

„Sprache und Herkunft der Germanen – Rekonstruktion des Frühurgermanischen vor der Ersten Lautverschiebung“

[Language and Origin of the Germanic Peoples – a Reconstruction of Early Proto-Germanic prior to First Sound Shift]

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Given more than two centuries of scientific work in the field, the common ancestor of all Germanic languages has been thoroughly determined and described. This language, generally called “*Proto-Germanic*” in the English-speaking literature and “*Urgermanisch*” in German, is today fairly well known and understood – although no original texts have survived.

Up until a few years ago, however, no comprehensive study has been carried out on the immediately preceding language, which was spoken in Scandinavia and in the northern parts of central Europe during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age around 500 BC. This fact is somewhat surprising, especially as the scientific community has been quite well informed for many years concerning the stages of linguistic developments before and after this era. As early as 1960, the famous linguist Hans Krahe deplored this huge *lacuna*. This gap has been filled almost simultaneously by the Don Ringe’s well-known study “From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic”, published in 2006 and the first edition of this book, written independently of Ringe since the year 2006 and published in 2009.

Much scientific work has been carried out on this field since that time, so an updated and extended version of Euler’s book became a strong desideratum. The basic structure of the book remains unchanged. As to the outward appearance, two modifications stand out: The number of illustrations, including maps, has been drastically reduced. On the other hand, the book now turns up as a hard-back – as usual for scientific works of this extent. As to the contents, no deep changes have proven necessary. Yet, the simple sum of updates, clarifications and additions – the essence of more than 25 scientific contributions published on the topic since the year 2009 combined with Euler’s ongoing reflections on the subject – make this book a new scientific work compared to the original edition.

Part 1 of this book summarizes the main ideas and focal points of this work and, moreover, provides a brief overview of the (very limited) historical and (much broader) archaeological knowledge of the subject period, i.e. the 1st millennium BC. In this context, some problems of the cooperation between linguists and archaeologists are also discussed. For example, in Germany, scientific studies related to the Germanic tribes were distorted and abused by a strong nationalist

movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and, even more so, by the Nazi regime during the years 1933 – 1945. After that, an excessive reaction against all things “Germanic” took place. This *caesura* not only led to a correction of misunderstandings and mistakes, but in an obvious act of overreaction, virtually any cooperation between linguists and archaeologists has been interrupted in Germany for about half a century.

As a part of this overreaction, some most promising fields of linguistic work, especially the systematic examination of toponyms, were neglected and almost abandoned for many years, and – even after such work was resumed – historians and archaeologists often failed to benefit from a comprehensive perception of new and relevant results of international linguistic research.

Still in Part 1, some definitions are made. In German-speaking literature, the term “*Urgermanisch*” is generally used to describe the proto-language of all historical and living Germanic languages. The word *Frühurgermanisch* is not much in use, so we coined it here in a specific sense to mean “Proto-Germanic before the first sound shift”. More precisely: we refer to the Germanic language before the *three* characteristic changes which are generally used to define “Germanic” in contrast to (later) “Western Indo-European”. The noted changes include the Germanic sound shift (“Grimm’s law”), “Verner’s law” and the change of accentuation to the first syllable. To make the difference fully clear, the well-established term “*Urgermanisch*” (meaning “Proto-Germanic” in English scientific literature) is modified here to *Späturgermanisch* (= “late Proto-Germanic”, abbreviation “Spg.”). Thus, in a nutshell, the term “*Frühurgermanisch*” is used here in the sense of an archaic Proto-Germanic language, sometimes referred to as “pre-Proto-Germanic” or simply “pre-Germanic” in English-speaking linguistic literature, whereas the term “*Späturgermanisch*” is used in the traditional sense of *Proto-Germanic* in English-speaking books.

These more formal issues are closely related to the material questions under discussion in Part 2, which covers the Proto-Germanic phonological system and where the ongoing debates in regard to dating and sequence of the changes due to Grimm’s Law and Verner’s Law are resumed. In the first half of the 20th century already, the traditional dating of the Germanic sound shift at around 500 BC (or only little later) has been challenged in favour of a later date. Based on sound evaluation of the earliest known lexical material, this view is shared in this book, and some new arguments are given in favour of it.

For example, the Latin spelling “*Cimbri Teutonique*” – not **Chimbri Teudonique*¹ – is a strong argument in favour of the assumption that, during the first century BC, Grimm’s law has still been productive at least in the western parts

¹ In later Latin, even the spelling **Chimbri Theudonique* would have been to be expected, but in classical times the writing “th” of the sound *þ* has not yet been established.

of the lands inhabited by Germanic tribes. Further arguments are provided by the Latin name of river Waal, one of the estuaries of the Rhine River. The Latin term was originally spelled “*Vacalus*” by Caesar, but 150 years later was written as “*Vahalis*” by Tacitus.

