Hans Georg Gadamer's "history of effect" and its application to the pre-Egyptological concept of ancient Egypt

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1. History of reception, afterlife and mnemohistory

With his study *Moses the Egyptian* (1998),[1] Jan Assmann has fundamentally changed the way we deal with the history of the pre-Egyptological encounter with ancient Egypt. This book has initiated an increasingly reflective examination of the subject. Terms such as Egyptomania, afterlife or the history of reception are now critically analyzed with regard to their implications, their interest in knowledge and their heuristic capacity. This has not only sharpened the analytical tools, but has also enabled a link to numerous scholarly discourses and thus led this field of research from the shelter of eccentricity into the openness of cultural studies.[2] This text is intended to contribute to the further methodological sensitization of cultural-historical analysis by discussing Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of "history of effect" and asking how it relates to mnemohistory on the one hand and the history of reception on the other, and how it can be applied to the history of the reception of ancient Egypt.[3]

History of reception can be a very simple and scientifically fruitful task. It asks how a present refers to a past and what this reference to the past says about the corresponding present, perhaps also about the past itself; it can also ask to what extent the image of the past and the self-understanding of the present change in this process.[4] In the research of the history of the reception of ancient Egypt, a third instance is added: the scientist who examines the history of reception with his own interests and assumptions and thus forms the conception of the past in

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[1] Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: the memory of Egypt in western monotheism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[2] On the older research and the intentions of mnemohistory cf. Jan Assmann and Florian Ebeling, "The mnemohistory of Egypt: approaches towards the understanding of Egypt in intellectual history", in *Beyond Egyptomania*, ed. Miguel John Versluys (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

[3] The term "reception of ancient Egypt" is used here in a very general and unspecific way for all forms of pre-Egyptological encounters with ancient Egypt.

[4] Cf. the concept of "Allelopoiese" and the paper by Johannes Helmrath in this issue of *Aegyptiaca.*

which the act of reception took place, the corresponding past as the object of reception, and thus also the self-understanding of our time.

There are some highlights in the history of the reception of ancient Egypt that are often and intensively studied: The enthusiasm for antiquity in humanism and the Renaissance, obelisks in Rome or the deciphering of hieroglyphics in the wake of the Napoleonic Egypt campaign. When it comes to these topics, it is often assumed that the recipient has a rather free access to (pre)history and that a moderately constructivist model is applied: an author or artist intentionally deals with individual aspects of history on the basis of his or her socio-cultural conditions. Particularly in the English-speaking world, the interest in knowledge often lies in the epistemology of the history of the science.[5] Dominant narratives are human self-empowerment in the Renaissance, the scientific revolution in the natural sciences of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or the emergence of Egyptology in the nineteenth century, which then understands the pre-Egyptological perception of ancient Egypt as the outdated misapprehension of Egyptology, as Egyptomania.[6]

But the history of reception can also be understood differently, especially if it is oriented to Aby Warburg's concept of "afterlife" or to Jan Assmann's "mnemohistory". Here the question of the interaction or reciprocity of history and the person referring to history is central, and history is understood less as a sequence of moments and events than as an organic process. In my understanding, the space between the act of reception and the object of reception is not only understood as an interim period to be bridged, which is skipped in the act of reception, but as a history of development and unfolding of historical semantics, which can only be understood as a constant interaction of reference to the past, self-image and projection to the future. The recipient, his or her world, interest in knowledge, and interpretation patterns are already influenced by history itself. In this respect, an act of reception is always also the result of history, which has developed from the object of reception. The

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[5] A good overview of reception studies is offered by Stephanie Moser, "Reconstructing Ancient Worlds: Reception Studies, Archaeological Representation and the Interpretation of Ancient Egypt", *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 22.4 (2015): 1263–308.

[6] Without question, there are excellent studies that use this somewhat problematic term. Cf. Florian Ebeling, "The pre-Egyptological concept of Egypt as a challenge for Egyptology and the efforts to establish a research community", in *Proceedings of the XI International Congress of Egyptologists*, ed. Gloria Rosati and Maria Cristina Guidotti (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2017), 184–8.

recipient is thus also influenced by the history to which the object of his interest belongs and not only by his immediate synchronous cultural-historical or social environment. If reception research emphasizes these synchronous conditions of the construction of a historical notion, diachronic development is understood as no less important in studies of afterlife or mnemohistory.[7] The focus here is therefore not on two points in time, that of the act of reception and that of the object of reception, but on the processual and semantically unfolding interaction of history, reference to the past and self-understanding in this interspace.

