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The scholarly debate and the book's Introduction

Since 1987, when Irene de Jong published *Narrators and Focalizers*, classicists have become familiar with the taxonomies of structural narratology typologized by Genette and Bal.¹ De Jong's series *Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative* is a glowing testimony to the ways in which these taxonomies have been helpful for the literary analysis of ancient Greek texts.² In more recent times, however, classicists have begun to problematize the use of structural narratology by pointing out its possible limits: the risk of making narratology "an end in itself" rather than that it "be made fruitful for interpretation",³ and its formalistic nature, as a result of which structuralist taxonomies fail to describe the actual experience of reading.⁴

Meanwhile, scholars working on post-classical and modern literature have elaborated new kind of narratologies,⁵ within which cognitive theory is offered as a new tool to investigate the actual experience of reading.⁶ The application of these new narratologies to Classics, especially the narratology of cognitive theory, is still at an initial stage, as shown by two forthcoming volumes covering the whole of ancient literature.⁷ These publications are expected to problematize further the limits of structural narratology, and to uncover new aspects of both Greek and Latin narrative.

¹ See de Jong 1987, Genette 1980 and Bal 1985.

² See de Jong et al. 2004–2012.

³ Grethlein and Rengakos 2009, 3.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Whitmarsh 2013, 244.

⁵ See e.g. Olson 2011.

⁶ See e.g. Herman 2003.

⁷ See Anderson, Cairns and Spevak (forthcoming) and Grethlein, Huitink, and Tagliabue (forthcoming).

The volume under review (henceforth *DGN*) enriches this scholarly discussion by criticizing the a-historical nature of structural narratology and by offering an inquiry into what is specifically Greek in ancient Greek narrative. *DGN* contains revised versions of fifteen papers delivered at “The Seventh Leventis Conference”, held in Edinburgh on 27–30 October 2011; the title of the conference was “What’s Greek about Ancient Greek Narrative?”.

The precise goal of this volume is addressed in the excellent Introduction written by Ruth Scodel, which offers a very clear sense of what the book is about. In Scodel’s view, “the application of narratological method to Greek texts tended to erase both the process of development of Greek narrative itself and the differences between Greek and modern texts, or between Greek and other ancient literatures” (5). An overt target of this criticism is precisely de Jong’s abovementioned series *Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, which in Scodel’s view has failed to trace a “story of historical development” (5) within ancient narrative forms. This failure shows the need to develop a historical narratology within Classics that is able “to present a meaningful narrative about how the practices of telling stories developed within Greek literature” (1).⁸ This ultimate goal, however, is still far from scholars’ reach, and Scodel sees this volume as a first step towards it: “Before anyone can write a history, ... the historian needs to be certain that the field has been meaningfully defined, both temporally and spatially” (1). How does this volume define the field of Greek literature?

Having acknowledged the “ideological implications” (1) of defining historical boundaries within literature, and having stated that language is no sufficient marker of Greek literature (since, for example, many texts written in Greek belong to Jewish and Christian narratives), Scodel summarizes the method used throughout the volume: “if there are features that appear more consistently within Greek narratives of all periods than in other narrative traditions, or that mark off particular forms of Greek narrative, or that develop within the history of Greek literature, we have a valuable tool of studying the boundaries” (3). In this explanation, the word “consistently” is important, since this method implies a certain deal of approximation: “‘Greek narrative’ can be a meaningful category even if individual features are not unique. We are far from knowing the narratives of the world well enough to make claims of uniqueness” (3).

In this volume’s task of defining the boundaries of Greek narrative, the identification of its beginning and its end is very important. Part 1 (“Defining the Greek Tradition”) contains four papers focussed on Homer, whose poetry is taken to mark the beginning of the Greek tradition, while Part 3 (“Beyond Greece”) draws some clear-cut distinctions between, on the one hand, Greek and, on the

⁸ On the notion of historical narratology, see e.g. Fludernik 2003.

other, both Roman and modern narratives. The long section in the middle—Part 2 (“The Development of the Greek Tradition”)—discusses Greek texts and genres that, with the exception of Heliodorus, were written between the beginning and the end of Greek literature. Here, most contributions point out “particular, salient characteristics of Greek narrative itself or one of its genres” (8). As I will show, the range of these characteristics is very wide, since it includes general stylistic features and specific narratological devices.

