

THE GOTHIC LANGUAGE

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Introduction

Gothic, the language of the Goths, is the oldest preserved language of the Germanic language family. It is the only preserved language of the so-called East Germanic branch of this family. This branch also included the languages of the Burgundians, Gepides, Heruli, Rugians, Scirii, and Vandals.

The preserved texts in the Gothic language are remnants of a translation of the Bible, made by Wulfila, the bishop of the Goths, in the 4th century. Wulfila was a Visigoth but, nevertheless, his Bible translation was also used by the Ostrogoths and what remains is of Ostrogothic origin. It is likely that other East Germanic tribes also used this translation.

The manuscript resources

Here all the Gothic manuscripts will be listed with short comments on their content:

Codex Argenteus. This manuscript is preserved in Uppsala University Library. Originally, it contained at least the text of the four Gospels on 336 leaves of which 188 or about 56% are still extant. The biggest lacunae are in the Gospel of Matthew. The editio princeps by Franciscus Junius was printed in 1665. In the year 1970 the last folium of the Codex Argenteus, with the final verses of Mark, was found in the cathedral in Speyer in Germany (for further details see the book-historical commentary).

But the Codex Argenteus is not the only Gothic manuscript although it is the most famous one. Most of the remaining Gothic manuscripts are palimpsests. In 1817 Angelo Mai found fragments of various sizes from five palimpsest manuscripts in the Ambrosian Library in Milan. Collectively, these fragments are labelled *Codices Ambrosiani*. They were first published by C. O. Castiglione in the years 1819–1839.

Codices Ambrosiani A and *B*. These manuscripts – 102 and 77 leaves respectively – contain most of what is left from the Gothic version of the Pauline Epistles. Their texts overlap to a considerable extent. Although fragmentary, around 70% of the text of the Epistles is preserved in these two manuscripts. At the end of Codex A there is a fragment (one page) of a Gothic calendar. The so-called *Codex Taurinensis*, four leaves preserved in the National University Library in Turin, was originally a part of Codex A. Romans and Philemon are entirely lost from Codex B but this manuscript contains all the text of 2 Corinthians, the only Biblical book preserved as a whole.

Codex Ambrosianus C. Two leaves with fragments from chapters 26 and 27 of Matthew. The text overlaps partly with the text of the Codex Argenteus.

Codex Ambrosianus D. Three leaves with fragments from chapters 5–7 of the Book of Nehemiah. These are the only fragments of the Old Testament preserved in Gothic.

Codex Ambrosianus E. This codex consists of five leaves in the Ambrosian Library and three leaves in the Vatican Library (Codex Vaticanus Latinus 5750). It preserves fragments of a commentary on the Gospel of John. Most likely this is a translation of a Greek original. The commentary is generally referred to as the *Skreins*. It was first published in its entirety by Maßmann in 1834.

Codex Carolinus. Four palimpsest leaves found in 1756 by F. A. Knittel in the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel. It contains fragments from the chapters 11–15 of Romans from a Gothic-Latin bilingual. Its text overlaps partly with the Codex Ambrosianus A. It was first published by Knittel in 1762.

The Codex Argenteus and the other manuscripts mentioned above contain 99.5% of the Gothic corpus. In addition there are some minor fragments with the remaining 0.5%. These are:

Codex Gissensis. This fragment from a Gothic-Latin bilingual, originally found in Egypt, was preserved in the University Library in Gießen but is now lost. It was a portion cut out from a double leaf containing fragments from chapters 23 and 24 of Luke in Gothic and Latin. It was first published by Glaue (Latin) and Helm (Gothic) in 1910.

The Codex LI (49) in the Capitolare Library in Verona contains a collection of homilies. The content of the homilies is often indicated by a marginal note in Gothic. Many of these notes are in fact Biblical quotations, but some of them are no

more legible. As a whole, these notes are generally referred to with the label *Gotica Veronensia*. They were first published by Capelle in 1928.