How important is this different evaluation of the "in-between" in the research of the pre-Egyptological image of Egypt? In both cases it is a question of how an individual referred to ancient Egypt at a certain time and what role the course of history itself as well as the cultural-historical contexts played; whether one prefers the economic, communicative-intellectual, social or intellectual aspects depends on the object of research and the preferences of the scientist. In reception research, the prehistory of the act of reception, i.e. the in-between, seems to be understood as a background that helps to decipher the motives of the recipient, but is not an independent factor and object of investigation. The studies on mnemohistory are specifically concerned with the in-between as a line of development of historical semantics or in retrospect as a chain of motivation of the reference to the past.

In both cases, a "longue durée" of ancient Egypt, in which a diversity of understanding and interpretation of Egypt has unfolded, is combined with a microhistorical analysis, in which the image of Egypt is then concretized. In the studies that are attributed to reception analysis, the focus is on the latter; in mnemohistory, the interaction of the former and the latter is emphasized. The individual and his cultural-historical environment are at the centre of reception studies; the line of development and the question of how the cultural-historical environment of an act of reception itself owes its existence to this history is dominant in mnemohistory.

In order to gain a better understanding of the connection between reception research and mnemohistory, and in particular of the significance of the space between the object of reception and the act of reception, I will examine Hans-

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[7] "Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past.", Assmann, *Moses*, 9.

Georg Gadamer's (1900–2002) concept of "history of effect". "History of effect" is regarded as a key concept of his philosophical hermeneutics, but in the following it will mainly be examined in terms of its significance for reception research and mnemohistory.[8]

I regard Gadamer's ideas worth considering because they have had an influence on both reception studies and mnemohistory. "History of effect" is one of the most important foundations for "Rezeptionsästhetik" (reader-response-criticism) of the Konstanz-school, especially in the sense of Hans Robert Jauss (German: Jauß).[9] Jauss is also very influential in the English-speaking world and is mentioned quite often in reception studies.[10] "History of effect" also has interesting parallels to cultural memory and mnemohistory and belongs to the spirit of Heidelberg that formed the soil for Aleida and Jan Assmann's thoughts on cultural memory.

2. Gadamer's Concept of the History of Effects

"Being-in-the-world" and the importance of prejudices

In his book *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960) Hans-Georg Gadamer wants to establish philosophical hermeneutics. That means he is dealing with the problem of understanding as a fundamental mode of human existence. The basic problem is indicated by the well-known "hermeneutic circle". In its simplest meaning, it describes the problem of how we can understand the part from the whole and the whole from the parts. Traditionally this is described as a slow approach in understanding and a technique or method of understanding: the better understanding of the part contributes to the better understanding of the whole and vice versa. Gadamer, however, takes on Heidegger and his fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927):[11] All being is

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[8] "Die Wirkungsgeschichte gilt zurecht als Kernstück der Gadamerschen Hermeneutik", Hans-Helmuth Gander, "Geschichtlichkeit des Verstehens", in *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Wahrheit und Methode*, ed. Günter Figal (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2007), 120.

[9] Cf. the paper by Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann in this issue of *Aegyptiaca*.

[10] Cf. Moser, "Reconstructing Ancient Worlds", 1264.

[11] "Heideggers Aufdeckung der Vorstruktur des Verstehens" in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Gesammelte Werke I (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 270–6, all German quotations are given according to this edition, all English quotations are given according to: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

historical. Man finds himself in the world (*thrownness/Geworfenheit*) and drafts himself towards his death (*Being-toward-death/Sein zum Tode*): Man is thus a historical being who can only understand himself in his world and his time. There is no man without a world and the world precedes every form of self-understanding. As a consequence, we have to work with pre-concepts or prejudices and in the sense of Heidegger and Gadamer the "hermeneutic circle" is not a methodical problem in the sense of an auxiliary science, but an indication of a basic structure of human life: "this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance" (269).

The ontological relevance of pre-concepts or prejudices also means, however, that any philosophy that takes its starting point from subjectivity fails to recognize precisely this basic condition of man. In Gadamer's and Heidegger's sense, the intention to gain an objective point of view is a metaphysical heritage that misunderstands man's historicity; pure objectivity can never be reached, and it is naive to seek for it.