Scodel’s introduction is also useful for another reason; it often draws to the reader’s attention the ultimate goal of a new historical narratology of classical literature, while making it clear that this lies beyond the boundaries of *DGN*. I quote the most remarkable passage: “It should be possible to define what is particularly Greek and what is generally ancient or even universal, along with what changes through the history of Greek literature and what is constant, without being excessively guided by our desires to create the story we want. ... If the qualities of Greek narrative are universal, and Greek narratives could all be analysed in exactly the same way as those of the nineteenth century, ‘Greek narrative’ would fail as a useful definer” (2).

Does *DGN* achieve the goal that Scodel promises in the Introduction?

In the following review, I will offer a positive answer to this question. I will argue that the fifteen chapters of *DGN* fulfill the expectations raised in the Introduction (section 2), and, while doing so, they also offer new approaches for the analysis of Greek texts (section 3). At the same time, the book’s main chapters invite the reader to think more critically about the ultimate goal of the historical narratology as discussed by Scodel in the Introduction (section 4). This volume opens a useful debate about whether and how it is possible to reach a full understanding of what is specifically Greek in Greek narrative.

*Summary of the chapters
and their contribution to the definition of Greek narrative*

Part 1 focusses on Homeric poetry and marks it as the beginning of Greek narrative, by comparing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* with both other near-contemporary literatures and later Greek works.

Johannes Haubold’s opening piece, “Beyond Auerbach: Homeric Narrative and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*” (13–28), after commenting on the risk of political bias in any comparative approach to literature, reinforces Auerbach’s argument that Homeric poetry is characterized by immediacy, and contrasts this typically Homeric and Greek feature with the problematic representation of reality in the *Epic*

of *Gilgamesh*. At the same time, Haubold suggests that Homeric poetry too is able to depict complex and subtle aspects of human experience.

Adrian Kelly, in “Homeric Battle Narrative and the Ancient Near East” (29–54), follows Haubold in adopting a comparative approach: having challenged scholars’ frequent use of this method to establish genealogical relationships between texts, Kelly argues that owing to its complexity the Homeric representation of battle narratives is unparalleled in Ancient Near East texts.

Ruth Scodel, in “Narrative Focus and Elusive Thought in Homer” (55–74), focusses on three aspects of Homeric poetry, namely constant shifts of focus, the characters’ capacities to understand each other’s thoughts, and the narrator’s careful use of narrative gaps. These aspects (which are explained with the help of the cognitive ‘Theory of Mind’) are defined as distinctive of both Homeric and Greek narrative, because they appear in later Greek texts but not in the Hebrew Bible.

Erwin Cook, in “Structure as Interpretation in the Homeric *Odyssey*” (75–100), offers a detailed discussion of intricate ring structures in the *Odyssey*, with a focus on repetition of themes within its entire plot. In Cook’s view, “this sort of highly symmetrical and balanced narrative architecture” (76) is distinctively Greek, since it is paralleled in Greek art and it influenced later Greek authors such as Aeschylus and Herodotus.

Part 2 of *DGN* is the longest section of the volume. Four of its eight contributions point out distinctive Greek features by identifying similarities between texts written in Greek.

Douglas Cairns, in “Exemplarity and Narrative in the Greek Tradition” (103–36), argues that the ‘principle of alternation’ (i.e. the notion that each individual life consists of a mixture of good and bad fortune) appears in many different cultures, and yet gains special force in Greek literature by means of exemplary narratives. Cairns demonstrates this through a close reading of texts from Homer to Plutarch. As he concludes, “the tendency to encapsulate the patterns of vicissitude ... in traditional narratives of an exemplary character” (136) constitutes a salient feature of Greek narrative.

Alex Purves, in “Who, Sappho?” (175–196), focusses on a distinctive feature of Greek literature, namely Sappho’s construction of lyric through the subversion of her epic predecessors and explicit “anti-narrative moves” (196). A case in point is Sappho’s use in Fragment 1 of indefinite and interrogative pronouns, which, unlike their epic counterparts, do not promote narrative. With this contrast, the generic difference between epic and lyric is framed in terms of narrative.