Some further evidence can be seen in the tribe names “*Caerosos*”, “*Paemanos*” and “*Usipeti*” to the extent we suppose Germanic and not Celtic origine of these names which Caesar explicitly characterizes to be of Germanic, and not Celtic, origin. Furthermore, the famous conquerer and author tells about a Germanic tribe called “*Tencteri*”, not **Ten(c)hteri*². Yet, Caesar also reports names which clearly seem to have passed the Germanic sound shift, so the picture remains ambiguous; there is, however, reasonable evidence for the proposition that this sound shift was completed not earlier than in the 1st century BC, at least in the West.

The second basic question is the chronological order of the three (four) fundamental changes under discussion: (1a) aspiration of tenues *p*, *t* and *k*, (1b) Germanic sound shift, (2) Verner’s law and (3) change of accent. The traditional view of this sequence is just as stated here: 1a - 1b - 2 - 3. But if we assume the effects of Verner’s law to have occurred after the aspiration of tenues, but *before* the sound shift (one might also say: before the *rest of* the sound shift, since the aspiration of *p*, *t* and *k* may be seen as the first stage of this change), thus 1a - 2 - 1b - 3, then the combined change in Proto-Germanic consonant system becomes more organic and clear.

As we show, the principle of Occam’s razor is in favour of this sequence, and an additional difficult problem in the linguistic history of Proto-Germanic is solved at least in part using this assumption: The very rapid changes of Proto-Germanic during the final decades BC appear less dramatic than, as the changes according to Verner’s law might have occurred some generations earlier already.

However, an important result of Part 2 is that, whatever opinion our readers might have in relation to these questions of dating and sequence (whereby the authors themselves by no means see their position as proven!), the following Chapters of this book remain valid in any case. The way leading from *Frühurgermanisch* (= Earlier Proto-Germanic) to *Späturgermanisch* (= Late Proto-Germanic) may be a bit different under the different standpoints, and the relevant dates may differ anywhere from about two to three centuries, but the results as such do *not* depend on either conviction.

The core of the work is thus accomplished in Part 3 and Part 4, which each describe the morphological and syntactical system of the Proto-Germanic language

² In later Latin, the spelling **Thenc(h)teri* would have been to be expected, see above.

as it was probably spoken during the Urnfield and Hallstatt periods (and, as we believe, even during the La-Tène).

In Part 3 the morphological system of Proto-Germanic is investigated. Although it is written in the conventional style of other comparative Germanic grammars (like Krahe, Ramat 1981, Bammesberger 1986), the focus of interest is the reconstruction of archaic Proto-Germanic (*Frühurgermanisch*); only when necessary forms in Late Proto-Germanic (*Späturgermanisch*) are invoked. This part covers the declension and formation of substantives (vowel and consonant stems), the formation of adjectives (including their comparison) and participles, the declension of pronouns, the numerals, the conjugation of strong and weak verbs, the athematic verbs, and the preterito-presents – the latter being of outstanding value for the understanding of the development of Proto-Germanic verbal system.

In part 4 the syntax of Proto-Germanic is analyzed, including the use of cases, tenses, and moods as well as word order. These investigations on syntax and style do not claim completeness, however, some quite archaic features of Early Germanic are shown which in most Germanic grammars have been neglected.

Part 5 explains some basic features and developments of the Proto-Germanic lexical system, especially the process of replacing inherited Indo-European words by neologisms.

At this point, the very theoretical reasoning of the preceding Parts provides very vivid and tangible results. Three highly conservative semantic areas are presented at a glance: kinship terminology, anatomical terms and the names of various animals. Keeping in mind that the Proto-Germanic vocabulary is probably the best examined part of this reconstructed language, Part 5 does not try to establish any kind of competition to existing etymological books, but offers on the basis of individual terms an amount of additional insight in the way in which the subject language probably sounded when spoken.

Part 6, on the other hand, provides something entirely new. Based on the given reasoning some short texts in Proto-Germanic are presented: two fables, one poem and the Christian Lord's Prayer. The fables and the poem have been chosen because of existing scientific versions of these texts in Proto-Indo-European and/or (late) Proto-Germanic. The Lord's Prayer has been chosen for reconstruction since early versions exist in all Germanic languages including Gothic, which helps significantly in terms of reconstruction.

Finally, some short sayings and classical quotes are reconstructed in both variants of Proto-Germanic. Thus, the English-speaking reader has the unique chance to learn how to say things like “a horse, a horse, a kingdom for a horse”

or “my home is my castle” in a language predating Old Anglo-Saxon by anywhere from 800 to 1200 years.