Gadamer points out that first man finds himself in everyday-life contexts such as family or school. Even before he forms a reflected self-image, he knows how to act in these settings. We cannot abstract from life, because it has formed us, our perceptions and (pre-)conceptions. In this respect, Gadamer understands man's reflective self-confidence for something problematic which at the very least says less about man than his prejudices:

> […] the great historical realities of society and state always have a predeterminate influence on any "experience." Self-reflection and autobiography […] are not primary and are therefore not an adequate basis for the hermeneutical problem […]. In fact, history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*[12]

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[12] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278, "[…] die großen geschichtlichen Wirklichkeiten, Gesellschaft und Staat, […] sind in Wahrheit schon immer vorgängig. Die Selbstbesinnung und die Autobiographie […] sind nichts Primäres […]. In Wahrheit gehört die Geschichte nicht uns, sondern wir gehören ihr. Lange bevor wir uns in der Rückbesinnung selbst verstehen, verstehen wir uns auf selbstverständliche Weise in

Gadamer refers here to family and state, but the same applies to all other conceivable factors that shape the individual's being and perception. Reflective self-consciousness is not primary but derived with intentions and can't serve as a basis for objectivity as it is highly formed and is derived from the prejudices and experiences themselves. Therefore, self-reflection can hardly criticize or correct the prejudices. This does not mean, however, as will be explained below, that one can only entrust oneself affirmatively to the pre-concepts.

For Gadamer, more fundamental than the concept of the subject is the question of how human prejudices are formed and how man deals with them. To want to abstract these pre-conceptions, to emphasize this once again, is impossible and only the idea of the possibility thereof is a metaphysical remnant or naive positivism. What does this mean for the very act of understanding?

Gadamer understands the starting point of philosophical hermeneutics as a critique of historicism in the wake of the Enlightenment and German Romanticism. In both, he observes a contrast between logos and myth. Everything that can no longer exist before reason will be understood historically and only historically. This has led to a revaluation of the historical sciences, to the recognition of the significance of linguistics, fairy tale research or folklore, but also to a contrast between logical-rational and historical understanding:

> If the Enlightenment considers it an established fact that all tradition that reason shows to be impossible (i.e., nonsense) can only be understood historically—i.e., by going back to the past's way of looking at things—then the historical consciousness that emerges in romanticism involves a radicalization of the Enlightenment.[13]

Familie, Gesellschaft und Staat, in denen wir leben. Der Fokus der Subjektivität ist ein Zerrspiegel. Die Selbstbestimmung des Individuums ist nur ein Flackern im geschlossenen Stromkreis des geschichtlichen Lebens. *Darum sind die Vorurteile des Einzelnen weit mehr als seine Urteile die geschichtliche Wirklichkeit seines Seins.*" Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 281.

[13] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 277, German: "Wenn es für die Aufklärung feststeht, daß alle Überlieferung, die sich vor der Vernunft als unmöglich, d.h. als Unsinn darstellt, nur historisch, d.h. im Rückgang auf die Vorstellungsweise der Vergangenheit, verstanden werden kann, so bedeutet das historische Bewußtsein, das mit der Romantik heraufkommt, eine Radikalisierung der Aufklärung" Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 280.

This postulate of the opposition of historization and logic, of historical and rational knowledge, is the subject of Gadamer's critique and his concept of "history of effect".

The idea of overcoming all prejudices and the possibility of an autonomous reason and objectivity is the starting point for Gadamer's critique. Human existence in its essence is never completely free but limited and conditioned in many ways. In this respect also "the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity" (277). Reason is rather dependent on the circumstances in which it unfolds. This critique of the objectivity of reason is absolutely crucial for Gadamer's understanding of his hermeneutics: "This is the point at which the attempt to critique historical hermeneutics has to start" and in the beginning of the chapter "Prejudices as conditions of understanding" he writes: "Here is the point of departure for the hermeneutical problem." (278)

The classical as the vitality of history

Gadamer first examines the meaning of understanding using the example of the "classical", which he understands both as normative and historical. It is a historical phenomenon and at the same time claims a validity and exemplariness that is beyond temporality. Gadamer asserts that the classical is directly accessible to man; the phenomenon of the classical makes it clear that not a sovereign subject encounters an object in understanding, but both belong to a context of life that cannot be separated into subject and object. The classical, according to Gadamer is a "consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and that is independent of all the circumstances of time—a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present." (288)

For Gadamer, the classical itself already accomplishes the overcoming of the distance between past and present and is an example of the fact that the time gap between the creation of a work and the respective present in which a work is read and understood is not a real separation. At the same time, it is not removed from the historical process: "The classical, then, is certainly 'timeless', but this timelessness is a mode of historical being." (290)

The individual does not encounter antiquity and its texts in autonomy; the writings of Plato, Homer or Aeschylus have unfolded such a rich history that

those who wish to understand these texts cannot escape their effective history and interpretation. It has always been part of the readers history of socialization and enculturation and has already affected him or her before he or she is reading: "Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated." (291) Gadamer thus understands the preceding cultural history as an inescapable existential prerequisite, as part of which the individual must first recognize and locate himself.

