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Stones and Stories. On the Use of Narratological Approaches for Writing the History of Archaeology

Summary

The last decades have seen considerable debate among theorists and historiographers about the extent to which historians resort to literary modes of representation and how far historical accounts owe their persuasiveness and explanatory power to narrative structures. As a result, the investigation of historical accounts using methods drawn from literary studies has become a highly diversified and rather confusing field. There is, of course, no reason to believe that the tendency to resort to particular narrative patterns has played an less important a role in the field of archaeology. Nevertheless, it is only recently that scholars have begun to apply narratological concepts in their investigations of the history of archaeology. A brief look at archaeological representations of human migrations demonstrates the usefulness of such approaches. Since these accounts usually cover long periods of time and encompass several historical actors and spaces, archaeologists have made use of certain narrative strategies in order to arrange their facts and to transform them into more or less coherent stories.

Keywords: History of historiography; history of archaeology; narratology; migration narratives.

Die Frage, inwieweit sich Historiker literarischer Techniken bedienen und ob die Erklärungs- und Überzeugungskraft ihrer Darstellungen auf vorgegebenen narrativen Strukturen basiert, ist von Geschichtstheoretikern und Historiographiehistorikern der letzten Jahrzehnte viel diskutiert worden. Entsprechend hat sich die Untersuchung historiographischer Werke mit literaturwissenschaftlichen Methoden zu einem komplexen und zunehmend verwirrenden Feld entwickelt. Es gibt freilich keinen Grund zu glauben, narrative Strukturen seien in der Archäologie von geringerer Bedeutung. Trotzdem sind narratologische Überlegungen erst in den letzten Jahren auch auf die Geschichte der Archäologie angewendet worden. Der Nutzen dieser Ansätze lässt sich besonders gut am Beispiel archäologischer Wanderungserzählungen aufzeigen. Weil diese Darstellungen in der Regel weite Zeiträume abdecken und verschiedene historische Akteure und Räume zusammenfassen,

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greifen Archäologen auf spezifische Erzählstrategien zurück, um ihre Fakten zu sortieren und in mehr oder weniger kohärente Geschichten zu transformieren.

Keywords: Historiographiegeschichte; Archäologiegeschichte; Narratologie; Wanderungsnarrative.

The article discusses initial considerations on migration narratives which I was able to formulate during research fellowships at the Excellence Cluster Topoi (CSG-V) in 2010 and 2011. Since 2014 further research on the subject was made possible by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (project WI 4102/2-1 „Wanderungsnarrative in den Wissenschaften vom Alten Orient. 1870–1930“ at the Institut für Altorientalistik, Freie Universität Berlin).

Hugo Winckler, the excavator of the Hittite Capital Hattusa,¹ wrote prolifically on the history of the ancient Near East at the turn of the twentieth century. Most of his articles and essays were written in an explicitly *gemeinverständlich* (popular) style and were obviously aimed at a readership among the so-called educated public, beyond academic circles. Although Winckler's controversial ideas would ensure that he remained an outsider in the scholarly world, some of his concepts turned out to be very influential for the study of antiquity.² Most important in this regard was his general theory on migrations in the ancient world, or rather, throughout human history. Starting from the assumption that the cradle of early civilization – ancient Mesopotamia – had been periodically devastated by nomadic peoples, Winckler came up with the following general conclusion:

Die Geschichte des Altertums bis auf den Beginn des sogenannten Mittelalters zeigt ein unaufhörliches Auftauchen nomadischer, unzivilisierter Stämme, welche in die Kulturländer eindringen – oder auch selbst eine Kultur entwickeln – um damit zu ansässigen Kulturvölkern zu werden und ihr Geschick im mehr oder oft auch bis jetzt weniger hellen Lichte der Geschichte zu erfüllen. Der Übergang zur Sesshaftigkeit ist mit einem Wechsel der Lebensbedingungen verbunden, der sich um so schneller vollzieht, wenn die Eroberer sich in das warme Nest einer schon entwickelten Kultur hineinsetzen, der aber in jedem Falle eintritt, auch wenn der langsamere Vorgang der Erarbeitung einer Kultur vorliegt.³

In essays written in flowery and metaphorical language like that above, Winckler expatiated on the way that ‘uncivilized’ Semitic tribes of the Arabian Desert shaped them-

1 Alaura 2006.

2 Renger 1979, 164–165; Carena 1989, 96–112;

Marchand 2009, 236–244.

3 Winckler 1903, 3.

selves into distinctive peoples (such as the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Aramaeans and last but not least the Arabs) between 3000 BC and 1000 AD and “flooded”⁴ the region of the “Fertile Crescent.”⁵ He explains that these former predators, if not parasites, ultimately settled down and themselves developed into civilized peoples (*Kulturvölker*). Thus, Winckler’s condensed and dramatic account links together what are in fact very different occurrences taken from different historical contexts and compresses them into a more or less coherent narrative spanning over 4000 years of the region’s history. It is the particular structure this narrative takes that is of greatest relevance for my purpose here: Winckler’s narrative presents history as a circuit – describing the supposed never-ending process of migration and acculturation, destruction and foundation of culture. Naturally, his contemporaries would already have been quite familiar with circular narratives (meaning narratives featuring the repetition of certain plot points), since migrations had always played a vital role in traditional accounts of the ‘rise and fall’ of great empires or civilizations. Thus, one can assume that Winckler’s approach owes its persuasive power in no small degree to his use of a well-known narrative structure. As I mentioned above, Winckler was never part of the academic establishment, and his writings – mostly published in journals and periodicals of which he himself was the editor – were more popular than academic in nature. Therefore, one could argue that his choice of type of narrative would have had less of an impact on academic archaeology. However, things are more complicated than that: Writing a historical narrative always requires the adoption of some kind of narrative strategy, and there is no clear demarcation line between popular and scientific writing.