Lucia Athanassaki, in “Creative Impact of the Occasion: Pindar and Horace” (200–225), offers a detailed analysis of Pindar’s songs for the Emmenids of Acra-

gas, within which she focusses on how occasion works as a stimulus for the composition of new narratives for the same or a related occasion. This argument is reinforced by Athanassaki's comparative analysis of two of Horace's Pindaric *Odes* (1.12, 4.2), in which, by contrast, there is no reference to any specific occasion.

P.E. Easterling, in "Narrative on the Greek Stage" (226–240), argues that the Greek staging of tragic stories is distinctive in its manner of intensifying the narrative focus of the whole drama, as shown for example by the importance of entrances and exits for a tragedy's coherence and by avoidance of verbatim repetitions of narrative information. The same intensifying effect is achieved by the practice of multiple role-play (i.e. one actor playing different roles within the same play).

Two other contributions of Part 2 rely upon ancient criticism. Richard Hunter, in "Where Do I Begin?: An Odyssean Narrative Strategy and its Afterlife" (137–55), shows that throughout ancient Greek literature both narrators and public speakers return time and again to Odysseus' proem in *Odyssey* 9, citing in particular the examples of Gorgias' Palamedes and Heliodorus' Calasiris. By recalling this Homeric speech, questions about narrative order and the reader's experience of pleasure are raised, the second of which is defined by scholia as characteristically Greek.

René Nünlist, in "Some Ancient Views on Narrative, its Structure and Working" (156–174), examines ancient Greek criticism after Aristotle's *Poetics*. In a rich selection of passages he shows that for ancient Greeks narrative is definitely worth discussing, and that, within ancient criticism, at least two aspects play an important role: the reflection on the reader's response to Greek narrative and the dramatic effect of narrative prolepses.

Part 2 contains two further papers that present original approaches. John Morgan, in "Heliodorus the Hellene" (260–276), sheds new light upon the long-standing debate concerning the *Aethiopica*'s perception of Greece. After explicating the scholarly oscillation between a "Helleno-centrifugal" and a "Helleno-centripetal" force (263) within the *Aethiopica*, Morgan illuminates the "Greekness" of Heliodorus' novel, especially by pointing to its reliance upon a vast intertextual dialogue with earlier Greek literature and the profound Greek characterization of Theagenes.

Lisa Irene Hau, in "Stock Situations, *Topoi* and the Greekness of Greek Historiography" (241–259), identifies a series of characteristics which make Greek historiography a distinct genre within Greek narrative. First, she tabulates a useful collection of stock situations, stock events and narratorial *topoi* found in Greek

historiographical texts written from the fifth century to the first century BCE. Second, Hau discusses further aspects and especially argues that the Greek focus on historical causation is unparalleled in Roman historiography, which privileges strict chronology or narration of traditional events.

This final comparative analysis gives a nod to Part 3, *Beyond Greece*, throughout which contrasts between, on the one hand, Greek and, on the other, both Roman and modern literature are used to define the end of Greek narrative.

Dennis Pausch, in “Livy Reading Polybius: Adapting Greek Narrative to Roman History” (280–297), compares Polybius’ and Livy’s constructions of their relationship with the reader. By focussing on the shared techniques of self-characterization, use of summaries and previews, and elaboration of a careful macro-structure within the work, Pausch draws relevant differences between the two historians, imputing to Polybius a “selective and utility-driven model” (291) in contrast with Livy’s more thoroughly engaging approach to his reader.

A.D. Morrison, in “*Pamela* and Plato: Ancient and Modern Epistolary Narratives” (298–313), uses the notion of epistolary narrative (defined as “narratives mostly or entirely told by means of a series of letters”, 298) to compare Greek and modern literature. The former is represented by collections of letters attributed to Plato, Themistocles, Chion and Euripides, while the latter by four modern novels starting with Richardson’s *Pamela*. Differences (the Greek narratives’ brevity, tolerance for gaps, and lack of editorial presence) are stronger than similarities (a shared deep interest in the characters’ psychology).

Irene J.F. de Jong, in “The Anonymous Traveller in European Literature” (314–333), shows how the figure of a third-person observer recurs across European literature, including that of ancient Greece, and discusses whether Greek narrative should be regarded as the original fountainhead of this device. Here de Jong’s approach is methodologically illuminating: this device “may be typically Greek” (332), in contrast with both Roman and Chinese literature, but its development into a literary topos in European literature might be more the result of cultural transmission rather than of deliberate literary imitation.

