

Non-Narrativity as a Necessity. The Vorau Manuscript 276 and its Multiple Circles of Recipients

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As a composite manuscript, the Vorau Manuscript 276 holds invaluable significance, serving as the highly regarded and in part unique source of early Middle High German texts within Germanic studies and a veritable treasure trove of chronicle, biblical-epic and sermon-like narratives. Not only the *Gesta Friderici I imperatoris*, which is the only Latin work within the codex, but also the *Kaiserchronik*, *Vorauer Bücher Mose*, works of Ava, *Ezzolied* and two versions of the *Judith* material can be found on the 183 parchment leaves of the large-folio codex. Whilst the perhaps planned arrangement of the texts is the subject of a research debate that is repeatedly conducted with vehemence, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that, on closer inspection, the textual boundaries within the manuscript are perhaps not as clear as they were postulated by the proto-editors of the manuscript in the 19th century like Joseph Diemer, Edward Schröder or Paul Piper.

Especially in biblical-epic narratives like the works of Ava or the *Vorauer Bücher Mose* text boundaries can often be found at the transition between narrative and non-narrative passages. However, this correspondence of text boundaries and the degree of narrativity no longer makes as much sense when the continuity of content is taken into account as well as the narrative potential that non-narrativity represents for spiritual texts.

For example, Ava's work was divided by Piper into the texts *Johannes*, *Leben Jesu*, *Sieben Gaben des Hl. Geistes*, *Antichrist* and *Jüngstes Gericht*. But if we look at the transition from the *Leben Jesu* to the *Sieben Gaben*, it becomes clear that only the degree of narrativity changes, while the continuity of the content is maintained. Thus, the *Sieben Gaben* can very probably be read as a commentary or interpretation on the *Leben Jesu*, especially on the Pentecost event with which the text ends. The material also emphasises continuity: Only a coloured lombard (of which there are many in the *Leben Jesu*) in the middle of a column on fol. 122v indicates a new component of meaning.

Looking at the manuscript as a whole, it can be said that narrative and non-narrative passages complement each other perfectly not only in Ava's works. Also the *Vorauer Bücher Mose* become a successful didactic and moral programme for a monastic and/or parochial audience thanks to varying degrees of narrativity. However, it is not only in these relatively extensive works that non-narrative passages can be found; shorter works such as the *Ezzolied* and the theologically extremely dense programme of the *Summa theologiae* also regularly contain non-narrative, expository passages.

The narrative transitions in these religious texts always serve a special purpose: the purpose of explaining the narration, commenting on it, drawing in further levels of meaning and interpretation and thus making the narrative accessible to a wider audience.

These multiple circles of recipients are a specific feature of the medieval monastic landscape and are reflected not only in the selection of but also in the commentary on the texts. The establishment of non-narrative passages in religious narratives thus reacts to cultural and functional conditions of pastoral care on different levels. In this respect, the diversity of texts within Vorau Manuscript 276 offers an promising field of research, in which narration in shorter and longer texts and their incorporation into a larger work can be examined.

In my paper I show various examples of narrative and non-narrative passages in the Vorau Manuscript 276 and analyse the narrative transitions from a narratological and material-philological perspective. I question text boundaries on the basis of material-philological facts and ask about the interaction between narrative and textual function. Non-narrativity as an important narrative component of both historical and biblical material can be found in every text inside the manuscript, only the way in which it is used differs. To show that the transitions within the texts function in a similar way to those in the manuscript as a whole, I will give examples of Avas works and the Judith-material as well as the Vorauer Bücher Mose. This selection allows to compare non-narrativity in texts with different forms of male and female agency, going even beyond gender. I will show how non-narrative passages expand the circle of recipients in a complex social environment, as they reflect the intertwining of secular, spiritual and interactional necessities.