In the following, after briefly outlining the debate about narratological approaches to the theory of history, I will discuss these approaches and how they can be applied to the history of archaeology. I have chosen, for that purpose, to focus on two aspects, selected with the two central aspects of the debate in mind – the relationship between author and narrator and the role of certain narrative structures or plots.

To examine that first aspect, I will look at the self-representations of excavators as protagonists in archaeological accounts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The central question here is how the results of archaeological research are *represented* and *rendered* to the public in a particular era, and how these modes of representation changed over time. I will then apply the concept of generic plot structures, developed by narratological theorists, for archaeological accounts on human migrations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and discuss the usefulness of this concept for the historiography of archaeology.

4 Winckler 1905, 3.

5 The term “Fertile Crescent” itself was coined a

few years later by the archaeologist James Henry Breasted (Breasted 1916, 100).

I Narratological approaches to the history of historiography

Discussion of literature and historiography's similarities and differences is, of course, anything but new, Aristotle being among those who have addressed the topic in the past.⁶ Although reflections about the meaning of narratives in *modern* historiography began to emerge with the American analytical philosophy of history in the 1960s,⁷ the current debate was clearly triggered and has been shaped by Hayden White's famous *Metahistory*.⁸ Another important contribution from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics was made in the 1980s by Paul Ricoeur in *Temps et Récit*⁹ – to name the other of the two most prominent approaches. Since then, the investigation of historical accounts using the methods of literary studies has developed into a highly diversified and rather confusing field.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the initial question was quite simple: to what extent do historians resort to literary modes of representation, and how far do historical explanations owe their persuasiveness and explanatory power to narrative structures?

In view of the fact that it is the historian's task to arrange the occurrences or events they are depicting in a certain temporal order, fill in gaps unmet by written and unwritten sources and, last but not least, transform all the information into a meaningful story, it seems obvious historians must of necessity rely both on their own imagination and on certain narrative strategies. The writing of history, then, is never just a matter of reconstructing and interpreting facts; it always also involves an act of composition and the combination of disparate elements, a transformation of contingency into coherency that can be described with Paul Ricoeur's famous definition of a plot as the "synthesis of the heterogeneous."¹¹ Thus, narratological approaches to historiography focus less on the epistemological question of how historical facts are generated by the historian than on this *arrangement* of *selected* events into a sequential and hierarchic order, their evaluation and composition to create a certain plot. White coined the term *emplotment* for this, meaning the *imposition* of a certain plot-structure upon a set of events and the resulting transformation of simple chronicles into "stories of a particular kind."¹² Accordingly, the explanatory power of historical accounts rests heavily upon the persuasiveness and "followability"¹³ of certain repetitive plots which must be identifiable and regarded as convincing and sufficient by the reader. The point here is that one could always arrange the events in a different order and thus relate the same occurrences in different ways by using different "modes of emplotment."¹⁴ Consequently, White regards historical narratives simply as "verbal fictions,"¹⁵ and explicitly blurs if not demolishes the

6 See the comments in his *Poetics* (§ 9).

7 Danto 1965.

8 White 1973.

9 *Time and Narrative*, White 1984–1988

10 Scholz Williams 1989; Clark 2004, 86–105; Eckel 2007.

11 Ricoeur 1984, 66.

12 White 1973, 7.

13 Ricoeur borrowed the term from W.B. Gallie 1964, 22–51.

14 White 1973, 7.

15 White 1978, 82.

traditional boundary between historiography and literature: “Viewed simply as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another.”¹⁶ Of course, assertions like this have provoked a great deal of opposition – both from historians and from narratologists. Critics have insisted what they see as a fundamental difference between “fictional narratives” and “factual narratives,”¹⁷ and rightly pointed out that White completely ignores the problem of historical referentiality; others have simply accused him of de-legitimizing historiography as a scientific practice. Furthermore, fierce controversy emerged about the ethical consequences of what seemed to be White’s postmodern relativism in the early 1990s.¹⁸

Space constraints preclude a presentation of the whole debate surrounding *Metahistory* here, but with respect to these general pitfalls Ricoeur’s more cautious observations about the relationship between literature and historiography seem to offer a more promising approach. Ricoeur neither assigns history and literature to completely separate spheres, nor ignores the differences between them. Instead, he focuses on areas of overlaps between them and on the ways they have been adapted: the “interweaving of history and fiction.”¹⁹

The strictly structuralist and a-historic character of White’s approach appears to be its most problematic aspect: referring to Northrop Frye’s famous classification,²⁰ White identifies only four “modes of emplotment” – romance, tragedy, comedy and satire – which, in the end, correspond with the four classical Aristotelian tropes²¹ and which he presents as “archetypes.”²² Thus, he regards these variants as universal and immutable. However, the empirical basis for this highly general assertion is very limited: White draws on seminal nineteenth century works of historiography and philosophy of history only, simply disregarding the differences between such texts and the historical writing produced during the last century. Although he does try to take political context into account, connecting the four modes of emplotment with specific “modes of ideological implication,”²³ his typology leaves the relationship between emplotment and ideological implication unclear and inadequately defined. Just as the structuralist narratology of the 1960s has been challenged and edged out by diachronic approaches that focus on the historical and cultural dependency of narrative patterns and their variability,²⁴ White’s critics have convincingly demonstrated the need to embed historical narratives in their cultural, political and ideological contexts.²⁵

16 White 1978, 122.

17 Genette 1990.

18 The discussion was focused on the representation of the holocaust (see the articles in Friedlander 1992). His most prominent critic was Carlo Ginzburg (Ginzburg 1992) who puts Whites ignorance of referentiality and relativism close to the position of right-wing holocaust deniers.