The phenomenon of the classical should make it clear that a text from the past is not only read because of its validity in its time of origin, but is also regarded as factually relevant at all times of its reading and interpretation. We assume that the texts of Plato, Sophocles or Ovid have something to say to us. Even if we do not agree with the factual content of the text, we still think that we must strive to understand these texts in order to gain a more nuanced point of view in the discussion of a certain matter.

Gadamer chose the concept of the classical to illustrate his concept of understanding and to make it comprehensible. His aim is to illustrate the vitality of the past and the wealth of history itself, in which a text of the past has unfolded in numerous interpretations, adaptations or transformations. For Gadamer, the interval between text creation and interpretation is the abundance and basis on which our self-image is grounded and not distance and emptiness. The concept of the classical is influenced by Gadamer's own experience as a classical philologist and philosopher. Unfortunately, it is at least misleading, and perhaps badly chosen, as criticism will show.[14]

Temporal distance and the unfolding of historical semantics

Understanding therefore takes place at a time interval between the creation of text on the one hand and reading or interpretation on the other. However, Gadamer does not want to bridge this time gap through empathy, in contrast to Schleiermacher and hermeneutics taught in Romanticism. The concept of the

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[14] "Wenn nicht das normative das historische Element des Klassischen völlig dominieren soll, dann ist die unmittelbare Zugänglichkeit des Klassischen kaum erklärlich", Kai Hammermeister, *Hans-Georg Gadamer* (München: Beck, 1999), 66. Cf. the criticism by Jauß, Habermas and Ricœr mentioned below.

classical should also stress the liveliness, but not the unity of text creation and text reception. For Gadamer there is without question an

> insuperable difference between the interpreter and the author that is created by historical distance. Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience.[15]

This irreversible difference seems at first to contradict Gadamer's definition of the classical. He thus makes it clear that neither text production nor text reproduction is dominant in the process of understanding. Understanding is not a relationship between two points in time, or the effort of a human being to reconstruct or relive the intellectual achievement of another human being at a past time. Understanding is not, as the concept of the classical might suggest, pure affirmation of the traditional. The experience of difference is fundamental: "It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all." (296)

However, this difference, like the time interval itself, is not a problem, but a precondition for understanding.: "Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted." (297)

It is not the time itself, however, but the confrontation with a text that takes place during this time that forms the basis of understanding. These possibilities of understanding, which are expressed as cultural and intellectual history, are the reservoir of the prejudices of text comprehension; they have already shaped those who want to deal with a text before they even wanted to understand the text and at the same time provide the means of understanding. The cultural and intellectual history itself is thus the medium of the possibilities of understanding. In the case of texts that are regarded as classical, this is particularly obvious. To

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[15] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 296, German: "[…] eine unaufhebbare Differenz zwischen dem Interpreten und dem Urheber, die durch den geschichtlichen Abstand gegeben ist. Eine jede Zeit wird einen überlieferten Text auf ihre Weise verstehen müssen, denn er gehört in das Ganze der Überlieferung, an der sie ein sachliches Interesse nimmt und in der sie sich selbst zu verstehen sucht. Der wirkliche Sinn eines Textes, wie er den Interpreten anspricht, hängt eben nicht von dem Okkasionellen ab, das der Verfasser und sein ursprüngliches Publikum darstellen.", Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 301.

interpret Plato or Homer without respecting the long and rich research or interpretation history of these authors seems impossible and would be scientifically naive. This tradition, and thus the period between the authors and their works themselves and the subsequent reading, is "filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us." (297) But only the experience of difference sets off one's own judgement against tradition, and here the temporal distance helps. Only the distance, "when all their relations to the present time have faded" makes it possible to come to valid judgements: "Often temporal distance can solve question of critique in hermeneutics, namely how to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones, by which we misunderstand." (298)

Cultural history itself thus provides the criteria for the validity of understanding. But if the critical judgment can only be legitimized by the cultural history and the effective history of a text, then the model is in danger of the critically resistant affirmation of tradition. Gadamer, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of "understanding differently" against the background of the influence of history. Understanding, and especially historical understanding, is nothing that a subject does to an object: It is an interaction that takes place between cultural imprint, self-image, factual interest and interpretation and becomes clear in historical self-assurance as an understanding of others and understanding in another way:

> Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. Only then will it cease to chase the phantom of a historical object that is the object of progressive research, and learn to view the object as the counterpart of itself and hence understand both. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. […] I shall refer to this as "history of effect". Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.[16]

