "glimpses of narration" (p. 104), Liccardo of "bits and pieces of stories" (p. 159). Such materials are far from the typical narrative of a single or group actor performing or engaged with a series of actions or events temporally organized. The brief prompts to narration Walter discusses from legal texts function a little like the master narrative Margreiter detects in archaeological scholarship and might be compared with the "non-original narrative units" (p. 219) Kramer and Novokhatko see in the topoi of hagiography, capable of amplification with fuller narrative detail. Liccardo's cartographic *loci*, in so far as they activate the recollection of a more extensive narrative, also have something in common with the *loci* of ancient memory systems. On the other hand, in the case of the letters of Sidonius and Ruricius I struggle to find substantial narrative content.

A second issue concerns what counts as narratology. If I had read a few of these papers in a different publication without the volume title, I would not have immediately recognized them as narratological. I think of the papers of Tuzzo, Wassenaar, and Kiperwasser and Ruzer. (I hasten to add that this has no bearing on the quality of the scholarship in these papers.) It is true that all of them concern narrative texts, but their methodologies conform to normal philological, historiographical, or literary practice. Overall, many of the papers in this collection do persuade that narratology can bring fresh light to or open new perspectives on a variety of texts and other materials, but the volume would, nevertheless, have benefited from some discussion of the limits of what constitutes a narrative and of the distinctive qualities of a narratological approach.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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