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Rogner, F.A.

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**NARRATIVITY – STORYTELLING – REFERENCE:
ON SOME FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTIONS
IN THE DISCUSSION OF IMAGES***

Frederik ROGNER

Abstract

44 years after the first – and so far, last – major publication on the issue of the narrative function(ing) of ancient Egyptian images, N. Braun's Bilder erzählen. Visuelle Narrativität im alten Ägypten sets out to explore this field anew. On the basis of this monograph, this article discusses trends and problems in the discussion of visual narrativity and pictorial narration in ancient Egypt and other (visual) cultures. Part I gives an overview of the book and presents the author's main hypotheses. Part II introduces three major problems that lead to contradictions in many narratological analyses of images and to the almost complete neglect of basic characteristics of the perception of images. In Part III the model of visual narrativity developed by the reviewer himself is introduced. By establishing a systematic distinction between visual narrativity and pictorial narration (or storytelling) it avoids many difficulties of previous studies. Part IV looks into the contexts of particularly strongly narrative images in ancient Egypt, especially in the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1050 B.C.), and into the use of images to tell stories by themselves.

Part I: In the introduction (pp. 5–7) Braun points out that during the last decades narratological research has come to the consensus that the phenomenon of narrativity is not restricted to literature and verbal storytelling, which lead to a rise especially in narratological analyses of visual material. Despite the vast range of relevant material, Egyptology has so far not joined this discussion, a fact that this publication – the first major Egyptological contribution on the topic in over 40 years¹⁾ – is supposed to change. The author adds however, that also her own aim is not to develop a theory of visual narrativity/narration in ancient Egypt. Rather, the book focusses on the critical evaluation of (narratological) literary studies and their applicability to ancient Egyptian imagery (p. 5): “Dabei soll keine eigene Erzähltheorie für visuelles Erzählen im alten Ägypten entwickelt werden, sondern eine Auseinandersetzung vor allem mit Erkenntnissen der Literaturwissenschaft erfolgen, dem Fachgebiet, in dem die Wurzeln der Erzählforschung liegen, aus denen etablierte Erzähltheorien hervorgehen.”

The first part of the book (pp. 9–78) is dedicated to the “theoretical foundations”. The goal of this overview of the wide range of narratological theories and approaches, with a particular focus on the “gradual” presence of narrativity in different media, is to create a theoretical basis for the analysis of Egyptian visual material (p. 6). The initial challenge is to find a basic definition of narrativity/narration (Braun does not distinguish between these two notions, see *infra*). Inspired by Wolf's research on the narrative potential of different media and forms, Braun favours the approach of prototype semantics (pp. 9–18). This means that of several

^{*)} Review article of BRAUN, N.S. — Bilder erzählen. Visuelle Narrativität im alten Ägypten. (Ägyptologische Studien Leipzig, 2). Propylaeum-BOOKS, Heidelberg, 2020. (25,5 cm, 447). ISBN 978-3-946654-95-8. € 49,90.

¹⁾ Gaballa 1976. For a previous publication of Braun's major arguments, see Braun 2015.

types of a given category the one that is associated with this category by most members of a community is taken as point of reference. For the category “narration” the prototype is said to be represented by verbal (natural as well as complex epic-literary) storytelling. Subsequently, the elements necessary to speak of “narration” are established based on this prototype, which leads to criteria such as *temporality*, *causality* and also *tellability*²). The latter refers to the fact that there is an *interest* in telling a given event, i.e. that an event is tell-worthy, rather than that it is *possible* to tell a story about it. Events are considered as possessing *tellability* if they are “extraordinary” and “deviate from the norm” (p. 17). A further consequence of the application of prototype semantics is the idea that different media have a fundamentally different narrative potential and are thus more – or less – suitable to realise narrative contents (pp. 19–24).

For the medium of the image – as for every medium – there are certain *restrictions* as well as *types* in relation to its narrative qualities and possibilities. Some of these are presented in an extensive overview of narratological research in images (pp. 25–59): *As restrictions* – compared to the prototype of verbal narration – the author mentions the fundamental a-temporality of (motionless) images and the lack of systematics and rules (in contrast with the communication system “language”). It results in ambiguities and gives a more prominent role to *context* which is also relevant regarding the narrative perception (p. 34): “[D]asselbe Bild kann in unterschiedlichen Zusammenhängen als narrativ wie nicht-narrativ aufgefasst werden.”

The discussion of different *types* of pictorial narration sets out with the introduction of A. Kibédi Varga’s classification of narrative images: He first distinguishes image series (*Bildreihen*) and single images (*Einzelbilder*) and then divides the former into multi-strand image series (*mehrsträngige Bildreihen*) and single-strand image series (*einsträngige Bildreihen*) and the latter into multiscentic (simultaneous) images (*pluriszenische (Simultan-) Bilder*) and monoscentic images (*monoszenische Bilder*).³ This overview provides basic terms, the following discussion does however not strictly follow his terminology.⁴

The overview puts a particular emphasis on the narrative qualities of monoscentic single images, probably with regard to the ostraca that are presented as “narrative” in the latter part of the book. One of the most important principles of monoscentic single images is the focus on the decisive moment or action, which G. E. Lessing designated as “pregnant moment” (*fruchtbarer Augenblick*). It has to enable and, moreover, trigger the observers’ knowledge about the actions represented so that they can complete them in their mind. This means that monoscentic single images are only narrative if they make the observers recognise the action represented as part of an action sequence with a “before” and an “after”. To ensure this, in many cases recourse is made to means of language, such as a title or labels. The author mentions that

there are researchers who, in light of these observations, doubt that in the case of monoscentic single images it is even possible to speak of narrations *stricto sensu*. Referring to the gradual nature of narrative potential postulated by prototype theory this objection is however refuted. Finally, a look at multiscentic single images offers a glimpse at the wide range of mechanisms inducing a polychronic nature of compositions, such as the repetition of a protagonist, the association of different moments, protagonists and locations, and the phenomenon of “embedded narratives”, i.e. the inclusion of an *image in the image*, which refers to a story of second degree.⁵ The first part of the book is concluded by an outline of the rich relations of image and text in different artistic traditions (pp. 60–65) and of Egyptological research on (textual) narrations and narration (pp. 66–78).

In the second and largest part of the book (pp. 79–365) the author approaches pictorial narrations in Egypt. She sets out with an overview of previous Egyptological research into visual narrativity/pictorial narrations (pp. 79–86) and the particularities of Egyptian imagery (pp. 87–96). For the first time, the author mentions here the fundamental problem that the original contexts of a large part of Egyptian images as well as the intentions behind their production are lost to modern beholders, which entails the danger of misconceptions. Regarding the narrative use of images, etc viewers might see narrations where there were none for emic observers and they might overlook others that were obvious for an emic audience (pp. 96f.).⁶

These remarks are followed by a first overview of different contexts of Egyptian images (temples and royal tombs, private tombs, houses and ostraca) that undergo a deeper analysis in the following chapters. In other words, the material is first presented (pp. 97–132) structured by contexts and then, a second time (pp. 134–338), regarding the narrative potential.

Regarding images in temples and royal tombs (pp. 97–106), the author assumes that they were not accessible or only accessible to a very restricted audience. Rather, their presence had been intended to guarantee the efficiency of the representations due to their magic efficacy. These assumptions have of course a decisive impact on the subsequent interpretations of these decorative programmes and their narrative potential. According to Braun, such a function of the images precludes by default any “unexpected” contents that “deviate from the norm”, meaning that they lack tellability. The crucial significance of this factor is stressed repeatedly. Therefore, even if – hypothetically – certain scenes, e.g. of the daily ritual, could not only be attributed to a specific king, but actually showed a specific date, they would not be

² In detail: Wolf 2002, pp. 372–383; Wolf 2003, pp. 458–468.

³ For a general overview of the history of the classification of images regarding their narrativity and their narrative use, including critical thoughts on this primarily taxonomical approach, see Horváth 2016; Pinotti 2007.

⁴ In her later description of compositions, the author repeatedly uses the contradictory term “monoscentic image series” (*monoszenische Bildreihe*) to designate either a series of several monoscentic images or compositions that in the above terminology would rather be classified as multiscentic images (e.g. pp. 46f., 155, 158).

⁵ When discussing the perception of monoscentic as well as multiscentic images, the author mentions the movement of the eye(s) as investigated in “eye-tracking” studies (e.g. pp. 55f.). It is important to stress that this movement must not be confused with the progressive perception of different (chronological etc.) stages in an image. Previous studies have shown that “eye-gazing patterns were not predictive of either aesthetic or movement assessment of the observed stimuli” (Massaro et al. 2012, p. 15). The “seeing” of causalities, temporalities, etc. depends thus on the subsequent reflexion of the perceived and does not depend on the eye-gazing patterns (see also Davis 1992, p. 137).

⁶ The notions of emic and etic (perspective) are used by the reviewer in order to concisely address the cultural relations mentioned by Braun. They designate the perception and understanding of recipients who are members (emic) or who are not members (etic) of the culture that produced the material under consideration (van Walsem 2005, p. 49).

considered “narrative” as they do not show a transgression of the norm and are thus not “tell-worthy” (p. 100). At the same time she stresses that there occasionally exist pictorial narratives in these contexts, such as the Qadesh reliefs of Ramesses II (pp. 101f.) or images *referring* to a certain myth, such as the image that accompanies the texts of the *Book of the Heavenly Cow* in the royal tombs or Hatshepsut’s Birth Cycle (pp. 102–105).