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[16] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 299, German: "Ein wirklich historisches Denken muß die eigene Geschichtlichkeit mitdenken. Nur dann wird es nicht dem Phantom eines historischen Objektes nachjagen, das Gegenstand fortschreitender Forschung ist, sondern wird in dem Objekt das Andere des Eigenen und damit das Eine wie das Andere erkennen lernen. Der wahre historische Gegenstand ist kein Gegenstand, sondern die Einheit dieses Einen und Anderen, ein Verhältnis, in dem die Wirklichkeit der Geschichte ebenso wie die Wirklichkeit des geschichtlichen Verstehens besteht. […] Ich nenne das damit Geforderte 'Wirkungsgeschichte'. Verstehen ist seinem Wesen nach ein wirkungsgeschichtlicher Vorgang.", Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 305.

Thus, in Gadamer's sense, the history of effect is a highly determined concept that must be distinguished from its everyday use. It refers to understanding over a period of time on the basis of a historically developed semantics that preforms the identity of the individual and, at the same time, makes its historicity manifest in the experience of difference.

Gadamer admits that "effective history" by itself is nothing new. However, what has hitherto been regarded as an appendix, an addition to the understanding of a work, is for Gadamer the fundament of understanding, and he demands that it "require[s] an inquiry into 'history of effect' every time a work of art or an aspect of the tradition is led out of the twilight region between tradition and history so that it can be seen clearly and openly in terms of its own meaning […]." (299)

A historical fact has therefore never faded if it interests and concerns us. It can not only be understood as significant in its time, but is part of our own world and has not only shaped history, but also our identities. According to Gadamer the predisposition that only sparks our historical interest and forms the modes of understanding would work unconsciously in everyday experience. For a reflected science it is important to make these mechanisms conscious and transparent and thus to understand oneself in its historicity, which is inevitably intertwined with its history of effect.

Broadening horizons as an experience of otherness and ownness

In order to explain more precisely how understanding in the sense of the history of effect takes place, Gadamer introduces the concept of "horizon", which describes the limitation of one's own perspective and the conditionality of individual knowledge: "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point." (301) But not only the one who understands has a horizon, but also the one who is to be understood. According to Gadamer, investigating this horizon is a basic requirement for the historian, regardless of whether it is a question of literary, social, economic, ideological or other framework conditions in which the historical event or work shows itself to us. Gadamer emphasizes that it is impossible to observe the historical horizon as such without thinking about one's own horizon and its limitations and conditionality. As stressed at the beginning, we cannot escape our prejudices and preconceptions. In understanding we are dealing with two horizons: that of the one who tries to

understand and that of one to be understood. But this is not a relationship between subject and object:

> When our historical consciousness transposes itself into historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead, they together constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and that, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. Everything contained in historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon. Our own past and that other past toward which our historical consciousness is directed help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives and which determines it as heritage and tradition.[17]

The history, the work of art or the literary work of the past that we must understand are also those that have shaped our culture and ourselves, to which we belong and with which we educate ourselves. Gadamer uses the term "fusion of horizons" to describe the process of understanding in which the horizon of the reader and that of the work overlap. This is, according to Gadamer's claim, something completely different from Schleiermacher's model of empathy: in the merging of horizons, the horizons always remain present and the difference between text and interpreter is not eliminated. The other is recognized as different, for only then will understanding take place. Understanding is not about identification, because "it is constantly necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning. Only then can we listen to tradition in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard". (304) The other must become clear again and again as the other! Our prejudices prove themselves in the text or prove to be unsuitable for understanding in confrontation with the otherness. This means that understanding is an ever evolving process: "In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices" (305). Our prejudices and pre-conceptions are therefore subject to constant

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[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 304, German: "Wenn sich unser historisches Bewußtsein in historische Horizonte versetzt, so bedeutet das nicht eine Entrückung in fremde Welten, die nichts mit unserer eigenen verbindet, sondern sie insgesamt bilden den einen großen, von innen her beweglichen Horizont, der über die Grenzen des Gegenwärtigen hinaus die Geschichtstiefe unseres Selbstbewußtseins umfaßt. In Wahrheit ist es also ein einziger Horizont, der all das umschließt, was das geschichtliche Bewußtsein in sich enthält. Die eigene und fremde Vergangenheit, der unser historisches Bewußtsein zugewendet ist, bildet mit an diesem beweglichen Horizont, aus dem menschliches Leben immer lebt und der es als Herkunft und Überlieferung bestimmt.", Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 301.

change, not only through the changing times of the present, but also through the history of the effect of the past: "Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past." The aim must be to widen one's own horizon in order to bring the horizon of what is to be understood as far as possible into line with one's own. It is an interplay of distance and identification with the past: we set ourselves apart from a tradition and by doing so, we recognize it as our tradition.