19 Ricoeur 1988, 180–193.

20 Frye 2000.

21 White 1973, 29–31.

22 White 1973, 9 and 38.

23 White 1973, 22–29.

24 Nünning 1999; Nünning 2000; Erll and Roggenendorf 2002; Fludernik 2003.

25 Rüh 2005; Saupe 2009.

However, White is not the only scholar to established a typology of historical narration. The most influential of the other typologies – in the German context – is certainly that of Jörn Rüsen. Actually, Rüsen does not address the relationship between literature and historiography in general; instead he focuses on *historische Sinnstiftung* through narration, meaning the way that historians use different narratives to make sense of the contingencies of history. He distinguishes four “functional types of historical narration”: the traditional, the exemplary, the critical and what he calls the genetical narrative.²⁶ However, since the connection between these types of narration and specific political and cultural contexts is again highly unspecified, the problem of context and variability remains the same. Even more problematic is the evolutionary, if not teleological, as some critics have argued,²⁷ character of Rüsen’s approach: he describes a “logical progression” from one type to the next and leaves no doubt that the “genetical narrative” is the most advanced and scientific approach.²⁸

Of course, scholars of historiography have also borrowed many other concepts from narratology, and from literary studies more generally. The most important in this context is the differentiation between author and narrator. The question here is whether or not this distinction can be applied to historiographical accounts. According to the French narratologist Gérard Genette, for instance, this is precisely where the fundamental difference between “fictional narratives” and “factual narratives” lies: in historiography, in contrast to fiction, he argues, author and narrator are identical, because the historian has to assume full responsibility for his narrative. Thus, any claims and theses put forth can be ascribed to the historian as an individual under the rules of scientific historiography.²⁹ However, others have countered this by pointing out that the fact of authorial responsibility does automatically mean that an identifiable narrator is necessarily absent from all historiographical accounts. One need only think of the common use of the personal pronoun *we* in scientific texts: Usually, the *we* in question does not refer to a group of authors but instead suggests the individual author’s affiliation with an imagined scientific community.³⁰ Moreover, history can be told from very different perspectives and thus by different kinds of narrators.³¹ As a case in point, Axel Rütth,

26 Rüsen 2001; Rüsen 2005. I cannot go much into detail here. However, to put it in a nutshell, Rüsen’s typology can be summarized as follows: The “traditional narrative” is focussed on founding myths and aims at the construction of identities; the “exemplary narrative” corresponds to the famous phrase of *historia magistra vitae* and thus bases upon the idea that the study of the past should serve as a lesson to the future; the “critical narrative” is simply characterized by the negation of established narratives; and, last but not least, the “genetical narrative” enables the historian to grasp the complexity of his-

torical change by identifying the structural developments and by presenting history as a dynamic process (see the table in Rüsen 2005, 12).

27 Rieckhoff 2007, 20–21.

28 Rüsen 2005, 15. Furthermore, he clearly identifies the genetical type with the German approach of social history (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*) as most prominently represented by his Bielefeld colleague Hans Ulrich Wehler.

29 Genette 1990, 763–770.

30 de Certeau 1988, 63–64.

31 Rütth 2005, 32–36; Bernbeck 2010, 240–42.

in his criticism of White's a-historic approach, shows how the presence of the historian as narrator has changed since the nineteenth century. Taking up a concept developed by the film theorist Seymour Chatman,³² he distinguishes between the "covert narrator" in traditional historical accounts and the more "overt narrator" which emerged in the historiography of the twentieth century: whereas older accounts are for the most part narrated by a hidden ('covert'), omniscient, or at the very least "objective" narrator, modern-day historians usually reflect on the limitations imposed by their own social or cultural context, and thus could be considered to be "overt narrators."³³

2 Archaeologists as narrators

There is, of course, no reason to believe that the tendency to resort to particular narrative patterns has been any less influential in the field of archaeology: like 'ordinary' historians, archaeologists have to arrange their facts in a certain sequence, fill in the gaps in the archaeological and historical record, and, last but not least construct comprehensive narratives in order to relate their results to existing interpretations, as well as to render them to the public. To do so, they rely on the same narrative strategies that historians use. However, theorists and historians of archaeology have only recently begun to apply narratological approaches to archaeological accounts. Both Manfred Eggert and Ulrich Veit draw heavily upon Rösen's typology in their examinations of archaeological narratives.³⁴ Others have used White's approach to deconstruct what they regard as the "master narratives" in archaeology,³⁵ or to propose new modes of interpretation and representation.³⁶ However, in order to avoid the pitfalls associated with White's structuralism and keeping in mind the developments and changes of archaeological writing, the development of a more diachronic approach would appear necessary, one that can help scholars to understand the transformation of archaeological narratives against the backdrop of their political and cultural contexts.