Similar things are assumed for private tombs (pp. 106–115), even if in this case certain parts (namely the tomb chapel) are accessible, and their decoration was intended to be seen, as is made clear, amongst other things, by the tomb owner’s *appeal to the living*. The decorative programmes are said to show no transient, singular, unusual events but general, ideal states.⁷⁾ The few narrative scenes that, according to Braun, can be found in private tombs are again images referring to mythological scenes, such as the god Re in form of the *Great Cat* beheading Apophis, or rare representations, such as the visit of a Syrian prince in TT 17 or the tomb owner’s encounter with a hyena in TT 85 (pp. 114f.). As in the case of temples and royal tombs, the criteria for the assessment as to whether a certain composition is narrative or not are not always clear and seem partly subjective.

For domestic painting (*Hausmalerei*), the author assumes a greater liberty of the artists than in the highly conventionalised, monumental contexts treated before, as it did not have the purpose of preserving eternal, ideal circumstances (pp. 115–122). Even if the (extremely small number of) preserved remains of domestic wall decoration mainly show scenes of “nature” and “everyday life”, such as flowers, animals or dancing women, Braun supposes that motifs such as the “animal stories” known from ostraca might also have been part of the decoration of living quarters, as it could be imagined “dass diese bei der Kindererziehung halfen, Lehrsätze und Moralvorstellungen erzählerisch zu transportieren” (p. 121).⁸⁾ Nowadays, these motifs are however only preserved on ostraca (pp. 123–132), especially those from Deir el-Medina and the Kings’ Valley from the Ramesside period. Besides sketches for and copies of monumental scenes as well as spontaneous drawings of everyday scenes, e.g. workmen or animals, many of these figurative ostraca contain drawings of animals engaging in human-like behaviour, which the author calls “the most important source for pictorial narration in ancient Egypt” (pp. 125f.).

After presenting these different contexts of images in ancient Egypt and their purposes, they are presented a second time with a focus on the examples for pictorial narrations. At the beginning, the “key criteria” for visual narrations are summarised again. Besides the necessity of one or more main protagonists and the image either showing action or

being part of an action sequence, the main criterion is once again the *tellability* of the represented event, which – as the author highlights – might be difficult to judge for etic observers (p. 133). Furthermore, a distinction is introduced between “real pictorial narration” with an image as independent narrative medium and images that do not fulfil at least one of the necessary criteria but that are still narrative in the sense of being an “evocation” of a story (p. 133): “Unterschieden werden muss weiter zwischen echtem visuellem Erzählen mit einem Bild als eigenständiges Erzählmedium und narrations-indizierenden Bildern, die mindestens eines der zentralen Kriterien für Narrativität nicht erfüllen, aber als Evokation einer Erzählung narrativ sind.” Among the latter are the many drawings of anthropomorphic animals on ostraca, which are extensively discussed in the latter part of the book.

As could be expected after what has been said about images from these contexts and their function before (see *supra*), the number of compositions from tombs and temples (pp. 134–176) that are accepted as pictorial narratives is very small. Among the rare “narrative” scenes are the famous battle scenes in two Old Kingdom tombs in Deshasha and Saqqara (pp. 137–142), Hatshepsut’s Punt Expedition (pp. 146–148), Amenemhab’s encounter with a Hyena in TT 85 (pp. 151–154), the so-called visit of a Syrian patient in TT 17 (pp. 154–156) and some battle scenes, such as the conquest of Satuna (pp. 160f.) and the battle of Qadesh (pp. 162–165). (As this overview shows, while – correctly – rejecting the criterion of “historicity”/“historical factuality” frequently mentioned in earlier Egyptological publications on visual narratives (pp. 79–86), by applying the criterion of “tellability” in a very narrow sense, the author ends up with many of the same cases as these earlier studies.) While the previous examples are primarily of “historical” nature, examples from later periods also include “mythical” contents, such as on the outer walls of the temple of Edfu (pp. 168f.). Finally, several late examples of temple scenes that offer parallels to animals showing human-like behaviour on ostraca are mentioned, such as the famous reliefs with animal musicians from Medamud (pp. 169–176).

In contrast, sources from private (maybe better: non-monumental) contexts – i.e. mainly ostraca, as paintings from houses are not considered because of their scarcity – are presented as offering a wide range of examples for narrative imagery. Before she sets out to present the images themselves, the author introduces different kinds of texts that might be presented in pictorial narrations on ostraca (pp. 176–191). Discussing different literary genres and styles, such as fable, folktale, animal story, fairy tale, satire, parody and myth, she comes to the conclusion that it is best in most cases to use the neutral term “animal story” (*Tiererzählung*). Some images that show a “world upside down” might (in addition) convey satirical intentions. However, she also supposes that there are some “real fables” (*echte Fabeln*) among them, including some parts of the *Myth of the Eye of the Sun* (pp. 182–187). According to Braun, pictorial renderings of such animal stories form the vast majority of visual narrations in Egypt, while images inspired by other, at least nowadays much better known stories, such as *Sinuhe*, *Wenamun* or the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, do not appear in the material or have not been recognised (p. 191). The issue is further complicated by the fact that many of these – supposed – animal stories are only known from the figurative ostraca themselves. It is thus often not possible to decide if ostraca that

⁷⁾ The repeated claim of an alleged “lack of individuality” (p. 109) of the decoration of private tomb chapels does not stand the test. While there is a certain basic similarity between different monuments due to common ideas of the members of the elite, these monuments in particular clearly show the striving for individuality, i.e. the attempt of the tomb owners to stand out of the mass of their peers while at the same time complying with the norms of the group (e.g. van Walsem 2013; Vernus 2009–2010; see also Vernus 1995 for the relation of group identity and personal individuality).

⁸⁾ It does not become entirely clear on which evidence this idea is based. If the scene in TT 123 shows the use of ostraca in the planning of wall decoration *at all* (p. 127 and Baud 1935, pp. 223f.) they would rather contain scenes of monumental content than animal scenes etc. (see the examples in Den Doncker 2017).

show animals engaging in human-like behaviour (drinking from vessels, playing musical instruments, performing priestly tasks, etc.) represent a pictorial rendering of a (otherwise not transmitted) story or rather a parody of social relations – or both (pp. 191–206).

Finally, in an extensive overview, the bulk of images identified as pictorial narrations is presented (pp. 206–338). It is structured by medium (ostraca, papyri, small-scale three-dimensional objects, etc.) and – in the case of the especially numerous ostraca – by topics, such as myths, stories of canids and hyenas, stories of cats and mice, monkey stories, charioteers, etc. The presentation of the material includes extensive discussions of the individual pieces, including previous theories about them, leading up to their classification within the categories previously introduced, such as narration, parody, rendering of literary topoi (e.g. the “lasciviousness” of canids referred to in love poems), etc., including possible combinations of those categories. In the end, a final verdict is (inevitably) impossible in many cases and the classification sometimes seems to depend on intuitive decisions rather than on the criteria for visual narrativity that have been determined in the former parts of the book.

This part on images that tell stories (*Geschichten*) is followed by some thoughts on images that tell history (*Geschichte*) (pp. 339–365) which, as the author herself admits (p. 359), owe their inclusion into this book rather to the relationship of the two terms in German than to an actual thematic overlap. The author elaborates here on some thoughts developed in an earlier publication.⁹⁾ Two observations form the starting point of this excursus: As a result of the “visual/pictorial turn”, images have increasingly been considered as sources in historical research. And, furthermore, images have – as a consequence of their media-specific qualities – the potential to influence the cultural memory and the collective identity in deeper and more lasting ways than textual communications. The author then analyses some rare examples of pictorial narration that she makes out among the wide range of images from Egyptian monumental contexts, i.e. “Beispiele für historische Erzählbilder [...], also außergewöhnliche Ereignisse der ägyptischen Geschichte, in die König oder Grabherr involviert waren und die als visuelle Narration festgehalten sind” (p. 339). The author clarifies that speaking of “historical pictorial narrations” does of course not include the criterion of “historical factuality” in the sense of modern historical research, but that these images were *intended to convey* real events.¹⁰⁾ However, the criterion of “tellability” in the sense of a “transgression of norms” is still applied, which – for obvious reasons – results in only a very small number of narrative examples, such as the battle of Qadesh and the battle against the Sea Peoples in Medinet Habu as well as the two Old Kingdom scenes mentioned before.

The third and final part of the Book is dedicated to the *functions* of visual storytelling (*visuelles Erzählen*) in different (visual) cultures and in particular in ancient Egypt (pp. 367–389). Storytelling (in different media) is introduced as a basic human need because of its role in ordering chaotic experiences, creating meaningfulness, transmitting information, communicating and – last but not least – entertaining. (The demarcation of narration (or storytelling) from the

creation of (meta-)narratives rather in the sense of *discourses* that create meaning in society becomes partly blurred.) In general, due to their media-specific qualities, such as their immediacy and their strong capacity to address the observer on an emotional level that cannot be equalled by texts, images play an important role in narration for themselves and also in direct and mental combination with texts.