3. History of effect and aesthetics of reception

In contrast to Gadamer's concept of the history of effect, which is hardly mentioned in contemporary reception research, the aesthetics of reception and the Konstanz School are also accepted in the English-speaking world as a fundament of contemporary reception research. In particular, Hans Robert Jauss's programmatic work *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* (*Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*) from 1967 is repeatedly attributed the status of a founding document.[18]

But what does this writing owe to Gadamer's philosophy and to what extent do the history of effect and the aesthetics of reception differ? In *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory* Jauss refers extensively to Gadamer and at the same time distances himself decisively from him.[19] Jauss aims to widen the "circular system of production and of representation" and include "an aesthetics of reception and impact" (8):[20] "In the triangle of author, work and reading public the latter is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but even history-making energy." Only by the addressee of the literature, only via the reader the text does have a "historical life". Jauss seems to understand this pragmatically at first:

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[18] Hans Robert Jauß, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, Konstanzer Universitätsreden 3 (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1967), I use the edition in: Rainer Warning, ed., *Rezeptionsästhetik* (München: Fink, 1979), 126–62. All English quotes given according to: Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory", *New Literary History* 2, No. 1 (Autumn, 1970): 7–37. In her essay "Reconstructing Ancient Worlds: Reception Studies, Archaeological Representation and the Interpretation of Ancient Egypt" Stephanie Moser emphasizes the significance of the reception aesthetics of Jauss and the Konstanz-School for reception research. For the first time, these works would have drawn attention from the text substance and the author's interest to the social significance of text history.

[19] Gadamer is mentined in thirteen of sixty-seven footnotes.

[20] In German "die Dimension ihrer Rezeption und Wirkung" (126) makes it more clear that it is referring to Gadamer's term "Wirkungsgeschichte".

Texts are written, read, they are discussed and criticized and this leads to new texts. Jauss calls for a new method for literary studies:

> For it is only through the process of its communication that the work reaches the changing horizon of experience in a continuity in which the continual change occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production which surpasses them. The historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a relation of work, audience and new work which takes the form of a dialogue as well as a process, and which can be understood in the relationship of message and receiver as well as in the relationship of question and answer, problem and solution.[21]

All this still goes in line with Gadamer's "history of effect": The semantic potential of the literary work unfolds only through the dialogue between work and reader. And this happens in a concrete historical and social situation through criticism, affirmation or transformation. Both Jauss and Gadamer call for the analysis of reception no longer to be understood as a casual supplement, but as an indispensable component or prerequisite of the interpretation of literary works.

Jauss also rejects historicism on the one hand and the temporally deprived aesthetics of subjectivity and genius on the other. But he first understands text reading as a "passive reception" and only a new production of literature as an "active reception"; ultimately, the researcher of literature Jauss is concerned with the reader as author. The philosopher Gadamer, however, is concerned with understanding itself, which he already considers as an active process independent of further literary production.

So far, the aesthetics of reception stands on the foundation of the history of effect. In the concept of the classical, however, Jauss clearly distances himself from Gadamer. The fact that the classical does not require mediation falls out

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[21] Jauss, "Literary History", 8, German: "Denn erst durch seine Vermittlung tritt das Werk in den sich wandelnden Erfahrungshorizont einer Kontinuität, in der sich die ständige Umsetzung von einfacher Aufnahme in kritisches Verstehen, von passiver in aktive Rezeption, von anerkannten ästhetischen Normen in neue, sie übersteigende Produktion vollzieht. Die Geschichtlichkeit der Literatur wie ihr kommunikativer Charakter setzen ein dialogisches und zugleich prozeßhaftes Verhältnis von Werk, Publikum und neuem Werk voraus, das sowohl in der Beziehung von Mitteilung und Empfänger wie auch in den Beziehungen von Frage und Antwort, Problem und Lösung erfaßt werden kann." Jauß, *Literaturgeschichte*, 127.

of the relationship between question and answer and thus ultimately out of Gadamer's own idea of dialogue as the place of understanding. As a philosophical historian, Gadamer had thus succumbed to problems which he had taken over with Plato's concept of art and Hegel's understanding of the classical and which ultimately contradicted his concept of the "history of effects":

> The concept of the classical which interprets itself, taken from Hegel, must lead to a reversal of the historical relationship between question and answer and contradicts the principle of the history of impact that understanding is "not only reproductive but also productive".[22]

Gadamer's insights that any understanding only occurs in an ever-changing horizon with never completely transparent preconceptions and prejudices as an endless confrontation with the otherness of what is to be understood would be counteracted by his reflections on the classical. The concept of the classical would gain a normative predominance and would be in danger of being transfigured into the substance for understanding.