Studies on the relationship between science and literature have clearly depicted the interrelations between fictional and archaeological writing in the nineteenth century. Christiane Zintzen³⁷ and Kathrin Maurer³⁸, in particular, have shown how archaeological accounts of the nineteenth century were shaped by certain narrative patterns borrowed from the realist novel. Furthermore, Zintzen identifies a fundamental interrelation between archaeology and modern literature, which she puts down to the way

32 Chatman 1978, 196–260.

33 Rütth 2005, 21.

34 Eggert 2002; Eggert 2006, 211–219; Veit 2006.

35 Rieckhoff 2007.

36 Leskovar 2005.

37 Zintzen 1998.

38 Maurer 2006.

that archaeology, with its focus on fragments and the discontinuity of the finds, perfectly reflects, the fragmentary character and the discontinuity of modern life and culture.³⁹

Be that as it may, I would now like to focus on one particular aspect: the way archaeologists have presented themselves in their own narratives. Most interesting in this regard are those parts of archaeological texts that are devoted to the circumstances and process of particular excavations. In examining these, one should bear the most obvious innovation of historical writing in the nineteenth century in mind: the introduction of the doubled narrative.⁴⁰ Whereas running text is reserved, for the most part, for the main story, historiographical accounts usually contain an additional section that reports *how* historians arrived at their conclusions. According to the new standards set for scientific historiography, most notably by Leopold von Ranke, this “secondary story” – intended more for colleagues than for the wider public – is usually hidden in footnotes.

The footnotes form a secondary story, which moves with, but differs sharply from the primary one. In documenting the thought and research that underpin the narrative above them, footnotes prove that is a historically contingent product, dependent on the forms of research, opportunities and states of particular questions that existed when the historian went to work.⁴¹

This implied a kind of imperative, according to which the historian should be more or less absent from the main narrative; in other words, the covert narrator was the ideal of classical historicism. Ranke himself expressed this demand very radically in a famous phrase telling of his wish to erase his self in order to let the facts speak for themselves: “*Ich wünschte mein Selbst gleichsam auszulöschen und nur die Dinge reden, die mächtigen Kräfte erscheinen zu lassen [...]*”⁴² This is not the place to discuss this often misinterpreted dictum, to determine whether Ranke succeeded in fulfilling this aspiration in his own work or whether it has never been more than just a pious dream of humble historians.

Whatever the case, false modesty is the last thing that one can impute to the archaeologists of the nineteenth century, and thus no comparable dictate was passed on to that field. Generally, the section reporting how the excavator found and unearthed material remains took a prominent position in archaeological writings, forming part of the running text. Thus, in contrast to the historiography of the time, in archaeological narratives these “secondary stories” included a personal appearance by the archaeologists themselves. In fact, large portions of the archaeological writings of the day were devoted to the stresses and strains the excavators endured. Furthermore, the more foreign or even exotic the setting of the story (the location of the excavation) appeared, the

39 Zintzen 1998, 16.

40 Rüh 2005, 45–47.

41 Grafton 1999, 23.

42 Ranke 1877 [1859], 103.

more the narrative's focus concentrated on the figure of the excavator. Since archaeological accounts of the time had a more-or-less autobiographical character, archaeologists were neither "covert" nor "overt narrators": they served as the actual protagonists of their narratives. Looking at these accounts and their transformations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one can already distinguish the emergence of different types or modes of representation, which later established themselves in public culture as stereotypical key roles for the archaeologist. Cornelius Holtorf has identified four such types of representation: the archaeologist as adventurer, the archaeologist as detective, the archaeologist as the source of profound revelations and the archaeologist as someone who takes care of ancient sites and finds.⁴³

The presentation of the archaeologist as heroic adventurer is definitely the oldest one of these. A good example for this is the famous report *Nineveh and its Remains* by Austin Henry Layard.⁴⁴ The subtitle of that work already signals its compendious and heterogeneous character; it also indicates that the ancient Assyrians are only one of multiple subjects covered: *With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezids or Devil-Worshippers; and an Enquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians*. Thus the entire first volume deals with Layard's own experiences and adventures in the contemporary Near East – his encounters with 'wild peoples,' seedy characters and strange customs. In other words, as one of his modern biographers has put it, Layard presented himself as Indiana Jones avant la lettre.⁴⁵ Upon its publication, *Nineveh and its Remains* smoothly fitted into the tradition of travelogues and adventure stories, and it was perceived precisely as such by contemporaries. Generally speaking, the adventure novel was one of the common modes of representation in the scientific writing of the time. The scholarly travelogue, in particular, constituted a special narrative type associated with certain features. For the most part, these reports tend to reveal the heroic and virile virtues of a male traveler, corresponding to those of the familiar figure of the lonesome cowboy, who faces perils and hardships in an alien but fascinating environment. The Near East, with its extreme climatic and political conditions, seemed to offer a particularly suitable setting for this kind of story.⁴⁶ The travelers, who were mostly British due to the power relationships of the time, enjoyed an enormous popularity in their homeland and established a special "English romance with Arabia."⁴⁷ However, as German-Ottoman ties grew stronger, more and more Germans and Austrians entered the arena, including Max von Oppenheim and Alois Musil, who would later become prominent excavators. Hence, to return to the comparison between historical and archaeological writings, in the latter, the structure of the doubled narrative seems to be reversed: the public appeal of archaeological reports was based less on the, rather scanty,

43 Holtorf 2007a, 63–75.

44 Layard 1849.

45 Larsen 1996, 52.

46 Wiedemann 2009.

47 Tidrick 1981; also Ure 2003.

depictions of ancient history than on the “secondary story,” which contained a suspenseful depiction of the journey that brought the archaeologists to the discovery of their ‘remains.’⁴⁸ With their obvious references to the genre of travelogues, their focus on excavations’ adventurous dimensions and their effective self-representations of archaeologists as scientific heroes, books like *Nineveh and its Remains* were typical products of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other famous examples for this include, of course, the writings of Heinrich Schliemann, who drew upon the same literary genres: the contemporary adventure story and the travelogue.⁴⁹ One still finds representations of Layard, Schliemann and other pioneers of the discipline as adventurers or modern heroes in more recent popular accounts of the history of archaeology. Kurt Wilhelm Marek’s (alias C. W. Ceram) *Götter, Gräber und Gelehrte*⁵⁰ is perhaps the best example, with its revealing subtitle (in the original German edition) “a novel of archaeology”; but there are also quite recent books that refer to this period as the “heroic age of archaeology.”⁵¹ However, taking into account the specific historical context from which these reports emerged appears to be a more productive approach than that offered by Holtorf,⁵² who views this narrative as manifestation of an “archetypal narrative structure.”⁵³ The context, in this case, is the age of European imperialism and colonialism. The relevance of that context becomes clear with a look at the standardized narrative structure. Focused on the archaeologist, representing a male European hero, who is forced to prove himself in a mostly non-European setting, these accounts can be regarded as a narrative appropriation and exploitation of unknown spaces.