Regarding Egyptian narrative images – at this point this notion mainly comprises the non-monumental material, i.e. ostraca and papyri with animal scenes that are at the centre of the study – the author concludes that they fulfil three basic functions of pictorial narrations: They serve as memory aids for telling stories, they illustrate stories that were being told and might have been shown to the audience, and finally they enhance the entertaining value of storytelling by stimulating the audience’s fantasy beyond the contents of a specific story. The explanations end with some hermeneutic considerations, including some thoughts on our possibilities – and restrictions – when analysing questions such as the ones treated in this book, especially the consequences of an etic point of view¹¹⁾ (pp. 385–389). Considering the importance of these points it would have been preferable to introduce them at an earlier stage of the investigation. The book is concluded by a summary (pp. 391–396).

Part II: Braun has taken the important step to reject “historicity”/“historical factuality” as criterion for visual narrativity, which was prevalent in most previous Egyptological studies.¹²⁾ At the same time, she continues however to rely on other assumptions that, in the reviewer’s opinion, make it impossible to conclusively answer some of the questions surrounding the (narrative) functioning of images. Furthermore, with the notion of “tellability” she introduces another criterion that is rather obscuring the ancient image producers’ intentions. The diverse problems that appear in many narratological analyses of images are summarised under the following three main points. Afterwards, the model of visual narrativity developed by the reviewer is introduced. It addresses these problems and leads to new explanations.

Point 1: While many studies on pictorial narration stress that they address narrativity as intermedial phenomenon, their theoretical basis is deeply rooted in textual narratology. They do not take the necessary step back in order to look at the phenomenon of the “narrative effect” in itself, regardless of the medium triggering it. In the book under review the reason for this lies in the fact that the author bases her investigation on Wolf’s postulate that different media possess *per se* a different narrative potential.¹³⁾ This postulation is in itself a consequence of the prototype semantics that constitutes the basis of Wolf’s (and Braun’s) approach (see *supra*). As a consequence, even if both Wolf and Braun (as well as others) repeatedly claim that the adoption of verbal (oral or

¹¹⁾ In the discussion of ways to cope with this difficulty, the author mentions the necessity of including external and general concepts, an approach that “is commonly known as hermeneutic circle” (“gemeinhin als hermeneutischer Zirkel bezeichnet”), quoting van Walsem 2005, pp. “61ff.”. On pp. 61–65 van Walsem indeed discusses strategies to investigate the ancient material despite the (unavoidable) shortcomings of our etic perspective. However, when he introduces the notion of “hermeneutic spiral or more appositely, cone” (p. 62) he is of course not talking about a “hermeneutic circle”, i.e. a “circular argument”, but about the constant reciprocal feedback (and backfeed) within the data in a continuously enlarged material and theoretical pool.

¹²⁾ For a critical overview see also Moers 2019.

¹³⁾ Wolf 2002; Wolf 2003.

⁹⁾ Braun 2009.

¹⁰⁾ Valuable insights on this issue can also be found in Münch 2013.

textual) narratives as prototype does not imply a value judgement, they nonetheless develop their criteria of narrativity and narration based on verbal narratives. Inevitably, all other forms of narration are thus in some ways “deficient”.

Point 2: A further problem is the assumption of “tellability” as necessary criterion for visual narrativity/pictorial narratives, or rather the way in which Braun defines “tellability”. Instead of developing a notion of “tell-worthiness” that corresponds to Egyptian usage by means of analysing the material, she accepts a very restricted definition of “tellability” that is based not only on verbal, but on strictly literary texts (*belles lettres*). In order to be tell-worthy, an event has to “deviate from the norm” and be “extraordinary” (p. 17): “Hinzu kommt als m. E. unerlässliches Narrem [i.e. factor causing narrativity] *tellability*, d. h., von der Norm abweichende und damit außergewöhnliche Ereignisse müssen im Zentrum stehen und Erzählungen von banalen Alltagserfahrungen, standardisierten Tätigkeiten und nach festen Regeln ablaufenden (Ritual-) Handlungen abgrenzen.” As a consequence, images that show ordinary, repeated, and/or everyday experiences are by definition excluded from the set of possibly relevant images, even if they clearly convey temporality and action – and even in the (hypothetical) case that they showed a specific date and were thus clearly intended to represent a singular historical event (e.g. pp. 84, 100f.). The criterion of tellability is probably the main reason why many of the figurative ostraca that show animals behaving like humans are deemed narrative, even if they usually lack an effect of temporality and eventfulness, especially in comparison to numerous monumental scenes.

Braun herself mentions that such an application of *tellability* entails a certain subjectivity that is a “basic problem” of her approach (p. 377, see also pp. 385–389): In the end, scenes that are identified as “tell-worthy” in accordance with this criterion, are “unusual” in the widest sense for us, i.e. etic observers, while for an Egyptian audience they might have been familiar and unspectacular motifs. Some examples will clarify this problem. Braun suggests that the Birth Cycle in Deir el-Bahari possesses tellability (and thus narrativity) because, focussing on a female ruler, it transgresses the norm (pp. 104f.). The tellability of all other versions of the Birth Cycle that are focussing on the origin of either a king or a deity¹⁴) is not addressed. Still, her claim raises the question if these would then be judged less – or even not at all – narrative, despite showing a (sometimes more, sometimes less) similar formal structure and thus creating a similar effect on their audience. Likewise, of all the battle reliefs on the outer western and northern walls of the temple of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu only the one that shows the battle against the Sea Peoples is deemed “narrative”, due to its divergence from the supposed norm (pp. 363f.). Again, this raises the question what this means for all the other battle scenes adjacent to these reliefs: Are they less – or even not at all – narrative, despite mentioning particular war campaigns and despite showing the same action loaded composition? Similar questions could be asked regarding some scenes from private tomb chapels that are said to be tell-worthy and thus narrative, mostly because of the *singular* nature of the motif, a point that – as has been mentioned above – leads to a group

of images that is very similar to the ones that have been determined in previous studies based on the criterion of the (supposed) “historical factuality” of the scenes.

When the singular and unusual nature of scenes is taken as argument for their tellability, such as in the case of the conquest of Satuna, showing a man that is pursued by a bear (pp. 160f., see also pp. 359–365), this assessment can in fact be understood as a consequence of the *effet de réel* triggered by these compositions. This term has been introduced by R. Barthes to describe our tendency to suppose that a detailed description “must be” based on a real model. It has always been exploited by creators of texts (and images) to endow them with an aura of veracity.¹⁵) Therefore, if such an understanding of these scenes proves anything, it is that the creators of these images knew what they were doing and succeeded in creating the impression that what they are showing “must be true”.

In what follows, it is assumed that *tellability* (i.e. the fact that a certain topic was worthy of being elaborated into a textual or pictorial narration) must be determined individually for different cultural contexts. While in some traditions only “new” and “unusual” contents are tell-worthy, in others there is rather a focus on the varied repetition of well-known topics. As Speidel puts it: “[...] a definition of narrative needs to account for the fact that there are *boring narratives*”.¹⁶) To give but one example, the biblical stories were well known to the great majority of western medieval readers (and listeners). Consequently, one of the main goals of the varied elaboration of these stories in manuscript illuminations was not to “let them know what happened” but to make them look again and again and thus to make them think about the events which ideally lead to their memorisation.¹⁷) Furthermore, Speidel’s experimental research into the perception of images has demonstrated that the criterion of “extraordinariness” – which is a decisive part of Braun’s “tellability” – is “less important than has often been suggested” for the creation of a narrative effect.¹⁸)

Point 3: The third and main problem that appears in many narratological analyses of images is the lack of a distinction between the three factors *narrativity*, *storytelling* and *reference*. Even when authors mention both *narrativity* as well as *narration* (or *storytelling*), those two are usually not independent factors. Rather, *narrativity* seems to be the “quality” that makes a text or an image a *narration/narrative*.¹⁹) In other words, if an image (or a text) fulfils enough criteria of narrativity (Wolf’s *narremes*) it “*is a narrative*”. (This conflation is also the reason why it was not possible to avoid certain ambiguities in the use of the terms “narrativity”, “narrative” and “narration” in the summary in Part I.)

In the book under review, the fact that single, monochronic (Braun: monoscenic) images have mainly the ability to *refer to* events but much less to *tell them* by themselves is mentioned *en passant* (pp. 50, 53f.). However, in the discussion of the material it is repeatedly said that an image – even if it does not fulfil the criteria for narrativity – can still be considered narrative because it *refers to* or *evokes* a story

¹⁴) Sonbol 2019. (The list of Birth Cycles mentioned there shows a preliminary state of the author’s research as she told me in a personal communication.)

¹⁵) Barthes 1968.

¹⁶) Speidel 2018a, p. 59, italics in the original; quote from the English manuscript.

¹⁷) Crohn Schmitt 2004.

¹⁸) Speidel 2018c, pp. 97f.

¹⁹) E.g. Braun 2020, pp. 9–24; Speidel 2018a, p. 5; Speidel 2018c, pp. 90f.; Wolf 2002, pp. 372–383; Wolf 2003, pp. 458–468.