This summary points out the wide range of texts and approaches that are included in this stimulating volume. Its goal is achieved through this variety: Parts 1 and 3, by comparing and contrasting Homeric poetry and later Greek texts with other literatures, such as Jewish, Roman and modern literary corpora, offer a temporal and spatial definition of Greek literature. Moreover, Part 2 draws the reader’s attention to salient characteristic of Greek narrative, from ring structures and occasion in archaic poetry to the force of exemplary narrative and the constant reflection on how to begin a story (to mention only a few of them).

Suggestions of new research avenues within individual chapters

In addition to its main goal, *DGN* has the merit of promoting further critical thought in its reader. Before addressing in Section 4 the main issue of what is Greek in Greek literature, I will now comment on more specific aspects, the first of which has a narratological focus.

The relevance of this volume for ongoing debate concerning the place of narratology in Classics is reinforced by its contributors' decision to adopt an inclusive approach to narrative and the emergence in some of their papers of cognitive approaches. *DGN* is a volume about narrative that includes chapters on poetry and letters; moreover, in her study of the Greek tragic stage, Easterling defines the whole of tragedy "narrative" (229), thus going beyond de Jong's assumption that in tragedy narrative is limited to embedded speeches.⁹ This volume's inclusive approach reflects a new interest within narratology in offering a broad and comprehensive definition of narrative, which does not require the presence of a narrator and can be applied to media forms other than literature, such as art and films.¹⁰

Cognitive approaches to narrative are used in Scodel's and Cairns' chapters, both of which benefit from the "Theory of Mind", with the latter also employing theories about the sociality of emotions. More implicitly, other papers express an interest in the actual experience of reading, which structural narratology has failed to reach; I mention here Nünlist's focus on the emotional effects of prolepses on the reader (164) and Pausch's remarks of how in Livy the audience is invited to be greatly involved in the narrative (296). In light of this framework, *DGN* is indeed a new voice within the debate about narratology and Classics.

While reading the chapters of this volume, then, further aspects have appeared as promising research avenues within our discipline. Within the space constraints of this review, I will focus on two of them. The first is Hunter's long discussion of how two ancient Greek novelists, Chariton and especially Heliodorus, use the earlier tradition of Homeric criticism to enrich their intertextual exploitation of the Homeric poems (145–155). The inclusion of the reception of the models in intertextual analysis is not an obvious point from which to begin in traditional

⁹ Cf. e.g. de Jong 2004, 6–8.

¹⁰ I am thinking here of the current transmedial trend within narratology, which, as Scodel herself defines, consists of "the extension of narratology to media other than strictly verbal narrative" (5). For an example of this comprehensive approach to narrative in Classics, see Grethlein, Huitink and Tagliabue (forthcoming).

classical scholarship,¹¹ where privilege is given to the identification of direct textual connections between the given text and its literary model.¹² I hope that Hunter's analysis will stimulate scholars interested in intertextuality to give more consideration to the ancient critical tradition, since, as Heliodorus' case shows, this tradition was indeed part of ancient writers' education and could not but affect their approach to earlier literary texts.

The second aspect concerns the representation of the divine. Towards the end of the her paper, Easterling argues that in some Greek tragedies the messenger's speeches have a special focus in that they narrate about supernatural happenings or even introduce a divine voice (239–240). I am intrigued by these references to divine or quasi-divine phenomena within the context of specific sections of the narrative, and ask whether this phenomenon might also apply to Sappho. In Purves's convincing reading of Sappho's Fragment 1, the emergence of "anti-narrative" is functional to the construction of lyric. I would interpret this "anti-narrative" drive also in a different way, by taking it as a device through which Aphrodite is made present in the text, as it is shown by the fragment's focus on the repetition of the goddess's interventions rather than on Sappho's human response to her. Narrative by nature develops through human time, but such a development might be affected when a text focusses on a divine entity, since its temporal dimension is not identical to the temporal dimension of a human. I would then argue that in her fragment Sappho might have played narrative down to give a sense of Aphrodite's non-human time. With this suggestive interpretation, I see in *DGN* an invitation to explore further how the divine is represented in narrative, and especially whether specific narrative sections or devices are used to narrate about the gods.