These accounts are also inextricably linked to the presentation of the archaeologist as a source of “profound revelations”⁵⁴ about history and human nature in general, which corresponds to the third type of representation in Holtorf’s classification. Far from merely excavators of material remains, archaeologists of the nineteenth century regarded themselves as rebels against a what they saw as a limited historical consciousness. In contrast to traditional historians they were able to bring the past back to life. A good example for this is the famous book “The resurgent Babylon” (*Das wieder entstehende Babylon*) by Robert Koldewey,⁵⁵ who tried to resurrect the ancient Mesopotamian metropolis by unearthing its ruins and ultimately rebuilding the city in a completely new context: the Berlin *Vorderasiatisches Museum*. It is, however, essential to note that neither Layard, Schliemann nor Koldewey nor any of the other famous archaeologists of the

48 It is however interesting that Layard later tried to separate the two narratives: in addition to his later books on archaeological excavations he wrote another influential travelogue on his early travels through Persia (Layard 1894; see Ure 2003, 19–24).

49 Zintzen 1998, 257–340; Samida 2010.

50 Ceram 2008 [1949].

51 Beyer 2010, 65.

52 Holtorf 2007a, 64.

53 Furthermore, Holtorf refers to the highly problematic concept of the mythical “hero” as delineated by the controversial Jungian mythologist Joseph Campbell (Campbell 2008 [1949]; see on this Ellwood 1999).

54 Holtorf 2007a, 84–91.

55 Koldewey 1913.

time had trained as philologists before they became excavators. In fact, they distanced themselves more or less openly from the established academic world and especially from the historians whose adherence to written sources seemed to them to be rather outdated. Archaeologists like Schliemann or Hugo Winckler, mentioned above, presented themselves simultaneously as both scholars and academic outsiders, drawing upon an emerging anti-scientific sentiment at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ Furthermore, it has never been more than a short step from the idea that archaeologists rescue and unveil hidden pasts to the idea that they actually *redeem* entire epochs, cultures and peoples from oblivion. Due to the assumption that archaeological knowledge had the potential to change our fundamental concepts of human culture, the act of unveiling the past became charged with religious importance. It is because of this partial overlap between archaeological and religious narratives that references to archaeology have played such an enormous role in modern western esotericism. While esoteric writers in the late nineteenth century, such as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,⁵⁷ were already referring to a hidden knowledge of the past, modern proponents of the occult, such as Erich von Däniken, now present themselves consistently as representatives of a “forbidden archaeology,”⁵⁸ in pursuit of a “stigmatized knowledge.”⁵⁹

One could regard these self-representations, or role patterns – the adventurer, redeemer of the past or scholarly outsider – as the teething troubles of a discipline as it transforms itself “from treasure-hunting to science.”⁶⁰ At least with respect to the public representation of the discipline, though, these roles have not lost their predominance; one could suggest that Indiana Jones has not ceased to serve as a more-or-less uninvited, but constant companion of the archaeologist. However, it should be emphasized that these clichés and narratives, far from being just annoyances imposed by the media, were originally invented by archaeologists themselves.⁶¹

In any case, both the representation of the archaeologist as heroic adventurer and discloser of the secrets of the past and the interweaving of the genres of archaeological texts with travelogues and esoteric literature, can be regarded as features specific to archaeology. There are other archaeological self-perceptions and references that do have a lot in common with historiography. Most important in this context is the relationship with crime fiction and the identification of historians and archaeologists with detectives. Accordingly, comparisons between criminalist and historical methods have been popular among scholars since the nineteenth century.⁶² Drawing upon this analogy, the German documentary series “History” presents historians as “the detectives of history”; in the same way, popular books on archaeology refer to excavators as “detectives

56 Marchand 1996; Marchand 2009. – However, Winckler was a trained philologist (assyrologist).

57 Blavatsky 2008 [1888].

58 Däniken 2003.

59 Barkun 1998.

60 Beyer 2010.

61 Holtorf 2007a; Kaeser 2010.

62 Bähr 2006; Saupe 2009; Holtorf 2007b, 75–83.

of the past⁶³ or “time-detectives.”⁶⁴ According to a famous essay by Carl Ginzburg,⁶⁵ this analogy became established during the rise of the “evidential paradigm” at the turn of the twentieth century. Astonishingly, Ginzburg made no mention of archaeological practices in this context. In fact, drawing parallels between the archaeological work and police investigations has long been an established device in archaeological writings: the excavation site appears as the crime scene, the archaeologists as detectives trying to reconstruct the past by analyzing material traces and collecting clues.⁶⁶ It is interesting, however, that references to criminology did not become commonplace in archaeology until the turn of the twentieth century and the rise of the natural sciences. Archaeologists then felt increasingly called upon to emphasize the sophisticated methods that enable them to produce an ostensibly exact knowledge of the past. This had important repercussions for archaeological writing: underlining the adventurous character of the excavation no longer appeared sufficient for this purpose so the focus of the archaeological narrative shifted to the act of deciphering the past using scientific methods. This corresponds with a general change in the representation of scientific expeditions after the turn of the twentieth century. Instead of focusing on the person of the explorer, discoverer and discloser, reports focused more and more on anonymous experts and specialists.⁶⁷ Hence, figures such as the detective came to replace the popular self-representation of archaeologists as adventurers and heroes. Moreover, despite the fact that scholars have, rightly, pointed out the flaws and pitfalls of this analogy,⁶⁸ the “crime scene syndrome”⁶⁹ remains highly important in both popular and scientific representations of the archaeological work even today.