(pp. 102, 133, 251). At some points it is even stated that *only* images inspired by (mythical, literary, etc.) stories are interesting for the question of pictorial narration at all (p. 128): “Interessant sind im Hinblick auf bildliches Erzählen nur von bekannten Geschichten inspirierte Darstellungen.” This assertion is not only problematic in itself, it also contradicts the criteria of visual narrativity that have been established by the author herself, such as tellability, the presence of key protagonists (Handlungsträger) and the occurrence of action/sequentiality/a pregnant moment (p. 133). It explains however why numerous figurative ostraca – many of which do not fulfil the more detailed criteria of visual narrativity – are deemed narrative (e.g. pp. 238, 240). It also reveals one of the big achievements of the book: Starting from a fix set of types of pictorial storytelling (taken from earlier literature) and from a list of motifs that are supposedly related to Egyptian stories (mainly the animal stories that can supposedly be seen on ostraca) the author demonstrates *by which means these stories have been realised in the pictorial medium*. In the reviewer’s terminology (see *infra*) Braun’s results show in all clarity that – unlike other contents not deemed narrative by her, such as the career of a member of the elite – traditional verbal narrations were *not* realised in images that were able to tell these stories by themselves. Instead, the images inspired by such stories merely *refer to* (parts of) them. Unless all of them are just leisurely drawings of people who had heard these stories, this points towards a *Sitz im Leben* where these ostraca and papyri appeared together with the orally transmitted stories. They might actually have been used in the context of the private or public “telling” or “performance” of stories, such as in the case of storytellers in India, mentioned by von Lieven in her discussion of this material.²⁰⁾ There remains only one restriction: Even if we suppose that these figurative ostraca, papyri, etc. showing unusual scenes of animals engaging in human-like behaviour are indeed a reflection of Egyptian stories, it needs to be noted that the existence of these stories is deduced solely from the very material itself that is then understood as its visual reflection (pp. 176–191).

Finally, many narratological analyses of images predominantly focus on the *content* of the images, neglecting the individual elaboration of the motifs. As a consequence, the *narrative effect* on the viewers, which can be recognised in descriptions of scenes as “vivid”, “eventful”, etc., not only in the everyday speaking about (Egyptian and other) images but also in the relevant literature,²¹⁾ is not explained, but negated, based on preconceived definitions. In contrast, scenes that are supposedly related to certain stories are deemed narrative despite not having such an effect on most viewers. It is probably true that many of the scenes in Egyptian tomb chapels were indeed not meant to *tell a story*. They do however have a *narrative effect* on their observers. It is therefore necessary to develop a terminology that makes it possible to address this effect. A strong candidate for such a term is the notion of *narrativity*. In what follows, *narrativity* is thus not used to designate the quality of “being a narrative” but the effect of “liveliness”, “actuality”, “action”, “reality”, “interest”, etc. caused by figurative images. In contrast, *storytelling* (or *pictorial narration*) is understood as

a particular *use* or *function* of images. Finally, *reference* is considered regarding its role in the emergence of narrativity as well as in the communicative use of images.

Part III: In his own research, the reviewer has investigated the causes of the *narrativity* of figurative images as well as its use by ancient Egyptian image producers²²⁾. In what follows, *narrativity* designates the narrative effect of images or, to put it differently, their potential to cause a narrative impression in the act of perception. The goal is thus to take the impression that appears in narrative verbalisations of images in everyday as well as in scientific descriptions – people are “moving from A to B”, there is “action”, images show a “dynamic composition”, etc. – seriously and to explain it instead of negating it based on preconceived theories.²³⁾ *Visual narrativity* in this sense exists regardless of the question whether an image was actually used to *tell a story*. The model presented hereafter explains this narrative effect of figurative images. It is important to note that this model is not the result of abstract reflections that were then “applied” to the material. On the contrary, it is the result of an extensive analysis of Egyptian pictorial material, mainly from the tomb chapels of members of the New Kingdom elite, but also from temples and royal tombs of the same period.

Every figurative image has – in varying degrees – the potential to have this narrative *effect* on its observers and, therefore, to cause a narrative *impression* (in the act of perception): This *narrativity* is a basic factor in the perception of all figurative representations. If it is increased or reduced, an image is “more narrative” or “less narrative”. (In contrast, the mere statement that an image “is narrative” does not have any distinctive meaning, as this is true for all figurative images – to different degrees.) While the narrative *potential* lies in the individual compositions, *effect* and *impression* only “exist” in the act of perception by an observer (or recipient).²⁴⁾ (Obviously, the term “impression” is here not being used in the sense of something that only “supposedly” exists. Rather, the aim is *to explain* this effect of figurative images, i.e. their observers’ impressions.) As a certain narrativity is inherent in every figurative image, the analysis of the narrative effect/narrative impression has to proceed gradually: In other words, a certain degree of narrativity is inherent in every figurative image, but it can be deliberately increased or decreased. This is the result of decisions taken by the producers (and their clients) and is conditioned and motivated by certain uses of images. By following this gradual differentiation, the approach presented here differs from the dichotomic classification that often appears in

²²⁾ Rogner (in press).

²³⁾ See also Speidel 2018a; Speidel 2018c.

²⁴⁾ They share this characteristic with the *image object* as defined in the distinction of *image object* and *image vehicle* in image studies. While the latter designates the material object (e.g. a tomb wall and the colours applied to it), the former denotes the *elements that observers see* in the composition. They too “exist” only, if – and while – they are recognised as such, even if the shapes and colours that *cause* this experience (i.e. the image vehicle) are always materially present (Pichler – Ubl 2014, pp. 20–35). As the narrative impression is triggered by the things *seen in* the image – i.e. by the image object – it is only logical that the impression too exists only in the act of perception and that an image can only deploy its potential to cause a narrative effect, *while it is being viewed*.

²⁰⁾ von Lieven 2009, p. 175 – not “Indianer”, i.e. “Native Americans”, as Braun understands (p. 378).

²¹⁾ E.g. Gaballa 1976, pp. 24f.; Braun 2020, p. 107.

previous research: A certain composition “is” or “is not” “a narration”.²⁵⁾

As has been demonstrated above (see Part II, Point 1), in order to understand the narrative effect of images, it is necessary to break with approaches that are focussing on the specific functioning of particular media. An essential prerequisite for understanding the narrative effect of pictorial as well as textual material in general, regardless of the qualities of a particular medium, is provided by the idea of the *triple mimèsis* developed by Paul Ricœur in his *Temps et récit*.²⁶⁾ According to Ricœur, the composition of a text represents the syntagmatic combination of innumerable possible circumstances that we know – for example from our everyday experiences. And it is this syntagmatic combination that – unlike a purely paradigmatic juxtaposition – causes a narrative effect.²⁷⁾ In Ricœur’s theory too, there remain certain characteristics that are specific to the medium text. Among other things, the linearity of texts is mentioned as one of the significant factors of the syntagmatic combination. This does however not affect his basic assumption that can be summarised as follows: Textual compositions are deliberately created syntagmatic structures that refer to their recipients’ reality and thereby trigger the narrative effect. Transferring this approach to images, it can be assumed that there, too, the narrative effect is the result of the reference to the observers’ knowledge or reality that the image triggers.²⁸⁾

What is the nature of this “reference to the observers’ reality”, how is it generated and how does it inform the narrative effect of images? Here, the three parameters *definition*, *dynamism* and *detail* come into play. Neither *definition*, nor *dynamism* or *detail* can be the sole criterion or condition for visual narrativity. Some compositions, or rather the events shown therein, may be highly defined by associated inscriptions and still not be perceived as strongly narrative – because they lack a dynamic effect as well as the elaboration of details. An example for this are scenes in Egyptian tomb chapels that show the tomb owner in front of the king, thereby summarising an important event in his life, without actually conveying it in the image itself. Others, such as scenes representing the work on the fields or in workshops, show a lot of moving figures and a dynamic structure of the composition, but do still not cause a strong narrative

impression due to the generic nature of their content.²⁹⁾ The same is true for images that show a highly detailed elaboration of their particular elements but do not create references to particular protagonists or events. Just as it has been pointed out for narrativity, *definition*, *dynamism* and *detail* too are present in all figurative images but to *different degrees*. Only if at least two – or even all three – of those parameters occur to a particularly high degree, the narrative effect of the image becomes stronger.

In this model of the narrativity of figurative images, *definition*, *dynamism* and *detail* are taken as three distinct and independent parameters that exist in every figurative image to a certain degree and that in their interaction cause different degrees of narrative effect and impression. The notion of *dynamism* as used in this model comprises much more than just “movement”. The term is developed with regard to the broad original semantic field of Greek δύναμις (*dynamis*) – “power”, “might”.³⁰⁾ First and foremost the notion is used to designate the pictorial insertion of time and temporality in the widest sense. It also designates however the creation of certain kinds of image space that make it possible to convey spatial relations, regardless of the *definition* of the space thus created. The parameter of *detail* describes the elaboration of the outward appearance of the single elements in images. Again, regardless of their *definition*, they can show a high or low degree of *detail* in their pictorial (re-)presentation.

