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Introduction:
Archaeology and Image Studies

When Hans Jonas in 1961 under the term *homo pictor* conceptualized the ability for image making as the *differentia specifica* of humans he invited his readers to a thought experiment and to imagine the situation of astronauts in search of traces of human life on an alien planet. This not least archaeologically designed research mission would have been accomplished when the astronauts had spotted images. Not the discovery of tools or graves but of images on the walls of a cave, of some lines and other configurations without structural function and with visual likeness of other things on that faraway planet was the clear sign of the presence of humans.[1] It is not by accident then, that the cultural anthropological dimension and the fundamental importance of the relationship between images and humans are becoming more and more important in different archaeological disciplines. Many material remains of past cultures carry images or pictorial elements that are invaluable in the interpretation of these cultures. Correspondingly, there is a broad spectrum of analytical methods that are employed to answer a variety of questions.

This volume is the outcome of the interdisciplinary conference "Homo Pictor. Image Studies and Archaeology in Dialogue" which took place at the Institute for Archaeological Studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg from 28 to 30 June 2018 and which I had the pleasure to organize during a ten-month guest lectureship on "Visual Culture and Anthropology in Archaeology" financed by the "Initiative Kleine Fächer Baden-Württemberg". I am very grateful to the director of the Institute at that time, Ralf von den Hoff, for giving me this opportunity.[2]

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1   Jonas 1961, 161–162.

2   I am also heavily indebted to all other colleagues, including staff and students, at the Institute for numerous and fruitful discussions on images and support in the organization of my lectures and the conference which made the stay a rich and beautiful experience, and to my home institution, represented by Martina Seifert, and my family for letting me go.

Although materialized images like reliefs, vase paintings, or murals have long been a major archaeological research topic, the rich epistemic potential of a deeper exploration of the universe of images has barely been touched. The reasons lie in various contingencies of the histories of archaeological disciplines and their engagements with pictorial representations. The original classical archaeological astronauts for example long have understood their discipline merely as an art history of Greek and Roman antiquity which analyzed images predominantly as works of art.[3] Analyses of form and style and judgmental contemplations based on connoisseurship and some normative aesthetics – derived from an idealizing classicism – dominated Classical Archaeology far into the second half of the last century.[4] Especially the analysis of form and style became, after a reductionist adaptation of Riegl's fabulous discussion of the evolution of the vegetal tendril ornament,[5] very dominant as they played an important role in dating material artifacts and putting up chronological systems.[6] Theoretical considerations and methods like iconography have, if at all and even after the proclamations of the pictorial[7] and the iconic[8] turn, until recently only been borrowed from art history.[9]

And yet, in the 1970ies the next generation of astronauts equipped themselves with a different set of theories and methods to study these alien ancient images. It was the beginning of a turn to conceiving of images as pictorial materializations and medializations of cultures and societies, already partly anticipating Mitchell's call for a critical iconology. The so-called *Hamburger Schule* began to sound the potential and borders of using semiotics and communication and interaction theory in Classical Archaeology.[10] This paved the way for analyzing images as media of communication within societies and as involved in the weaving of Geertzian webs of significance[11] and, thence, developing Classical Archaeology into a discipline not just studying ancient art but societies and cultures and becoming open for concepts from cultural

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3   Schmidt 2003, 68; von den Hoff 2011, 47.

4   Hoffmann 1974, 198: "Die Archäologie wurde dabei zu einer Art kultischer Verrichtung, bei der das Kunstwerk die Rolle des Gottes spielte."

5   Riegl 1893.

6   Cf. Grüner 2014, 27; Hoffmann 1979, 61.

7   Mitchell 1992.

8   Boehm 1994.

9   The collection *Hermeneutik der Bilder. Beiträge zur Ikonographie und Interpretation griechischer Vasenmalerei* (Schmidt – Oakley 2009) does not refer to any image-related research outside the field of Classical Archaeology.

10   Schneider et al. 1979.

11   Geertz 1973, 5.

anthropology and sociology.[12] This new orientation of the traditional discipline of Classical Archaeology towards images was heavily disputed at first,[13] however, meanwhile it found its way into textbooks.[14] Classical archaeologists now study for example images as media of visual communication,[15] the cultural anthropological dimension of narrative images,[16] or what images can reveal about levels of socialization.[17]

And now, classical archaeologists working from Deep Space Nine to maintain the new outpost or striving home on Voyager find themselves amidst an interdisciplinary image theoretical battle. Semiotics, just having become a proper tool to analyze images has come under heavy fire. An anti-semiotic movement[18] has encroached upon archaeology and it is fueled from the new paradigms of the material turn, aiming at the very matter of archaeology: the material things. Tonio Hölscher, one of the former proponents of semiotics in Classical Archaeology now formulates a fundamental critique:

> While semiotic theory has brought fundamental insights into cultural history, it implies some basic problems when applied to the visual arts. A general problem in the semiotic approach to figurative art is its inherent concept of the sign as a bearer of meaning different from the sign itself.[19]

Turning back the pictorial turn he seems to advocate for a "renewed metaphysics of pictorial 'presence'"[20]:

> The essential character of images, however, implies that they visually and concretely embody, and in this sense *are*, what they mean. A grave statue of a young man or a public image of a Roman emperor, a statue of Zeus hurling the thunderbolt or of Aphrodite displaying her sensuous beauty, *are* those individuals and deities. The concept of a constructed sign fails to grasp the concrete presence and the immediate physical impact of images.[21]

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12 Cf. Hoffmann's (1974) *Hahnenkampf in Athen. Zur Ikonologie einer attischen Bildformel* adopting Geertz's (1972) *Deep Play: Notes on the Cockfight in Bali* for Classical Archaeology. – This new direction of Classical Archaeology was also followed up by French archaeologist, cf. Vernant 1984.