3 The case of migration narratives

The usefulness of narratological approaches to the history of the discipline becomes even more obvious with a look at concrete narrations. The main questions here are how archaeologists draw narrative connections between material finds and the written sources and previously published historical interpretations, and whether they refer to certain plots when doing so. For this kind of investigation, the most promising approach appears to be one that focuses on the representation of certain *types* of incidents – especially on those kinds of occurrences that are believed to recur repeatedly through the whole course of history.

63 Korn 2007.

64 Fagan 1995.

65 Ginzburg 1989.

66 Gründel and Ziegert 1983; Neuhaus 1999; Platzek,

Hausers, and Dudde 1999; Mante 2003; Korn 2007.

67 Torma 2011, 216–220.

68 Holtorf 2003; Holtorf 2004; Holtorf 2007b.

69 Kaeser 2010, 54.

This definitely includes the history of human migrations – a field which is still one of the most important subjects in archaeology. In this sense, a historical (or archaeological) migration narrative is one specific way of representing and retelling the story of human migration in a given context. Since a migration narrative describes the movement of human beings through time and space, it expresses an “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” and thus can be regarded as one of the central *chronotopes* of archaeology, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s famous concept.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the reconstruction of migration routes has always been linked to the question of the origins of certain peoples or ‘races’: traditional narratives of migration usually tell a linear story, covering the departure of a certain group at its mythical *Urheimat*, the migration itself and finally its definitive settling in the new territory. To that extent, they simply meet the basic – Aristotelian – definition of stories, namely they have a discernible beginning, a middle and an end. As a result, historical accounts of migrations usually cover long periods of time – sometimes ranging from an *Urheimat* up to the present. To create such accounts, archaeologists make use of a common narrative strategy, compressing long-term historical changes in order to transform them into single events – an “effect similar to that of a speeded-up film”.⁷¹ Of course, migration narratives are far from immutable and have always been affected by political and cultural change. This becomes obvious with a look at the representation of human migrations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is most striking in connection with these accounts is the fact that at the time archaeological interest was almost exclusively focused on the “Wandering of Peoples,”⁷² meaning the movement of whole groups or collective entities, for example, certain nations, peoples or ‘races’. Following Ricoeur⁷³ one can identify these groups as the “quasi-characters” of migration narratives. Furthermore, in historical surveys this kind of mass movement of people served as a central marker or turning point, permitting the demarcation of different periods. Most important in this context is, of course, the role of the so-called *Völkerwanderung* as a watershed between classical antiquity and the Middle Ages. In this sense, migrations – or to be more precise, the migrating peoples – were seen as responsible both for the destruction of whole civilizations and for the founding of new ones. Thus, migrations played a vital role in the classical narrative of the rise and fall of cultures and empires. As I have already shown, Winckler used migrations exactly in this way to construct his circular narrative. But how did archaeologists arrive at the “quasi-characters” of their narratives? In other words, how did they identify and distinguish different migrating peoples and how did they compose coherent narratives on the basis of the material remains they excavated?

70 Bakhtin 1981, 84.

71 Ricoeur 1984, 109.

72 Haddon 1911.

73 Ricoeur 1984, 200–202.

Up until the second half of the nineteenth century, historians usually drew upon philological methods to distinguish one ethnic group from another and to reconstruct the origins and roots of migration. However, having lost much of its persuasive power at the end of the century, philology began to appear less and less adequate to this purpose. The colonial penetration of what had, for Europeans, until then been almost completely unknown territory resulted in a massive extension of the geographical and ethnological knowledge base, which in almost no respect accorded with the traditional narratives set down in the written sources. However, the emerging science of archaeology, with its spectacular successes in excavating and visualizing the past, seemed poised to fill this gap by drawing upon new (material) sources and introducing new methods to historical research – methods borrowed, for the most part, from the increasingly influential natural sciences.⁷⁴ The introduction of anthropological methods and narratives into historical writing was archaeology's contribution to the debate on the supposed origins of certain peoples or races. Most important in this context was (physical) anthropology,⁷⁵ as a new methodological framework for the interpretation of certain kinds of objects. These included not only skull and skeletal finds, but also excavated monuments. Thus, statues, reliefs and other ancient representations of human beings were perceived less as artificial or typological portrayals than as one-to-one reproductions of the physical appearance of past peoples. This proved especially important for the identification of supposedly culturally gifted races. Accordingly, archaeologists tried to determine what race the ancient Egyptians or the Babylonians belonged to by studying representations of them on historical monuments.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the spatial and temporal dissemination of certain anthropological types was seen as indicating the origins and roots of migration of certain races from antiquity to modern times. In contrast to traditional philological methods, anthropological investigation led not only to an important extension of the temporal (as well as the spatial) perspective, but enabled the connection of two different kinds of narratives which had been separate up to then: the *longue-durée* histories of (physical) anthropology, with its *biohistorical narratives*,⁷⁷ – meaning the history of mankind in general, the development and dissemination of different races according to the geographical conditions, etc. – and *ethnohistorical narratives* in a more narrow sense – meaning the history of civilization, the recorded history of a single people, etc.