Finally, the notion of *definition* necessitates a more extensive explanation. It partly concerns issues that have been addressed in the discussion of (not only but also) Egyptian images before. Researchers have always tried to “identify” certain protagonists or locations in images. Hereafter, *definition* is however used in a sense that is at the same time more open and more restricted, or rather, differentiated: It concerns the relationship of *representation*, *referent* and *reality*. The *referent* is what is being recognised in a given pictorial element or a representation as a whole. Amongst many other things, this can be a person, a building, a landscape or even a complex event.³¹⁾ Observers recognise referents based on their knowledge about (certain elements of) their reality – the referent itself is however *not* identical with this (part of) reality. This important point can be illustrated by a simple example: A real person X can pose for the representation of a (possibly but not necessarily) fictional person Y. The real *model* of the representation is X. Regarding the perception of the *referent*, the context of use is decisive: For most observers the referent they perceive will be Y – as has been the intention of the artist. If, however, an art historian who is interested in the history of models looks at the same image, trying to find the “real model” for the figure shown in the painting, the referent is X.³²⁾ The *referent* of image theory shares this elusive state, between representation and designated reality, with the *signifié* of semiotic theory: This too is

²⁵⁾ On a terminological note, this entails the rejection of two uses of the term “narrative” as a noun and as an adjective, respectively: The noun “narrative” is sometimes used as a synonym for “story” or “narration”. In order to clearly distinguish the “narrative potential” inherent to every figurative image from the specific use of images to “tell a story”, “narrative” is not used in this sense in what follows. Furthermore, in line with what has been said, the adjective “narrative” cannot be used to designate compositions that were used to tell a story – otherwise the term “narrative images” would be ambiguous. Instead, “narrative” is always related to the “potential”, “effect” or “impression”. In the German narratological discussion, the introduction of the (fashionable) term “narrativ”, instead of “erzählend”, etc. has not contributed to a conceptual clarification; instead, it has created further problems by blurring terminological boundaries (Braun 2019, pp. 29–31). In the reviewer’s own German writings, the adjective “narrativ” is only used to designate the phenomenon that has been introduced here (narrative Wirkung, narrativer Eindruck, etc.). For the specific application of images to tell a story, the terms “Erzählen (mit Bildern)” and “Bilderzählung” are used.

²⁶⁾ Especially in the chapter on the “triple mimèsis” in the first volume: Ricœur 1991, pp. 105–162.

²⁷⁾ On the notions of *syntagmatic* vs. *paradigmatic* see also Haring 2018, pp. 85–88.

²⁸⁾ The importance of the observers’ general knowledge is also stressed by Speidel 2018a and Speidel 2018c.

²⁹⁾ Compare Fitzenreiter’s critique of approaches that understand “Bewegtheit” as “Narrative” [thus in the German text] (Fitzenreiter 2017, p. 179). Because he does not differentiate between “narrativity” and “storytelling” he discards “movement” as factor of visual narrativity altogether.

³⁰⁾ s.v. “δύναμις” in the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: [http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=29470] (13 April 2021).

³¹⁾ Pichler – Ubl 2014, pp. 43–59.

³²⁾ Pichler – Ubl 2014, pp. 50 and 62–66.

a mental concept and not identical with the part of reality it refers to.³³)

This fundamental distinction of *referent* and *reality* allows the existence of not only *specifically defined* but also *generically defined* (or even *undefined*) referents: To give but one example, observers who know “deserts” – “deserts” are a part of their reality – are able to recognise a “desert” – i.e. the referent “desert” – in a pictorial representation, given that certain necessary elements are used. If it has not been *specifically* defined by pictorial elements or inscriptions, the desert that is recognised in the image can very well be just *generically* defined – and thus not designate a particular place. Here lies a decisive difference between *representation* and *referent* on the one hand and *reality* on the other hand: In the real world, elements (in the widest sense) are in general specific or singular, which corresponds to “specific definition” in images: Even in a forest with an innumerable number of trees, every single tree is still one specific tree. In a representation – and also a text – certain elements as well as bigger contexts can however also be only generically defined: Something happens “in a forest” or “in a desert” that has not been defined more exactly – because it was only relevant for the intended message that the events happen in the respective setting. Regarding the entire image space, in Egypt – as well as in numerous other pictorial traditions – it can also be temporally and/or spatially completely *undefined*. For singular pictorial elements this is however not possible. As soon as we recognise a tree as a tree, it is generically defined. As these explanations demonstrate, the parameter *definition* differs from *dynamism* and *detail*, which appear in continuous degrees, in that there are *three grades* (*undefined*, *generically defined*, *specifically defined*).

At this point it is necessary to counter the potential objection that, contrary to what has been said, there is indeed a connection between *definition* and *detail* insofar as a great amount of detail entails specific definition. Someone uttering this argument might be thinking of a (modern western) portrait or representations of buildings. Indeed, one might think at first glance that an image such as a representation of the great temple of the Aten³⁴) is specifically defined *because we recognise it due to the great amount of detail*. This conclusion is however not valid. Even if it is possible that in a given case the identification of a building happens not by means of a textual label but actually by the way in which it is shown in the image, it is still based on factors of definition and not on the degree of detail: The same building could be rendered in a most simple way and still be specifically defined by means of the (monumental) context, the (pictorial) cotext and/or a label, respectively. Throughout (art) history there have been representations of buildings that show only a minimal degree of detail and still *represent* a specific building, from the temple of Monthu in Armant in the tomb chapel of Khonsu (TT 31)³⁵) to the little house (*domuncula*) of the Virgin Mary in innumerable Annunciation scenes. Furthermore, the same highly detailed structure that in one representation is used to represent the temple of the Aten in Akhetaten, could – theoretically – be used in another composition to refer to a completely different structure. This is because, as has been demonstrated above, *definition* is based

on the relation between *representation*, *referent* and *reality* and not just between representation and model – be it imaginary or real.³⁶) In short, even if it cannot be denied that occasionally there is indeed a *correlation* of a high degree of detail and specific definition, *definition* and *detail* have to be considered as two distinct factors.

In the act of perception, the image creates a reference to the observers’ reality – and thus triggers a comparison between the representation and this reality. For the observers, the representation/what they see in the representation exhibits – in relation to their reality – a certain degree of dynamism (regarding the temporality of actions and the relationships of entities in space) of detail (regarding their outward appearance) and of definition (regarding the relationship of representation, referent and reality) and, as a result, causes a certain degree of narrative impression. If the representation comes closer to the observers’ reality in one or several of these aspects, it is perceived as more narrative.

The notion of the observers’ *reality* must of course not be understood in an absolute sense. Instead, it designates the relative knowledge of the recipients about their reality, as understood in approaches informed by the sociology of knowledge.³⁷) It is formed by common knowledge of a society as well as by individual experiences. The knowledge about *reality*, or the *real world*, in this sense – i.e. the reality of the individual observers – does not only comprise processes and circumstances of everyday life. It also includes facts that they know (only) from traditions that are part of a given culture, such as the knowledge about the events of a fictional story (e.g. “Sinuhe”) or about what happens after death.³⁸) There is a decisive difference in how these parts of a person’s knowledge are obtained: Whereas the knowledge about – at least parts of – everyday reality can be obtained by personal experience, knowledge about the events of a fictional story, about things that happen after death or also about the gods can only be received through tradition.³⁹) Still, all these facts are equally part of an observer’s reality.

The points described so far form the basic traits of a model of visual narrativity that explains the visual effect of figurative images from different ages and cultural backgrounds. The pictorial/artistic means by which definition, dynamism and detail – and hence narrativity – can be increased (or decreased) differ however from one (visual) culture to the next. This also means that the conclusion that a “more detailed” rendering of certain elements increases

³⁶) Obviously, whether the definition of a representation and its parts is specific, generic or completely absent does not allow to draw a conclusion regarding the “fictional” or “non-fictional” nature of the represented events and entities (Pichler – Ubl 2014, p. 70).

³⁷) Landwehr 2018; Müller – Münch 2020.

³⁸) In a phenomenological sense the term *lifeworld* could be used instead of *real world* or *reality*. However, the latter terms are preferred here, because, on the terminological level, they allow a parallel use with the *real space* – as opposed to the *virtual space* that exists only in the representation and is thus ontologically distinct from the real world.

³⁹) Similarly, van Walsem 2005, pp. 34–38 distinguishes a “material reality” that is “sensorily observable and intellectually realizable (= thinkable)” from an “immaterial reality” that comprises “ideological” as well as “ideational” factors. This distinction follows partly but not completely the same lines as the one made here. Certain points, such as the fact that the tomb owner is “being represented on an unnaturally large scale, observing all kinds of scenes”, which in van Walsem’s division are part of the “immaterial, ideological reality”, are here not understood as factors of the general knowledge in the same sense but just as a specific part of the representational tradition.

³³) Haring 2018, pp. 89f.

³⁴) TA 4 (*Meryra I*)-PM (22, 24–25): de Garis Davies 1903, pl. 10a, 25.

³⁵) TT 31 (*Khonsu*)-PM (6): de Garis Davies 1948, pl. 13.

the narrative effect must not be (mis)understood in the sense that different pictorial traditions have *per se* a different degree of narrative potential. (They can however cause varying narrative impressions in etic observers, as these (involuntarily) apply the standards of their own representational tradition to those of other visual cultures. This is also the reason why sometimes Egyptian images *in general* are (wrongly) described as “static” or “emblematic”.)⁴⁰ In the reviewer’s research, the potential field of “all (figurative) images” has been subjected to a threefold limitation: regarding the genre (two-dimensional (monumental) images), regarding the cultural context (ancient Egypt) and regarding the exact time period (New Kingdom). In this period, *detail* is enhanced by elaborating or highlighting aspects of the shape, consistency, surface structure and volume of pictorial elements, while *definition* is introduced mainly by means of labels but also by context and by the interplay of different elements (i.e. pictorial cotext). Finally, dynamism is increased by creating (more) continuous image spaces as well as by the kinetic and/or cinematographic elaboration of figures and by the use of polychronic images and image series.⁴¹ It is hoped that by applying this model to their own research material, the readers of this article might uncover similar – as well as completely different – artistic means in diverse visual cultures.

