

Zitierhinweis

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Paul Langeslag / Heike Sahm / Roland Scheel (Hgg.): Die Anfänge germanischsprachiger Literaturen

The book examines the earliest written attestations of the Germanic languages - namely Gothic, Old High German, Old Low German, Old Frisian, Old English, and Old Norse - and situates them within a comparative framework that highlights both structural convergences and historical as well as cultural specificities. Its chronological scope necessarily varies from language to language: beginning with the earliest evidence (runic inscriptions), the volume traces individual traditions ranging from Gothic, which became extinct in the second half of the sixth century, to Old Norse, whose rich and extensive literary tradition continues into the second half of the thirteenth century.

Throughout the volume, the emergence of early written evidence in the Germanic languages is consistently and convincingly presented as a set of multiple, discontinuous, and regionally differentiated processes. From its overall structure, it is clear that the book does not aim merely to assemble individual specialist contributions; rather, it seeks to develop a coherent and integrated perspective centered on two principal questions: How, and under which historical circumstances, do the earliest written texts in the Germanic vernaculars come into being?

Following a methodological introduction (*Einleitung*), the volume is divided into six chapters: *Ausgangspunkte* , *Medien* , *Sprachgeschichte* , *Die Anfänge der germanischsprachigen Literaturen* , *Schnittpunkte* , and *Rezeption* . Each chapter is further subdivided into contributions by specialists in the respective fields, offering detailed and well-documented analyses of the topics addressed and accompanied by bibliographical references.

The chapter *Ausgangspunkte* offers an in-depth examination and a careful discussion of the migration period of the Germanic *gentes* and the processes of their Christianization (2.1 *Die frühen Germanen. Multiple Narrative zwischen "Ethnogenese" und "Völkerwanderung"* by Jörg Fündling and Martin Lindner; 2.2 *Die Missionierung Mittel- und Nordeuropas* by Paul Langeslag, Heike Sahm, and Roland Scheel). These contributions successfully convey the political, religious, and cultural transformations that form the background of early vernacular writing. In particular, the relationship with Latin culture is addressed with careful attention to regional variation and long-term historical dynamics.

The chapter devoted to media (*Medien*) - covering orality, visual culture, runic writing, and alphabetic literacy (3.1 *Mündlichkeit* by Heike Sahm; 3.2 *Figürliche Kunst (ca. 400-1100) und ihr Verhältnis zur literarischen Überlieferung* by Sigmund Oehrl; 3.3 *Frühe runische Schriftlichkeit (2. Jh. bis ca. 800)* by Sigmund Oehrl; 3.4 *Schriftkultur* by Nathanael Busch, Irene Kupferschmied, and Bernhard Luxner) - is particularly rich and informative. By foregrounding the plurality of medieval communicative practices, these chapters offer valuable insights into the complex interactions among different modes of transmission. The chapter on the history and characteristics of the Germanic languages (*Sprachgeschichte* : 4.1 *Die germanischen Sprachen* ; 4.2 *Germanische Lautlehre* ; 4.3 *Germanische Formenlehre* ; 4.4 *Germanische Satzlehre* , by Christiane Gante, Svenja Brand, and Marco Coniglio) is schematic and functional in relation to the aims of the volume. Notably, the various contributions rightly emphasize that - unlike in nineteenth-century scholarship - it is no longer meaningful to speak of a unified "Germanic" culture or language. Each linguistic and cultural tradition is shown to follow its own historical trajectory, shaped by the specific history of the respective *gentes* .

The presentation of early Germanic literatures is clear and well structured: 5.1 *Gotische Literatur* (by Marco Coniglio, Martin Lindner, Heike Sahm); 5.2 *Althochdeutsche Literatur*

(by Nathanael Busch, Bernhard Luxner, Michael Schwarzbach-Dobson); 5.3

Altniederdeutsche Literatur (by Philip Flacke, Heike Sahm); 5.4 *Old Frisian Literature* (by Paul Langeslag); 5.5 *Old English Literature* (by Paul Langeslag); 5.6 *Norröne Literatur* (by Roland Scheel). The analyses are consistently grounded in textual evidence and in the conditions of textual transmission, while situating literary production within broader cultural contexts that include law, historiography, and religious practice (see also the chapter *Schnittpunkte* : 6.1 *Sprachbezeichnungen, Sprachkontakt und Sprachreflexion* , by Irene Kupferschmied, Paul Langeslag, Bernhard Luxner, Heike Sahm; 6.2 *Historiographie und Konzeptionen von Zeit* , by Philip Flacke, Paul Langeslag, Roland Scheel, Michael Schwarzbach-Dobson; 6.3 *Recht* , by Roland Scheel, Anna-Lena Heckel, Paul Langeslag, Heike Sahm, Michael Schwarzbach-Dobson). Taken together, these contributions provide philologically sound tools for the study of early Germanic literatures and stimulate further reflection on issues such as linguistic variation, standardization, and language contact. The final chapter (*Rezeption: Der Germanen-Mythos in Deutschland, England und Skandinavien* by Matthias Teichert) offers a careful analysis of the reception of the Germanic past in modern culture, including its more problematic ideological appropriations. This part provides an important critical perspective that productively connects medieval studies with modern cultural and intellectual history.

From an editorial point of view, the volume is well prepared. The systematic use of charts, bold type, tables, and overviews significantly enhances the clarity of presentation and makes the volume easy to consult. These visual and structural aids help guide the reader through the extensive material and allow for the quick identification of key points. The glossary and indexes significantly enhance its usability for students and non-specialist readers, while the close coordination among contributors ensures a high degree of overall coherence. An additional and noteworthy merit of the volume is its availability in Open Access. The cover image, whose reference is, however, absent, depicts the prophet Ezra - although modern scholars believe it to represent Cassiodorus, the culture minister of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic - in his *scriptorium* (*Codex Amiatinus* , f. 5r, produced around 700) and underscores the volume's focus on early textual culture.

Alongside its many strengths, some critical observations may be noted. The bibliography largely privileges scholarship in German and English and is not always fully up to date. One illustrative example concerns the Gothic tradition: despite its limited corpus - where every omission is particularly noticeable - the volume does not mention the discovery of the Mangup graffiti, published in 2016 [1]. The most recent Gothic grammar, by Miller [2], is not cited, nor is Snædal's concordance [3]. A few inaccuracies may be noted in this chapter, including: "Gothica Bononiensis" for "Gothica Bononiensia"; and "Fragmente aus Esr. oder Neh." for "Fragmente aus Neh.".

Moreover, one might question whether the chapter outlining the characteristics of the Germanic languages (4. *Sprachgeschichte*) would have been more effective if placed at the beginning of the volume, in order to introduce this linguistic group and to foreground from the outset both the shared features and the innovations of the Germanic languages within the Indo-European context, or alternatively if it had been relegated to an appendix, since it deals with linguistic rather than literary aspects.

In conclusion, the volume provides a well-balanced synthesis of the history of early Germanic literatures, offering both a clear overview of established research and fresh insights. Its thematic breadth and consistently comparative perspective make it a valuable resource for scholars, students, and a wider readership interested in the early Germanic textual traditions.

Notes :

[1] A. Vinogradov / M. Korobov: "Gotische Graffito-Inschriften aus der Bergkrim", in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 145 (2016), 141-157.

[2] D.G. Miller: *The Oxford Gothic Grammar* , Oxford 2019.

[3] M. Snædal: *A Concordance to Biblical Gothic. I. Introduction-Texts, II. Concordance* , 3rd rev. ed. Reykjavík 2013.