I can understand this critique by Jauss; Gadamer's concept of the classical is at least misleading. But the classical in Gadamer's work serves primarily as an illustration and is not synonymous with the "history of effect" and the analysis of the meaning of the "in-between" in which historical semantics unfolds, culture develops, and an cultural imprint takes place that allows us to draw again on the works of the past. Contemporary research on reception seems to have understandably rejected Gadamer's concept of the classical in the wake of Jauss's criticism; at times, however, it has thrown out the baby with the bathwater by at the same time rejecting Gadamer's convincing concept of "history of effect". While afterlife research in the sense of Aby Warburg and mnemohistory are dedicated to the in-between, in many reception studies it is misunderstood as a footnote to the cultural-historical environment of an act of reception.

Gadamer's concept of the "history of effect" certainly has difficulties in describing a critical attitude towards history. Although he shares Gadamer's

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[22] Jauss, "Literary History", 22, German: "Der von Hegel übernommene Begriff des Klassischen, das sich selber deutet, muß zur Verkehrung des geschichtlichen Verhältnisses von Frage und Antwort führen und widerspricht dem Prinzip der Wirkungsgeschichte, daß Verstehen 'kein nur reproduktives, sondern auch ein produktives Verhalten ist'", Jauß, *Literaturgeschichte*, 139, "history of impact" in German "Wirkungsgeschichte", like the term used by Gadamer, that is translated in the English translation of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* cited above by "history of effect".

criticism of objectivism and of the notion of sovereign reason, Jürgen Habermas has insisted that prejudices, as a component of understanding, must not lead to the pure affirmation of what has come from the past.[23] Nevertheless, he wants to argue with Gadamer against Gadamer when he considers critical reflection as a necessary component of understanding.

Paul Ricœur had similar problems with Gadamer's hermeneutics and tried to show that a hermeneutics in the wake of Gadamer and critique of ideology do not have to exclude each other. He distinguished between hermeneutics of trust with confidence in the senses that attempts to unfold and explain what is presented, and hermeneutics of suspicion that initially mistrusts the senses and thus grants critique of ideology or psychoanalysis a place of understanding.[24]

In his hermeneutics, Gadamer focuses above all on the texts of Greek antiquity. He believes that it is essential to come back there again and again in order to comprehend the lines that have emerged from there to us and shape our cultural self-understanding; not out of reactionary insistence on past greatness, but out of recognition of one's own limitations and dependence on this tradition. That Gadamer's hermeneutics is nevertheless subject to a conservative basic tone was frequently denied by himself later and he led an open and insightful debate with many critics.[25]

But what about the reception of ancient Egypt; to what extent does it differ from the reception of antiquity, and to what extent is Gadamer's model fruitful for description and analysis?

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[23] Karl Otto Apel, *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), 45–65.

[24] Jean Grondin, "Von Gadamer zu Ricœur. Kann man von einer gemeinsamen Auffassung von Hermeneutik sprechen" in *Bezeugte Vergangenheit oder versöhnendes Vergessen: Geschichtstheorie nach Paul Ricœur*, ed. Burkhard Liebsch (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 61–76.

[25] One of his first responses to his critics can be found here: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik. Metakritische Erörterungen zu 'Wahrheit und Methode', in *Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register,* Gesammelte Werke II (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 232–50 and on the same volume "Replik zu Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik", 251–75.

4. Reception of antiquity and reception of ancient Egypt

Are the writings of Plato and Homer a good model for pre-Egyptological concept of Egypt? Can we use Gadamer's reflections to better understand the history of the pre-Egyptological concept and image of ancient Egypt?

In contrast to "Antiquity", which was always regarded as an integral part and normative basis of Western culture, Egypt had to be appropriated through the perspective of Antiquity itself. Greek writings were, at least since humanism, accessible for most scholars and Latin was until far into modern times their lingua franca. The writings of classical antiquity were present through the ages, perhaps received less intensively in some discourses than in others, but they never lost their significance. Those interested in antiquity could consult the sources themselves.

Egypt first had to be opened up through the writings of antiquity. Until the 19th century, the image of Egypt had always been conveyed, preformed or broken by antiquity. Egypt was that from which antiquity set itself apart or identified itself, it was already an object of pre-antiquity reception in antiquity and the confrontation with Egypt also contributed to the cultural self-image of antiquity. Until the emergence of scientific Egyptology, classical antiquity was more clearly and more directly understandable than Egypt, whose testimonies were non-readable properly and left much greater scope for interpretation and imagination. Even the writings of classical antiquity had to be interpreted, but Greek or Latin writings themselves could be critically scrutinized, the interpretations had to measure themselves against the texts by themselves.