Until now scholars have worked predominantly on epiphany,¹³ but Easterling's and Purves's chapters suggest that other modes of divine representation in narrative may also be considered. In my research on Aristides' *Sacred Tales*, to mention another example, I have identified repetition as a narrative device that places Asclepius at the core of the narrative of Books 2-6.¹⁴ Moreover, the same section of the text is characterized by an 'anti-narrative' drive, which is produced by the underplaying of temporal markers and a replacement of the day-by-day chronology characteristic of Book 1 with a narrative that plays its natural temporal development down. Purves has done brilliant work on the configuration of the

¹¹ It is less unusual within novelistic scholarship, for which see Telò 1999 and Morgan 2006, 55, both of which argue for Heliodorus' exploitation of Homeric criticism.

¹² For a useful survey of intertextuality in Classics, see Citroni 2011.

¹³ See e.g. Platt 2011 and Petridou 2016.

¹⁴ See Tagliabue 2016.

divine within the Homeric poems,¹⁵ but many other texts still need to be explored from this point of view.

*The opening of a debate:
how far can we understand what's Greek in Greek narrative?*¹⁶

As I have shown in Section 1, through Scodel's Introduction this book raises some broader issues, which the reader is invited to think about. The main questions are whether and how it is possible to reach a full understanding of what is specifically Greek in Greek narrative: neither of them is an easy question, and this is the reason why the volume cannot (and does not) promise an answer to them. However, what *DGN* does is to make the reader sensitive to the complexity of these issues, and to suggest a variety of approaches to them.

To begin with, Scodel's Introduction and some remarks by Haubold (14–19) and Morgan (263–264) are suitably cautionary about the risk of ideology present in any study of “Greekness”: to avoid anachronistic readings, *DGN* invites “a committed encounter with specific texts” (Haubold, 18) and a sensitiveness to the context in which Greek literature was composed. Given these premises, it would perhaps have been helpful to spell out more clearly the contributors' own view of “Greekness”, and to reflect from a theoretical perspective on the tension between relative and absolute ways of defining it. But I am aware that a collected volume is no ideal venue for this kind of considerations.

Having distanced itself from ideological bias, *DGN* offers at least three different approaches to what is Greek in Greek narrative: study of ethnicity, an internal analysis focussed upon ancient criticism and an external analysis based on comparative criticism. As I have argued in Section 2, each of these approaches helps to achieve the goal of the volume, but I will now suggest that their contribution to the wider scope of the analysis differs in several ways.

Study of ethnicity lies at the core of Morgan's analysis of Heliodorus, which focusses on how Greek identity is constructed within the *Aethiopica*, and imputes to it linguistic, cultural, and moral components. To some extent, Morgan's study reflects a broader interest within Classics in notions of “Greekness” and “alterity”, represented, for example, by Jonathan Hall's study of ethnicity in the Greek world

¹⁵ See Purves 2006 and Purves forthcoming.

¹⁶ I thank Luuk Huitink, Henrike Arnold and Chrysanthos Chrysanthou for sharing their thoughts on the topic of this section.

and the extensive scholarly reflection on the “Other” stimulated by François Hartog.¹⁷ This topic is intriguing and relevant for our contemporary multicultural world, but it does not lead—at least directly—to a better understanding of “how the practices of telling stories developed within Greek literature” (1), which is the ultimate goal of a historical narratology of classical literature.

Internal analysis based on ancient criticism is offered by Hunter, who explores what the ancient Greek scholia identify to be typically Greek. His following statement is very interesting: “The Homeric scholia are very fond of asserting what is ‘Greek’ and what is “barbarian”” (145). The possibility of taking this research further is very promising, and here Plato’s reflection on the Greek literary tradition could also be included (Plato being perhaps one of the few omissions of this very comprehensive volume). This second approach to what is Greek, in contrast with the first, is able to shed new light on the ancient “practice of telling stories” (Scodel, 1). We should keep in mind, however, that the scholia offer an internal viewpoint on Greek literature, a viewpoint that often comes from a limited range of texts: therefore, they cannot exhaust our scholarly interest in what is Greek in the whole of Greek narrative.