Part IV: The same restriction holds true for the analysis of the actual *uses* of images. Purposes and applications of figurative representations differ from (visual) culture to (visual) culture. (This does of course not preclude that some of the results *might* be valid also for other ages and cultures.) The analysis of images with regard to their actual contexts of use represents thus an important step towards their (re-) contextualisation within historical communicative practices.

As has been mentioned above, the reviewer’s research, which led to the model of visual narrativity presented in Part III, especially focussed on the tomb chapels of members of the New Kingdom elite. Of course, this selection in itself

⁴⁰ If the narrative effect is here defined as a result of the reference to the observers’ knowledge created by the image, such a claim may, at first glance, show certain similarities to Gombrich’s idea that the development of a more “realistic” or “naturalistic” way of figurative representation by the Greeks had been motivated by the intention to create images that were able to render “narrations” (Gombrich 1996, pp. 99–125). Gombrich assumes however that it is possible to observe or judge images with regard to their “absolute similarity” to their models in the real world – which for him entails the possibility to also postulate a development towards a “more and more realistic” rendering of this “objective reality” that he assumes. However, as has been explained above, “reality” or “knowledge” need to be taken in a relative sense: It is the reality *of a given artist/observer X*. Furthermore, the ways to create a reference to this reality as well as the creation (or increase/decrease) of *detail*, *dynamism* and *definition* in images always have to be assessed *within one visual culture*. From the point of view of the norms of “academic” western painting, the repetition of the same protagonist within a continuous image space would contradict “reality” because the same person “cannot actually be” at two places in one moment. However, from an Egyptian point of view this was apparently a convincing possibility to enhance the temporality of the representation in order to more clearly convey the events taking place (see *infra*). Finally, even within the period analysed by the reviewer, i.e. the New Kingdom, many of the mechanisms to strongly enhance visual narrativity, such as polychronic compositions, have only been used sporadically, namely if it was suitable for the image’s purpose. Not even within a given visual culture, can we thus speak of a teleological or evolutionary development; rather, artists’ decisions have always depended on the messages the images were supposed to convey.

⁴¹ These mechanisms are discussed in detail, based on numerous examples, in Rogner (in press).

is based on an observation, namely that visual narrativity is especially strong in images from this context (e.g. in the so-called “daily life scenes”, hunting scenes, scenes of royal reward, etc.). The subsequent comparative analysis of compositions from other monumental contexts showed that the same is true for many images on the outer walls of temples as well as in their courtyards (e.g. battle scenes or religious processions). Much more than the scenes from the inner rooms of temples (e.g. scenes of “daily ritual” and other scenes showing the interaction of the king with the gods) or – even more clearly – from royal tombs (e.g. so-called “underworld books” and the king with different gods), the images from these monumental contexts often create a strong narrative impression. What are the reasons for this?

The contexts of the private tomb chapels as well as the outer walls and courtyards of temples have in common that they were accessible to at least bigger parts of the population – in contrast to the inner rooms of temples as well as royal tombs that were inaccessible to most people. Obviously, also the inner rooms of temples and the royal tomb were accessed, namely by temple staff and during the king’s burial. And while the outer walls of temples might indeed have been visible to most parts of the population, access to their courtyards as well as to private tomb chapels might have been governed by certain norms. However, the fundamental difference of (much more) accessible vs. (much more) inaccessible contexts holds true.⁴² The observed distribution – highly narrative images in (accessible) private tomb chapels and on the outer walls and in the courtyards of temples, much less narrative images in (inaccessible) inner temple rooms and royal tombs – points thus towards a use of images and visual narrativity that takes the presence (or absence) of an audience into account. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that other means that have been analysed in relation to the reception of images, e.g. tools of *visual apostrophe*, such as humorous details or a distribution of scenes that takes the movement of visitors in architectural space into account, have also mainly been found in these accessible locations.

However, the locations mentioned above do not only have in common that their decorative programmes could be seen by a wide(r) range of observers. Both contexts also play an important role in the “worldly preservation” (namely of the tomb owner/the king), as opposed to the scenes in the royal tomb and in the inner temple rooms. This point necessitates further explanations, starting with private tomb chapels. The funerary monuments of the elite fulfilled a twofold function. The first function was the cultic, otherworldly preservation of the deceased. In principle, it was independent from the

⁴² The strong distinction of private tomb chapels from royal tombs, as well as the difference in accessibility might require an explanation, especially for non-Egyptological readers. The private funerary monuments of the New Kingdom consist of two parts. The *chapel* is either hewn into the rock (e.g. Thebes, Tell el-Amarna) or built from stone (e.g. Saqqara) and could be accessed by different groups of visitors, such as priests, family members, other members of the elite, artists, etc. as is clear not only from inscriptions (e.g. the so-called *appeals to the living*) that ask people to come in and in some cases even to look at the images and marvel at their liveliness (Den Doncker 2012, p. 23; Kuhlmann 1973, p. 209) but also by the graffiti that they left (Den Doncker 2010; Den Doncker 2012). In contrast, the subterranean *burial chamber* was the place where the deceased were put to rest and that was only accessed during burial procedures. In most New Kingdom tombs, it was left undecorated. The royal tombs of the time, situated in the so-called Kings’ Valley, correspond to these burial chambers. The function of the tomb chapel was in their case fulfilled by the kings’ temples on the Theban West bank.

existence of a monumental funerary monument. A simple burial and the performance of some rituals must have been taken to be sufficient for the preservation of a person in the netherworld. Otherwise, we would have to suppose that the vast majority of the population was not expected to enter the afterlife.⁴³⁾ The second function, and it is this function that is at the centre in what follows, was the worldly preservation, i.e. the preservation in the memory of future generations. This function was a decisive drive for the increasing monumentalisation of the elite's funerary monuments. Amongst other things, the preservation in the collective memory depended on the fact that a person's monument was seen and visited – and thus known – by many people. At the same time, we can suppose that even if a visitor entered a tomb chapel primarily for “aesthetical” reasons – e.g. an artist with an apprentice – this still involved at least some basic ritual actions. Therefore, the attraction of visitors also contributed to the otherworldly preservation, as is also made clear by the *appeals to the living* that ask passers-by to enter and to speak some offering formulas. For all these reasons, it was important to the members of the elite to create a monument that was in the widest sense “interesting” for potential visitors and allowed an appealing and unusual visual experience – for example by enhancing the visual narrativity of the decorative programme.

The same holds true for the accessible parts of temples. Here, the person whose memory should be preserved was the king himself. His deeds were captured to secure his fame in all eternity. Successful military campaigns as well as the implementation of processions and religious festivals in accordance with tradition demonstrate that the ruler has acted as he was supposed to. In this case there was obviously no direct competition with “contemporary contenders” for the people's attention as in the case of members of the elite. However, there seems to be a “diachronic competition”, for which E. Hornung coined the term *Erweiterung des Bestehenden* (lit. “expansion of what (already) is”).⁴⁴⁾ These conclusions also have consequences for our understanding of images in locations that correspond less clearly to an outside – inside dichotomy, e.g. the Opet procession in the colonnade of the Luxor temple or the decorative complex of the second terrace of Deir el-Bahari (Birth Cycle – Coronation Cycle – Punt Expedition). If – as in these cases – a strong narrative elaboration can be seen, this is a clear indication that the scenes were indeed accessible to a wider audience.

So far, the focus has been on the visual narrativity, i.e. the narrative effect that every figurative image has to a higher or lesser degree. In what follows, images will be considered that were actually *used to tell a story* – “story” in a wide sense, from children's stories made up on the spot to literary and religious tales and to historical events that happened a short time or also ages ago. When speaking of such compositions, the term “pictorial narrations” might be used. However, it must be kept in mind that this is no absolute classification. An image “is” a pictorial narration only as long as it *is being used as* a pictorial narration. In other words, the figurative and compositional properties of an image alone cannot tell us if it has actually been used to tell a story. As is demonstrated below, the figurative and compositional elaboration needs to fulfil certain requirements in order to make it pos-

sible for a composition to actually tell the sequence of events “by itself”, without relinquishing this task to an associated text: It needs to *contain a sequence in order to tell a sequence*. But external factors, such as the monumental context and communicative roles, have to be taken into consideration, too. Only a small group of images from the New Kingdom have actually been used to tell a story in this sense. However – and this is an essential conclusion of the reviewer's research, especially in relation to the reasoning of many previous studies – this does *not* mean, that only these images have a *narrative effect* on their viewers.

To start with the formal requirements that have to be fulfilled in order to speak of images used to tell a story, the compositions themselves have to be able to convey a certain sequence of events. (The same event can also be conveyed by a different type of image in combination with an explaining text – but in this case the image itself does not convey the events through its figurative and compositional properties.) There are two types of compositions that occur in the New Kingdom and fulfil this requirement: Polychronic compositions and image series. Both have in common that *they show the same protagonist several times in distinct action units which together form one coherent action sequence* – in the case of the polychronic composition these action units *appear within one image space*.⁴⁵⁾ The principle of polychrony appears most clearly in several compositions from private tombs in Tell el-Amarna that show the tomb owner being rewarded or appointed to an office by the king. Here, by means of labels or specific elements such as his attire or the gold of honour that he received, the main protagonist is clearly recognisable in the distinct action units, which is a basic prerequisite to recognise an image as being polychronic.⁴⁶⁾ It has always been possible in Egypt to include the same protagonist several times within one and the same composition – and even more so within the different compositions of one monument. However, only in the case of polychronic compositions are the different figures representing the main protagonist put in a syntagmatic connection. In other words, polychronic compositions fulfil an important formal requirement for images to be able to tell stories on their own: They *contain a sequence* in order to actually *convey* – or *tell* – a sequence of events by themselves, without external (verbal) commentaries.⁴⁷⁾ The same is true for image series, such as the one in Huy's tomb chapel in Qurnet Murai (TT 40). In three images, the first and last of which are internally polychronic, the observers can follow important moments in Huy's career. On the (northern) end of the right entrance wall he is appointed viceroy of Kush. Then he

⁴⁵⁾ Speidel draws a clearer distinction between single images and image series and states that in order to understand how complex forms, such as image series, narrate we first had to understand how storytelling works in single images (Speidel 2018a). In contrast, the present explanation is based on the assumption that single image and image series are two fundamentally different forms that are chosen based on the (communicative) function that a given composition is supposed to fulfil.