The interpretations of Egyptian culture could not be falsified on the basis of texts until the 19th century. The consequence of this is that the concept of Egypt has often been in the service of the concept of antiquity, because antiquity itself has largely shaped the concept according to which it wants to be remembered. This is what the ancient Egyptian texts did too, but since they could not be read, this self-image for the descendants only became part of the image of Egypt in the 19th century.

For the history of the reception of Egypt up to the emergence of scientific Egyptology, Gadamer's reflections seem to me to be very instructive: it is about an interpretation context that is related to itself and repeatedly goes back to certain texts, which could not easily be falsified. The tradition had indeed handed down the semantic potential and the hermeneutic structures. The description of

the lines of tradition turns out to be a fruitful undertaking. Without the metaphysics and epistemology of Platonism, without the application of Middle Platonism to Egypt, without the emergence of the hermetic Pseudepigrapha in late Antiquity, which then developed into two lines of tradition, the Western image of Egypt can only be understood inadequately until the 19th century.[26]

Gadamer's reflections can probably describe transformations and continuity better than breaks or real innovations. For the description of the emergence of a scientific Egyptology in the 19th century it seems to me to be less suitable. There was indeed a break with the past: Egypt was no longer the land of symbolic wisdom, which had to be unravelled deep beneath the surface. The change of perspective from the depth of the hidden to the evidence of the visible made it possible to discover the aesthetic intrinsic value of Egyptian art and architecture. In 1822, Jean-François Champollion succeeded in deciphering the hieroglyphics and thus making ancient Egyptian culture speak for itself. From now on one was no longer dependent on the mediation of antiquity and late antiquity in order to get an idea of ancient Egyptian culture but could question ancient Egyptian sources oneself.

The history of the reception of Egypt in the sense of "Wirkungsgeschichte" obviously does not end here, it only changes its structure. Esoteric groups emphatically refer to the image of Egypt as it can be found in Hermeticism, spiritual Philosophy or Alchemo-Paracelsism; the Afrocentrism debate takes up the concept of Egypt as the cradle of Western civilization; the adherents of "ancient astronauts" refer to the reports on the legendary ancient knowledge of the Egyptians. In Hollywood films or fictional literature, the mysteries of the Egyptians are presented as horror aesthetics.

The interpretation sovereignty of Egyptology over ancient Egypt is undisputed within the sciences. Nevertheless, the boundaries between Egyptology and the pre-Egyptological concept of ancient Egypt are fluid.[27] In art, the concepts and

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[26] This is the basis of my work, for example: Florian Ebeling, *The secret history of Hermes Trismegistus. Hermeticism from ancient to modern times* (Ithaca et al.: Cornell University Press, 2007); Jan Assmann und Florian Ebeling, *Ägyptische Mysterien: Reisen in die Unterwelt in Aufklärung und Romantik* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011).

[27] This topic has not yet been systematically addressed. Material for orientation cf. David Jeffreys, ed., *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, colonialism and modern appropriations* (London: UCL Press, 2003).

associations of the pre-Egyptological history remain effective.[28] And also the question of what is responsible at all for Egyptologists turning to Egypt is one that can be answered meaningfully by means of the history of effect or mnemohistory. Some scientists in Napoleon's entourage founded hermetic Freemason lodges,[29] and for numerous renowned Egyptologists can be asked what actually led them to the subject; i.e. the Oxford professor Battiscombe Gunn (1883–1950) was associated in his youth to the magical-hermetic order of the Golden Dawn. And we are guided likewise with our interests in ancient Egypt by prejudices and pre-conceptions which owe themselves to the depth of Western cultural history and the history of the pre-Egyptological image of Egypt.

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[28] Florian Ebeling, "Ägyptische Mysterien bei Paul Klee und Max Slevogt. Eine Wirkungsgeschichte jenseits von Orientalismus und Ägyptologie", in *Imagination und Anschauung: Ägyptenrezeption und Ägyptenreisen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Heike Biedermann, Andreas Dehmer and Henrik Karge (Dresden: Sandstein, 2015), 66–74.

[29] For many examples of a rich "history of effect" of Egypt in connection with the freemasons cf. Florian Ebeling and Christian E. Loeben, ed., *O Isis und Osiris. Ägyptens Mysterien und die Freimaurerei* (Rahden, Westf.: Marie Leidorf, 2018).