The cardinal problem associated with this new kind of archaeological interpretation involved aligning the material finds with the written sources and existing philological classifications. Although some observers were fully aware of the differences between linguistic and anthropological concepts,⁷⁸ in practice the mixture of classifications was in-

74 Trigger 2006; Eberhardt 2011.

75 Unlike in the Anglo-American context, the German term *Anthropologie* (without further attributes) meant just physical anthropology and should not be confounded with cultural anthropology.

76 Wiedemann 2010.

77 Lipphardt 2008, 35–38; Lipphardt and Niewöhner 2007.

78 See for instance Meyer 1910, 73–75.

creasingly predominant in archaeological and historiographical works – with the result that certain groups of peoples, which had previously been classified as language families, were promoted to anthropological types or races that exhibited specific physical traits.⁷⁹ Furthermore, since archaeological research was dependent on public support (just as it is today), producing narratives of general interest was of great importance. One could not rely upon anthropological data alone to produce such a narrative. The shape of a skull or the representation of some unknown human being on a monument remains more or less meaningless without a relevant story behind it. What really mattered here was to get the skulls and monuments to speak by putting them into a certain narrative context. This, of course, could not be done without referring to written sources and existing interpretations. Assigning different anthropological types to well-known subjects of history appeared to offer a way to visualize the central peoples and races of the ancient world. To give an example, the representation of human beings found on Mesopotamian monuments were immediately related to the Bible and used for a typological interpretation of the peoples of the ancient Near East.⁸⁰ The aim of establishing a complex ethnohistorical cartography of the entire region, from antiquity to modern times, required the comparison of material from different epochs. Accordingly, a change in representations was taken as evidence for mass migrations, or at least for violent incursions by foreign invaders. This kind of reasoning seemed to offer a way to identify the racial character of several historical peoples and a way to verify their origins and routes of migration.

Finally, the lingering importance of the written sources resulted in a great similarity between archaeological and historical accounts of migrations. This becomes clear with a look at the plots and role patterns common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which cannot be reduced to White's four-type classification. One can identify a restricted number of relatively flexible migration narratives with certain plots, roles and patterns of sequence in these texts. Individual narratives contradict one another and can appear almost incompatible, but in a way they all belong to the same mode of historical representation and explanation. With respect to the protagonists or "quasi-characters," most archaeological accounts of migrations relied on a narrative pattern which can be characterized as 'heroic.' Accordingly, migrating peoples were presented as – physically as well as morally – superior conquerors or bearers of civilization, and the *Völkerwanderungen* were elevated to the status of crucial factors explaining historical changes.⁸¹ This is, then, to a large extent consistent with White's description of the "Romance" as a

79 However, an increasing awareness of the difference between anthropological and philological concepts led to the establishment of new classifications in physical anthropology. The best example in this context is the substitution of the philological term "Semitic race" by the anthropological concept of

an "Oriental race" (Kiefer 1991; Wiedemann 2010; Wiedemann 2012).

80 Rawlinson 1862; Meyer 1913.

81 Chapman and Hamerow 1997; Trigger 2006, 314–385.

“drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience”.⁸² It has been clearly shown that the rise of archaeological “migrationism” and “diffusionism”⁸³ was closely connected with the politics of nationalism and imperialism:⁸⁴ For obvious reasons, stories about the diffusion of culture and migrating carriers of civilization appeared in an especially flattering light to those European nations who regarded their own colonial expansions as cultural missions. The most important example in this context is the Aryan or Germanic myth, i. e. the idea that the Aryan or Indo-Germanic peoples had appeared in every historical context as bearers of culture – a “civilized people” (*Kulturvolk*) par excellence. As is well known, this narrative fitted perfectly into racial and extreme nationalist – *völkisch*⁸⁵ – concepts of history⁸⁶ which emerged after the turn of the twentieth century. In this context, the focus of representation shifted more and more from bearers of culture to ruling castes of conquerors; in other words, the image of the Aryans as *Kulturvolk* was partly replaced by the concept of *Herrenvolk*. However, Marxist archaeologist Gordon Childe’s adaptation of ideas expressed by the *völkisch* prehistorian Gustav Kossina clearly demonstrates that this kind of “migrationism” is not associated only with a specific set of ideological or political convictions.⁸⁷

The colonial narrative and the heroic epic did not remain unchallenged however and were thus just two options available for representing the history of invasions. An alternative narrative focused more on the violent character of invasions: archaeologists presenting the history of invasions from the perspective of the conquered peoples established a narrative type that might be called ‘tragic’. Most influential in this context was the general theory on human migrations in history put forth by the Leipzig geographer Friedrich Ratzel. Proceeding from the assumption that there is a fundamental dichotomy between sedentary peoples and nomads, Ratzel believed he had detected a historical law under which what were called *Kulturgebiete* (meaning areas populated by sedentary peoples) were periodically overwhelmed by nomadic invaders from the surrounding deserts and steppes, who steam-rolled over them.⁸⁸ The immediate adoption of Ratzel’s theory in anthropological and archaeological writings of the time was due in no small part to his alluring imagery: Using metaphorical language suggestive of thermodynamic forces, he called the areas populated by nomadic peoples “cauldron of peoples” (*Völkessel*) in which the masses were brewed and bubbled until the “cauldron” exploded and the nomads flowed into the *Kulturgebiete*.⁸⁹ In this form of narrative,

82 White 1973, 8.

83 Adams, Van Gerven, and Levy 1978.

84 Trigger 2006, 202–204.

85 The untranslatable (Hutton 2005, 7–13) term

völkisch refers to a distinctive branch of the extreme national right in early twentieth-century Germany:

the so-called *völkisch* movement (Puschner 2001).