⁴⁶⁾ E.g. TA 2 (*Meryra II*)-PM (6): de Garis Davies 1905, pl. 33; TA 4 (*Meryra I*)-PM (19): de Garis Davies 1903, p. 21; pl. 6, 8; TA 6 (*Panehesy*)-PM (7–8): de Garis Davies 1905, pl. 10, 11; TA 8 (*Tutu*)-PM (9–13): de Garis Davies 1908, pl. 19, 20.

⁴⁷⁾ Other scenes, such as representations of fieldwork or craftsmanship also show different stages of a certain action sequence. The effect is however not the same as the observer does not follow *one protagonist* but sees a multiplicity of protagonists in a paradigmatic panorama of actions that are part of a certain area of activity.

⁴³⁾ Fitzenreiter 2008.

⁴⁴⁾ Hornung 2005, pp. 88f.

leaves the palace and offers to the gods. This is followed by three action units on the left entrance wall, in-between which lie larger time intervals, namely the start of his journey, the stay in Nubia and finally the preparation of his return.⁴⁸⁾ Finally, on the left back wall, Huy returns from Nubia and presents people and goods to the king, before being rewarded and welcomed by friends and family.⁴⁹⁾

The polychronic compositions and image series that have been found have in common that they are situated in accessible locations. This means that another basic requirement of images used to tell a story is met: The act of telling a story necessarily needs a *recipient* or an *audience, to whom* a story is told. (Even an image that clearly shows a polychronic structure can only have been *used as* a pictorial narration if it had an audience. This is also the reason why the *narrativity* of an image and the use of an image to *tell a story* are two clearly distinct points: Even if in practice images that were used to tell a story are often also highly narrative, being highly narrative is not a sufficient condition to speak of a pictorial narration – there also needs to be an audience. However, the mere existence of an audience is not enough for an image to be a pictorial narration – otherwise all images in private tomb chapels and in the accessible parts of temple buildings would be pictorial narrations.)

Once compositions that fulfil the necessary criteria for pictorial narration have been found – i.e. images that clearly convey a sequence of events by means of their compositional properties and that were visible to an audience – their content can be analysed. In so doing, it is possible to determine which topics were chosen to be told by means of pictorial compositions and thus possessed “tellability” *in the context of New Kingdom monumental culture* (see Part II, Point 2). Among the relevant cases are the reward/appointment scenes from Tell el-Amarna (see *supra*) the image series in TT 31, TT 40 and TT 131 (see *infra*) and the polychronic renderings of processions in the second courtyard of the temple of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu.⁵⁰⁾ They have in common that they were used to represent the actions and merits of the tomb owners and the king. Obviously, in itself this observation does not differ from what has been said about the decoration of accessible locations in general. But together with the preceding observations on the storytelling qualities of these images it shows that compositions were worked out into pictorial narrations where particular achievements and actions should be presented to an audience as clearly as possible.⁵¹⁾

It might seem, at first glance, as if the criterion of tellability was once again associated with the criterion of “novelty” etc.: The tomb owner receives a “new office”, thus the event possesses tellability. Such a simplistic interpretation would however miss the emic intention. Egyptian “career stories”

– in images as well as in (autobiographical) texts – do not convey a “novelty” in the sense of the “unusual” and “unexpected”. Rather they show how members of the elite pursued their career, thereby standing out from the group of their peers – and still acting within their norms and expectations and their predecessors’ tradition.⁵²⁾ The goal of the pictorial narrations in temples and tomb chapels is not to report an “incredible” event but to highlight and to convey as clearly as possible the achievements of the king and the tomb owners.⁵³⁾

Whether such an event was actually elaborated into a pictorial narration was left to the discretion of the tomb owners and their artists. An event such as the reward or appointment of the tomb owner could always be “condensed” into a single, non-polychronic image showing the tomb owner before the king in his kiosk.⁵⁴⁾ In this case, the image itself does not *tell the story of the events* but only *creates a reference* to these events. The part of telling the story could be – but did not have to be – taken over by longer texts added to the scene or by a separate autobiographical inscription. But even if this was the case, the observers would not see at first glance how the events unfold in the compositional layout itself. To say that such a composition “tells a story” just as polychronic images and image series do would be the same as to say that a summarising title, such as “appointment of X to the office of Y”, “tells the story” of a career in the same way as an autobiographical text does. In the case of a mere *keyword* or a single, non-polychronic image, the story (i.e. the sequence of events) is not actually *told*; the relation between pictorial elaboration and represented content consists in a *reference*.

Distinguishing *telling a story* from *creating a reference to a story* is of great hermeneutic importance. It has often been neglected in previous studies, resulting in the difficulties mentioned above (see Part II, Point 3). In the case of polychronic compositions and image series, even observers that cannot grasp the full details of the represented events – e.g. because they cannot read the labels and do thus not know which king performed the reward ceremony or to which office the tomb owner has been appointed – are still able to recognise the basic structure of the events, as they can follow the main protagonist through the composition. The composition is *telling the story*. The single, monochronic images from the same period can however only *trigger memories* of a certain story/certain events, by *referring* to them.⁵⁵⁾ This reference is of course only successful if the observer recognises what the image refers to.⁵⁶⁾ The same is true for

⁴⁸⁾ Probably due to the larger time intervals between these actions they have not been conveyed by a polychronic composition but by the internal division of the image by means of black vertical lines, which creates another kind of image series *within* one image field.

⁴⁹⁾ TT 40 (*Huy*)-PM (8-1-2-3-5-6-7): de Garis Davies – Gardiner 1926, pl. 4-5-10-31-32-23-22. (The sequence of the plates as mentioned here follows the action sequence in the composition.)

⁵⁰⁾ Epigraphic Survey 1940, pl. 196.

⁵¹⁾ Braun 2020, p. 339 stresses that images she mentions as “telling history” were not actually intended to “tell the observer about an event” but to preserve the event for eternity. There is however no contradiction. Rather, an effective preservation has been reached in these cases *by* elaborating the event in a strongly narrative way.

⁵²⁾ The representation of actions between tradition and individuality is a decisive trait of Egyptian (elite) culture, e.g. Vernus 1995.

⁵³⁾ Where “new” or “unusual” topics can be found in the same period, they are often part of images that have *not* been elaborated into pictorial narrations and that are often not even highly narrative, such as the scene of Amenemhab and the hyena (TT 85) that is repeatedly mentioned by Braun.

⁵⁴⁾ TT 56 (*Userhat*)-PM (9): Beinlich-Seeber – Shedid 1987, Taf. 4; TT 93 (*Qenamun*)-PM (17): de Garis Davies 1930, pl. 8.

⁵⁵⁾ A similar distinction between telling stories with pictures and merely creating a reference by means of pictures is made by Crohn Schmitt 2004.

⁵⁶⁾ Speidel’s example of a non-polychronic single image that indeed seems to have been used to tell a story (Géricault’s *Le radeau de la Méduse*) does not contradict these conclusions (Speidel 2018a, Speidel 2018b). (The story being told by the image itself is, as Speidel himself stresses, that of being wrecked and then rescued by another ship, as the title first given to the painting (*Scène d’un naufrage*) confirms. The connection with the historical event of the sinking of the vessel *Méduse* in 1816 and the rescue of the survivors can only be made by means of reference; see

polychronic images in a wider sense that have been excluded in the definition above: If a single image contains several distinct moments, but without repetition of (a) protagonist(s), this plurality of moments can usually only be recognised by viewers who already know the story the image refers to.

Reference – and not storytelling – is also the mechanism at play in the case of some of the figurative ostraca presented by Braun – given that they are actually related to (well-known or spontaneously made up) stories at all. To date, there are no verbalised accounts of these stories, which would be the only possibility for etic observers to understand the content of these images. As a consequence, interpretations vary widely, including the question whether these images are related to any stories at all. If they had been elaborated in order to tell a story by themselves, such as the images mentioned above, it would be possible to extract at least a basic sequence of events. Even if some of them might refer to stories, their purpose clearly was not to *tell these stories*. Rather, they might have been used to refer to such a story as a whole or also to illustrate a decisive moment of the story – maybe while it was being told.