The external analysis identifies different kinds of features as distinctively Greek: some of them are broadly literary, since they are linked to the context of a work (for example, occasion) or its style (for instance, Homer’s immediacy); others have a more specific narratological nature, such as the “anonymous traveller” discussed by de Jong and the prolepses studied by Pausanias. Moreover, each of these features is identified by means of a comparative analysis. In many papers of *DGN*, a specific corpus of Greek narrative is contrasted with narratives from other traditions. The boundaries of these comparisons sometimes differ: the dichotomy between literature written in Greek and texts written in other languages is the most used, but in both Morrison’s and de Jong’s papers the dichotomy takes the wider frame of ancient literature in contrast with modern literature.

In light of the number of identified features, this external comparative analysis is the most fruitful of *DGN*, the analysis that more clearly leads towards a better understanding of the ancient “practice of telling stories” (Scodel, 1). In addition, this analysis makes the volume even more exciting, since it leads classicists to compare their texts with Mesopotamian, Japanese and Chinese literature, just to mention some examples. Can we then conclude that this literary comparative approach will eventually bring us to a full understanding of what is Greek in Greek literature?

This question is not easy to answer. As acknowledged by Scodel in her Introduction, the comparative method has a certain deal of approximation, since it is

¹⁷ See Hall 2002 and Hartog 1988.

based on a specific set of texts, Hau's paper being a good example of the potential and the limits of this method. Hau's analysis is an excellent contribution to the volume, since it points out distinctive features of Greek historiography whilst using Roman historiography as a contrast. At the same time, however, her initial choice to stop her corpus of Greek historiography at Diodorus is somehow problematic. Hau argues in defence that "after Diodorus Greek historiography merges with Roman historiography to such a degree that it becomes impossible to keep the two traditions apart" (240). This statement implies that at the beginning of her paper Hau has already defined the boundaries of Greek historiography. This is not a problem for the scope of her current paper, but it would become problematic if Hau wanted to extend her analysis further and set new boundaries of Greek historiography based on her findings. In other words, Hau's paper shows that, in any comparative analysis, a selection needs to be made about text corpora, and this selection affects the way in which we reach our conclusions, and possibly makes it impossible to reach definite and universal ones. Moreover, a degree of arbitrariness characterizes the choice of literary features: Hau—and other contributors of *DGN*—do not discuss how many traits are required in order to define a text or a corpus of texts as Greek.

In light of these problematic issues, it is indeed difficult to reach a full understanding of what is Greek in Greek narrative. However, I see in *DGN* the suggestion of a way in which this goal might become more feasible, by way of putting this literary and comparative analysis in dialogue with cognitive theory or other kinds of science. Through this dialogue, the findings of the comparative approach, which are by definition limited in scope, can be strengthened by being placed within a broader or even a trans-historical framework.

Cairns's paper is a case in point of this attitude. In his paper, thanks to the theory of the sociality of emotions, the distinctive Greek trait of exemplary narratives is taken as a particular expression of the "principle of alternation", which is part of several other cultures. In this way, the outcome of Cairns's analysis is more satisfactory than what he achieves with his initial comparison between Greek and Japanese literature. Similarly, de Jong, in her analysis of the "anonymous traveler", relates the results of her comparison between selected ancient Greek and modern texts to biological theory about cultural dissemination: as a result, she argues not only that this motif "may be typically Greek" (332), but also that it might be a universal narrative.

In my view, other disciplines could also produce the same benefit, starting from philosophy. I am thinking here of how Jonas Grethlein has recently drawn significant distinctions in the use of plot between selected ancient and modern novels, and made sense of them by means of a trans-historical reading of literature

as a reconfiguration of human time—a reading which draws upon phenomenology.¹⁸ Similarly, Christopher Gill has shed substantial light on characterization in ancient literature by putting his findings in the context of a philosophical exploration of the self.¹⁹ A philosophical framework, then, could also support the comparative method and let scholars overcome its limits. In other words, I see in *DGN* the suggestion that a broad framework offered by other disciplines might be needed if we want to progress towards a full historical study of Greek narrative.

In the *DGN*'s invitation to put comparative analysis in dialogue with other disciplines I see the last merit of this volume. I am curious to see how classicists will take this volume's invitation further.

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¹⁸ See Grethlein 2015.

¹⁹ See e.g. Gill 1996.

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