13 Cf. Schneider's (2010) as anecdotal as readable *Theoriegeschichtlicher Rückblick auf archäologische Bildwissenschaft in Hamburg*.

14 Cf. von den Hoff 2019, 10; 35–40.

15 Dietrich 2015; Muth 2011; Seifert 2013, 2015.

16 Cf. Bracker 2015, 2016a, 2018, 2019.

17 Seifert 2011.

18 Siefkes 2015, 7.

19 Hölscher 2015, 672.

20 Mitchell 1992, 91.

21 Hölscher 2015, 672 (emphases in the original).

Downright polemically Ruth Bielfeldt accuses Classical Archaeology of having, in the course of rigorous semantization tendencies, bowed to the dictates of semiotic interpretation models favoring a dualism of object and sign and argues for regaining the things of antiquity as cultural gestures of presence.[22]

It is obvious that there can be no either/or between semiotic and phenomenological or aisthetic approaches to images. Semantization needs sensation and vice versa. There is no meaning without sensation and we cannot talk about sensation without semantization.[23] The 'power of the image', a seemingly inherent energy or agency which is coming up in these discussions, is something which needs further theoretical elaboration to avoid what Mitchell termed the 'power fallacy'.[24] However, the dispute shows that archaeology now acceleratedly advances into the interdisciplinary discourses of *Bildwissenschaften* and visual culture studies. The tendency already became apparent i. a. in recent works which – responding to the iconic turn – questioned the status of the image by thematizing the dichotomy of figure and ornament,[25] and lately an accumulation of conferences pointing in this direction.[26]

This very brief and fragmentary story of (Classical) Archaeology and image studies which, depending on personal research foci and reading lists, could have been written very differently – but most likely with no different outcome – motivates the call for an intensified exchange between archaeological disciplines and interdisciplinary image studies which the conference intended to promote. A consistent theoretical framework that would allow for a systematic conceptualization of a discipline specific or historic study of images in archaeology has not yet been articulated. Since the pictorial and the iconic turn there has been a vast trans- and interdisciplinary research on images and their perception under the categories of *Bildwissenschaften* and visual culture studies. The conference sought to explore whether and how these contemporary developments can contribute to theories of the image and methods

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22 Bielfeldt 2014a, 7; 2014b, 21.

23 Which recently led to integrating models such 'phaenosemiosis' (Grabbe 2016, 2017), Elleström's (2018) medium-centered model of communication which considers four equal modalities of media: the material modality, the spatiotemporal modality, the sensorial modality (pre-semiotic modalities), and the semiotic modality, or multimodal approaches (Sachs-Hombach et al. 2018). Cf. also Bracker 2016b.

24 Mitchell 2002, 172; 175. – Theories of the multimodality of media should be considered here as well, cf. Sachs-Hombach et al. 2018, 18.

25 Cf. Dietrich – Squire 2018; Haug 2015; Lipps – Maschek 2014.

26 Cf. the conferences "Bildwissenschaften und Museumspraxis. 'Bild' als Forschungsschwerpunkt versus 'Bild' als Ausstellungsobjekt in den Archäologien", organized by the graduate school "Ancient Objects and Visual Studies", Berlin 22–24 November 2018, and "Mehrdeutigkeiten: Rahmentheorien und Affordanzkonzepte in der archäologischen Bildwissenschaft", organized by Johanna Fabricius and Elisabeth Günther, Berlin, 2–4 November 2018, and the interdisciplinary conference series *bildkontexte.de* at the University of Hamburg.

of image analysis within archaeology. Reciprocally, it was also asked in what ways archaeology – due to its large material corpora and long scholarly tradition – could make a considerably larger contribution to the fields of image and visual culture studies than acknowledged to date – especially as the object of its research reaches back to the origins of humans and images and their relationship. That gave rise to a number of questions: How can theories and methods of image science and visual culture studies be translated and adapted for uses within archaeology? What additional epistemic potentials for the research into visual/image cultures is opened up by such interdisciplinary approaches? How might such approaches challenge or deconstruct established patterns of interpretation? What concepts of the image and/or the picture emerge as particularly productive for archaeological analyses? How can the interdependency of material and visual/image culture be conceptualized? What contributions can archaeology make towards the development of image and visual culture studies?

Finding answers to these questions will prepare archaeological disciplines and *their* image studies for the inevitable further turns to come, for what is under way, already indicated by Riegl in 1893 and what will shake the foundations right again through a journey deeper into space than ever before. But that is another story, a story of what comes next. Meanwhile, you are invited to enjoy reading the inspiring answers of the conference speakers.

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