Another observation demonstrates that the ability of pictorial compositions to tell a story is based on their figurative and compositional elaboration and not on the topic/content itself: As has been shown, storytelling needs an audience and New Kingdom compositions that, due to their formal properties, are able to tell a story by themselves are indeed usually situated in accessible locations. In contrast, compositions in less accessible locations that *might* have been used very well in order to tell a sequence of events were elaborated focusing on other aspects. The clearest examples are the netherworld books in the royal tombs and the ritual scenes in the inner temple rooms. Both thematic complexes lend themselves – at least from a modern, etic perspective – to the conveying of the sequence of events in a most clear manner or in other words to tell the story of what happens in the netherworld and during the daily ritual for the gods.⁵⁷⁾

This is however not how these compositions were actually used in the New Kingdom: The interest of their creators must have lain on different aspects as can be seen from the fact that they were *not* given the syntagmatic, sequential structure that so clearly conveys a sequence of events. Instead, they show a paradigmatic structure, highlighting the individual steps rather than their succession, and their arrangement in (architectural) space is less informed by the wish to clearly convey an action sequence than to highlight other factors. In the case of the netherworld books, the placement and orientation in cosmic space was crucial. The sequence of hours on the walls does in many cases not diachronically follow the sun god's journey but is governed by

other criteria, such as the cardinal points that are mentioned in the accompanying texts.⁵⁸⁾ As for the ritual scenes in temples, the diversity of their arrangement in monumental space is notorious. The mere difficulty – if not impossibility – to reconstruct the ritual actions from these decorative programmes should make clear that their main goal was not to “show what happened”.⁵⁹⁾ The reason for this is not only that they replace what was probably a multiplicity of (priestly) protagonists performing synchronous actions by a single protagonist (i.e. the king). Rather, their layout and combination in general prioritise meta levels of the socio-religious discourse, for instance regarding the king's role as ruler and priest.⁶⁰⁾ In comparison, the deliberate strengthening of the storytelling capacities in the polychronic compositions and image series discussed above becomes all the clearer.

A final point concerns the strategic arrangement of scenes in architectural space that highlights once again that they were aimed at an audience. (It is mainly relevant for tomb chapels as in temple courtyards the number of possible paths and visual axes is too high to apply similar tools). In many cases, the polychronic images that tell the tomb owner's life story are situated on the back wall of the transversal hall of the chapel, i.e. in the most prestigious and visible location. They thus immediately catch the eye of every visitor who enters the chapel.⁶¹⁾ As for the image series in TT 31,⁶²⁾ TT 40 (see *supra*) and TT 131,⁶³⁾ they all start on the entry wall of the transversal hall – which means that visitors see the beginning of the story when they leave the tomb coming back from the shrine where probably every visitor spoke at least some offering formulas. If they are intrigued by it and follow the sequence of events, they finally behold the result of the actions – e.g. the presentation of tributes to the king or the execution of the office – again on the more prestigious back wall.

While these remarks have mainly focussed on the enhancement of visual narrativity, there is also the opposite pole, i.e. pictorial compositions that show a strong reduction of narrative effect. The prime examples for this phenomenon are images in a “diagrammatic” use, the main goal of which is to convey not actions but properties/qualities of certain objects, beings, and structures as clearly as possible. Examples for this mode are the *Botanical Garden* of Thutmose III⁶⁴⁾ or renderings of the “cosmos” showing the earth god Geb, the sky goddess Nut and – in-between them – the air god Shu. Once more, they highlight the necessity of an approach that takes the formal elaboration of pictorial compositions into consideration *as well as* their context(s) of use.

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To conclude, it needs to be noted that the illustration in the publication under review are of rather poor quality and in

the paintings (secondary) title.) First of all, as has been repeatedly stressed, the actual *use* of images has to be investigated separately for different (visual) cultures. In this case we see different uses of images in tombs and temples of the Egyptian New Kingdom and in 19th century French painting – both prime examples of *high culture*. Furthermore, even if Speidel has clearly demonstrated that under certain conditions monochronic images are indeed able to tell a story, they never seem to have been the first choice for a clear communication of events, as the scarcity of examples shows.

⁵⁷⁾ This is indeed how these compositional complexes are often (re-) presented in Egyptological discussions and publications: We follow the sun god through the netherworld hour after hour, cavern after cavern and we see the different ritual actions performed by the king, step by step, from entering the sanctuary, to opening the shrine, feeding and clothing the deity and leaving the sanctuary again.

⁵⁸⁾ Richter 2008; Wilkinson [2016].

⁵⁹⁾ Eaton 2013; David 2016, pp. 126–180.

⁶⁰⁾ Eaton 2013, especially pp. 18–33; see also Gillam 2012.

⁶¹⁾ E.g. TT 49 (*Neferhotep*)-PM (6–7); de Garis Davies 1933 (II), pl. 1; TT 75 (*Amenhotep Sise*)-PM (3); de Garis Davies 1923, pl. 11, 12; TT 90 (*Nebamun*)-PM (4); de Garis Davies 1923, pl. 26, 27, 37.

⁶²⁾ TT 31 (*Khonsu*)-PM (4–5–6); de Garis Davies 1948, pl. 11–12–12.

⁶³⁾ TT 131 (*User*)-PM (8–9–12–6); Dziobek 1994, pl. 72–74–75.

⁶⁴⁾ Beaux 1990.

some cases too small, especially for a publication that focuses on visual material. Also, the unfortunate custom of relying on line drawings even in cases where good photographs are available has been followed.

- Finally, a small list of errors remains to be added:
- p. 14: 3rd par., l. 2 from top, read: minimal *narrative*
- p. 23: l. 1 from top, read: *Bremond*
- p. 41: 2nd par., l. 7 from below (and *passim*), read: A. Kibédi Varga
- p. 77: 2nd par., l. 8 from top, read: *Loprieno*
- p. 83: n. 257, read: *wird*
- p. 95: 3rd par., l. 4 from top, read: *Munro*
- p. 105: legend of fig. 26, read: *Geburt Amenhoteps III. und seines Ka*
- p. 125: 2nd par., l. 5 from below, read: *Davis*
- p. 127: l. 4–5, delete: (*Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge E.G.A. 4324.1943; Abb. 33*)
- p. 128: l. 11 from top, add: (*Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge E.G.A. 4324.1943*) (see Brunner-Traut 1979, pp. 40f. with pl. 12)
- p. 152: l. 2–3, delete: *auf der dem Grabeingang gegenüberliegenden Rückwand des ersten Raumes*, read instead: *auf der Rückseite des Architravs zwischen den Pfeilern zu beiden Seiten der zentralen Achse* (see Guksch 2003, p. 113 and fig. 2)
- p. 155: l. 8 from top, read: schließt *sie* nicht aus
- p. 162: l. 5 from below, read: *-Reliefs*
- p. 166: l. 6, read: *mit* Sternen
- p. 224: l. 7 from below, read: *ist zeichnerisch sehr sorgfältig eine große Hyäne*
- p. 226: 2nd par., l. 3 from top, delete: *sie*
- p. 227: l. 3 from below (and *passim*), read: Institut Français d'Archéologie *Orientale*
- p. 231: l. 9 from below, read: zeigt *eine Maus*
- p. 235: fig. 114 (= ostrakon IFAO 3494) is the ostrakon in the *middle*; on the *left* is fig. 115
- p. 239: 2nd par., l. 1–2 from top, read: *eine Scherbe*
- p. 243: l. 10 from top, read: *einfaches*
- p. 244: n. 745, read: schließt *ihre*
- p. 249: 2nd par., l. 3–4 from top, read: *eines der höchsten ägyptischen Götter*
- pp. 261f.: l. 1 from below, read: wenn es *um* Feindabwehr geht
- p. 330: l. 4 from top, read: das erste *vorchristliche*
- p. 378: l. 13 from below, delete: *Indianern*, read instead: *indischen Geschichtenerzählern*
- p. 402: (Abb. 122 and Abb. 123), read: *Umzeichnung*
- p. 411: (Aufrère 1999), read: *Monspeliensia*
- p. 412: (Blumenthal 1999), read: das *alte Ägypten*
- p. 415: read: *Bruyère, Bernard, Rapport sur les Fouilles...; Bruyère, Bernard, La Tombe...*
- p. 416: (Capart 1941), read: *textes littéraires*
- p. 417: (Daressy 1901), read: *Musée du Caire*
- p. 419: (van Essche 1991), delete 2nd *in*:
- p. 420: (van Essche-Merchez 1994), read: *des parois*
- p. 420: (Fitzenreiter 2006), read: *Dekorierte Grabanlagen*
- p. 420: (Flores 2004), add: *G. N. Knoppers/A. Hirsch (Hrsg.), Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World. Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford (= PdÄ 20)*
- p. 421: delete entry de Garis Davies 1933 (see p. 417)
- p. 424: (Helck 1969), read: *Oriens*
- p. 424: (Herb 2006), read: *Dekorierte Grabanlagen*

- p. 426: (Janssen 2005), read: Janssen, *Jac J.*
- p. 427: (Kaelin 1999), read: Kaelin, *Oskar*
- p. 431: (Loprieno 1996 [Defining] and Loprieno 1996 ["King's Novel"], add: *A. Loprieno (Hrsg.), Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms (= PdÄ 10)*)
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- p. 435: (Parkinson 1996), add: *A. Loprieno (Hrsg.), Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms (= PdÄ 10)*
- p. 435: Parkinson 2009 should follow Parkinson 1999
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- p. 440: (Schmitz-Emans 2010), read: *Schmitz-Emans*
- p. 442: (Simon 2010), read: *Bildtheoretische*
- p. 444: delete 2nd entry of Vandier d'Abbadie 1940
- p. 444: (Vasari 1938), read: *di* Giorgio Vasari
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- p. 446: delete 2nd entry of Widmer 2003

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⁶⁵ The abbreviations of book series and journals follow the guidelines of the *Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*.

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