ORRIN W. ROBINSON. Old English and Its Closest Relatives. A Survey of the Earliest Germanic Languages. London: Routledge, 1992. Paperback edition, 1994. Pp. xiv + 290.

Reviewed by HANS F. NIELSEN

By way of introduction, it may be observed that the publication of the present volume – with its careful presentation of primary texts, basic grammatical features, background history and dialectal interrelations – has made it considerably easier for the Germanic scholars in our universities to offer introductory survey courses on the earliest Germanic languages.

Orrin W. Robinson (R) devotes one chapter to each of the seven early Germanic dialects treated: Gothic (ch. 3, 43-68), Old Norse (ch. 4, 69-99), Old Saxon (ch. 5, 100-135), Old English (ch. 6, 136-175), Old Frisian (ch. 7, 176-198), Old Low Franconian (ch. 8, 199-221) and Old High German (ch. 9, 223-246). The central part of each chapter is two text specimens, one being the Parable of the Sower and the Seed from the New Testament (to the extent that this text is extant in the languages concerned) and the other being textually more representative for the language treated than the New Testament extract. For Old Norse, e.g., R has selected the 'Thor and the Giant Skrymir' episode from Snorri's *Edda* and for Old English (most of) the 755 annal ('Cynewulf and Cyneheard') from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. With one exception, the two readings do not exceed two pages; they are supplied with lists of cognate English and German words in the right margin; and they are followed by full glossaries, which in addition to English renderings of individual items also frequently provide grammatical identification. In an appendix at the back of the book (265-276), word-by-word translations into English are offered of all texts(!). In each chapter the two readings *cum* glossary are followed by a section entitled 'Some Aspects of ... Grammar', which in all seven cases consists of the following inventory: 'Spelling and Pronunciation'; 'Phonology'; 'Nouns and Pronouns'; and 'Verbs'. R here concentrates on features 'that uniquely characterize *this* language as against all others or ... that it shares with *some* languages and not others' (21). Each chapter is introduced by a brief survey of the tribal history of the speakers of the relevant early dialect, and this is again immediately followed by a section presenting the major texts of the language under discussion. But there is one section in all seven chapters that is not standardized, viz. the last

which is devoted to a specific topic that often goes beyond the chapter in which it has been included: the chapters on Old Norse, Old Saxon, Old English and Old Frisian contain final sections on, respectively, 'The Runes' (91-94), 'Germanic Alliterative Verse' (125-135), 'Selected Topics in Germanic Syntax' (162-175) and 'On Being a Younger Older Language' (195-198).

The seven core chapters are preceded by two introductory chapters. Taking English and German as its point of departure, the first chapter explains why these languages are genetically related (1-5); how they and the other Germanic languages can be traced back to a common ancestor by means of the comparative method; and how the various degrees of relationship exhibited can be expressed in terms of a Germanic 'family tree' (5-13). Other sections deal briefly with 'Linguistics, Archaeology, and History' (13-18) and 'Dialects and Languages' (18-19). In the second chapter a grammatical sketch of Germanic is given in the shape of a short section on 'Pronunciation' (24-28) and a longer one on 'Grammar' (28-42). For his grammatical exemplification R uses Gothic forms. The purpose of this chapter is to give the student a comprehensive view of the basic grammatical features of Germanic, an overview which it would not be possible for the student to glean from the grammatical sections of chs. 3-9 alone owing to the restrictions imposed on the selection of material (cf. above).

In the final chapter of the book entitled 'The Grouping of the Germanic Languages' (ch. 10, 247-264), R charts thirty-one phonological and morphological items discussed in the grammar sections of the seven previous chapters, recording the participation or non-participation of the various languages in the items listed (250-251). This gives R an excellent basis for discussing the interrelationships of the early Germanic dialects. R links his discussion up with past scholarship in the field, treating such topics as the similarities between Gothic and Old Norse (252-255); Old Norse and West Germanic (255-256); the West Germanic languages (256-257); the socalled Ingveonic languages (257-259); Old High German and Old Low Franconian (259-269); and Old High German and Gothic (260-261). The chapter is rounded off by a section called 'A Late-Breaking Theory' (261-262), which (unexpectedly) focuses on Vennemann's (1984) theory of a first split of the Germanic languages into High Germanic (High German) and Low Germanic (all remaining Germanic dialects). Vennemann's basis for this, of course, is his belief that the High German consonant system arose at the

same (early) point of time as the consonant system(s) prevailing elsewhere in *Germania* – and not in the sixth century A.D. as traditionally assumed.

Orrin W. Robinson may be criticised for not being always up to date with regard to the scholarly literature in the field. R's selection of phonological and morphological points for illustrating dialectal interrelations in chs. 3-9 makes the grouping of the Germanic languages the *Dreh- und Angelpunkt* of the book. It is therefore very surprising that with the exception of Vennemann 1984 R appears to have no knowledge of the ongoing discussion beyond the mid- or late 1970s, the last chapter of the book being based chiefly on Schwarz 1951, Kuhn 1955-1956 and Markey 1976. Elmer Antonsen's version of the North-West Germanic theory, e.g., has had considerable impact on the scholarly debate (Antonsen 1975, 1986). Even in the case of Vennemann 1984 (cf. above), R is not up to date when he says (263) of this article that 'we have no idea about when the significant split is supposed to have taken place, and we can only speculate about the possible geographic collocations of tribes that would give flesh to the proposed common developments'. In papers published in 1987 and 1988 (and later) Vennemann has in fact faced the problems of chronology and geography raised by his theory of the earliest macrogrouping in the Germanic world. But what R does not seem to realize either, is the serious criticism levelled at Vennemann's theory from several corners since its inception in 1984.

My other chief worry about R's book is that it does not make enough of the early runic inscriptions of Scandinavia (cf. 91-98). One would have thought that the archaic language represented here would be of central importance to the problems raised in R's book and would constitute an important link in the development from early Germanic to the various Germanic dialects in Northern and Western Europe. R's bibliography (279-284) bears no evidence of runic works published after 1968, and it thus misses out on, e.g., Krause's (1971) and Antonsen's (1975) important runic grammars and the second edition of Klaus Düwel's *Runenkunde* (1983).

There can be no doubt, however, that R has been very successful in attaining his main aim, viz. to compile an accessible book for beginners on the earliest Germanic languages with texts, grammar and background information – a remarkable achievement, in my view. To this should be added that the volume has been handsomely produced and is available at a price of only £12.99 in paperback. Hopefully, students using this book will feel encouraged to study one

(or several) early Germanic language(s) in depth. The volume under review will never be able to replace traditional courses in Old English, Old High German, Old Norse or Gothic; and owing to the limitations on the data selected, it is not likely to be used as a work of reference in the place of the well-known neogrammarian handbooks. Orrin W. Robinson's book should be regarded as an appetizer and as an efficient means of giving students an overview of the earliest Germanic languages and their interrelations.

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