86 Häusler 2004; Wiwjorra 2006.

87 Trigger 2006, 235–248; Veit 1984.

88 Ratzel 1890, 8–10.

89 Ratzel 1898, 69.

migrations tended to be presented not as the result of social transformations or environmental changes, but through imagery of volcanic eruptions, leading Ratzel to refer to migrations as “floods of peoples” (*Völkerfluten*).⁹⁰ Applied to ancient history this meant that migrations and invasions were portrayed as tragedies, with the immigrants or invaders presented as barbaric villains who were to blame for the destruction of civilization. In ancient Near Eastern studies, for instance, historians and archaeologists pointed to a number of such barbaric invasions of Semitic peoples from the desert in order to explain what they saw as ups and downs in Babylonian culture.⁹¹ The most influential author in this context was that same Hugo Winckler, whose circular narrative of the history of the ancient Near East simply represented the rigorous application of Ratzel’s theory. Thus, Winckler described the Arabian Desert as a “chamber of Semitic peoples” (*semitische Völkerkammer*) and tried to distinguish different “waves of peoples” (*Völkerwellen*) which invaded the lands of the Fertile Crescent and destroyed the civilizations that existed there.⁹²

Of course, the history of migrations was presented in ways other than through the heroic and the tragic narratives. The most influential among these other narratives was the romantic narrative of cultural pessimism. Against the backdrop of the discontent with modern civilization emerging in *fin de siècle* Europe, interpretations of human history and culture were subjected to fundamental changes and re-evaluation. Attitudes toward culture and civilization grew increasingly ambivalent; ultimately people began to see them as manifestations of decadence. In this light, the supposed destruction of civilizations by outside invaders took on a different appearance: sedentary civilizations of antiquity began to be depicted as morally or racially degenerate while invading ‘wild peoples’ from outside began to embody natural virtues such as moral purity, virility and artlessness. In narratives of this type, historians and archaeologists could simply refer to the traditional myth of the ‘noble savage.’ In the context of the history of the Near East, this topos was represented by the “Noble Bedouin.”⁹³ We see this in Berlin Orientalist Otto Weber’s eulogizing of the role of the ‘Semitic’ Bedouin in the history of the ancient Near East, for example. Weber refers to the invasions of the “brave sons of the desert,” who represent a pure and original element (*urwüchsiges Element*), refreshing the decadent and dying cultures of ancient Mesopotamia.⁹⁴ Furthermore, this narrative made it possible to draw a parallel between the ancient Germans and the Arabs, as both were presented as ‘young peoples’ who had destroyed the decadent civilizations of late antiquity. Arthur Ungnad, for instance, a German assyriologist who was later to become an enthusiastic supporter of National Socialism, did not stop at underlining the nomadic roots

90 Ratzel 1923, 74.

91 Wiedemann 2010.

92 Winckler 1899.

93 Toral-Niehoff 2002.

94 Weber 1902, 3–4.

of Germanic and Semitic peoples, but even speculated about the existence of racial connections between them.⁹⁵ In a sense, one could see this as transformation of the heroic: whereas the attribute of the heroic was ascribed to the *founders* or distributors of culture and civilization in the imperial or colonial myth, the narrative of cultural pessimism reserved heroic features for the *destroyers* of culture.

4 Migrating narratives

To sum up, archaeologists have always told the history of human migrations in different ways and made use of different narrative patterns. What is crucial here is the possibility to narrate the same occurrences – in this case the same migration processes – in multiple ways: The archaeologist's choice of the heroic (colonial), the tragic, the romantic or the circular narrative to relate the history of a certain migration has never been dictated by facts or finds but is a question of, to use White's famous term, *emplotment*. The same applies to the assignment of particular roles to certain historical subjects. What this means with regard to the archaeological accounts of human migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is that the representation and valuation of certain historical subjects as heroes or victims, founders or destroyers of human culture, was relatively arbitrary. Nevertheless, the flexibility of this 'casting', the ease with which one role could be exchanged for another, was restricted by contemporary nationalist and racist resentments and prejudices. As a case in point, presenting African peoples or 'Negroraces' as the primary bearers or carriers of human civilization obviously seemed impossible to the archaeologists of that era.

However, neither the (self-)representation of excavators in archaeological writings or in popular culture, nor migration narratives are immune to change, and thus neither should simply be attributed to archetypes or cognitive patterns. Both have always been subjected to continual change. Hence, like historical narratives in general, they must be analyzed against the backdrop of their specific cultural and political contexts. It seems clear, for example, that both heroic narratives analyzed above – the presentation of the excavator as heroic adventurer and the identification of certain heroic peoples – perfectly corresponded to the colonial and imperialist contexts in which they took shape.

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate the possibilities and the usefulness of narratological concepts for the historiography of archaeology. Yet, further investigation could shed light on the general dissemination of these narratives beyond the disciplinary

95 Ungnad 1923, 5. It is most important to mention that according to a new anthropological classification after the turn of the twentieth century, the Jews were no longer grouped into the same category as

other Semitic peoples. Accordingly, Ungnad could speculate about racial relations between the Germans and the Semitic Arabs without including the Jews (see Wiedemann 2012).

borders of archaeology (and history). This, of course, would raise new questions, such as whether one could identify specific scientific or literarily contexts from which central narratives or metaphors originally emerged and reconstruct their ‘migration routes’ – meaning the ways they were adapted and transformed in different disciplines.

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