Codex Vindobonensis 795 in the Austrian National Library in Vienna contains some Gothic material on fol. 20; alphabets, quotations from Luke, and numbers. It was first published by Grimm in 1828.

Finally, there are two deeds, written on Papyrus, mostly in Latin but with some Gothic subscriptions. The deeds have their origin in Ravenna; one of them is now in the Library in Naples (first published by Sabbatini d'Anfora in 1745), the other was in the Cathedral Archive in Arezzo but is now lost (first published by Doni in 1731).

The date of the first edition of each manuscript tells us when the material became accessible for scholars in general and became part of Gothic studies. This material later came to be published along with the *Codex Argenteus*. Thus, Zahn's edition from 1805 contains also the *Codex Carolinus* and the deeds from Naples and Arezzo.

Having in mind what Biblical texts are extant in the Gothic manuscripts it appears to be a little bit misleading to talk about a 'Gothic Bible'. The fact is that only a tiny fragment of the Old Testament is preserved. Further, even though we can speak of 'Gothic New Testament', it should be remembered that several of the books of the New Testament have left no fragments, i.e. Acts, Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, and Revelation.

The amount of the Gothic corpus

The Codex Argenteus is of course extremely important for our knowledge of the Gothic language. Therein we find more than a half of the extant Gothic corpus. The Gothic texts are written in the so-called *scriptio continua*, i.e. without word breaks but divided into phrases and sentences. The edited texts have been divided into words. Then, the whole corpus contains 67,876 tokens (word-forms) but 9,391 types (words). As mentioned some of the manuscripts overlap so parts of the texts are found in two manuscripts. When the words in these overlapping parts are only counted once, the result is ca. 59,630 tokens. If Biblical names and loan words are subtracted, these are a little more than 3,000 lexemes. How representative this vocabulary is of every day Gothic is another matter. For example we do not know for sure the word for 'horse' in Gothic as a horse is not mentioned in the Gospels and Pauline Epistles. On the other hand the corpus contains many neologisms for biblical and theological concepts. From these neologisms we can learn a great deal about the possibilities of word-formation in Gothic.

In the Codex Argenteus (Speyer Fragment included; 142 tokens) there are 35,338 tokens, or 52% of the entire corpus, 59% if overlapping parts are only counted once.

This all means that in the Codex Argenteus the average number of tokens on each leaf is ca. 188 or 94 on each page. If the manuscript were printed with 300 tokens on each page it would be a booklet with less than 120 pages. With the rest of the corpus ca. 100 pages would be added, if the overlapping parts are counted singularly. Actually, in Bernhardt's edition from 1884 the Gothic texts are printed on 218 pages. Lacking here are the 237 tokens in the fragments found later, i.e. from Gießen (33), Verona (62), and Speyer (142). The amount of the

entire Gothic corpus is not far from being equal to the amount of text originally found in the Codex Argenteus.

Gothic Grammar

As mentioned in the book-historical commentary, learned men began to show interest in the Codex Argenteus in the 16th century. Then the first specimens were published by Goropius Becanus 1569, Vulcanius 1597, and Gruter 1602–3. Even though there are many misreading in these specimens one could, nevertheless, say that they are remarkably correct. The alphabet had to be deciphered and although knowledge of Greek palaeography was of help here, Wulfila's alphabet has its idiosyncrasies. Also, the Codex is not always easy to read so the first editions contain some lacunae when the manuscript was illegible for the editors. Actually, Uppström's edition is the first with all the lacunae being filled.

The Gothic corpus is relatively small and in addition the texts are uniform. In the Gospels the same or similar events are often narrated with the same or similar wording. Also, many portions of the Pauline Epistles are similar. Therefore, even though the Gothic texts are sufficient to give us a good picture of the Gothic linguistic system, our knowledge is nevertheless limited in many ways. We do not, for example, know the inflexion of every noun or the conjugation of every verb.

Then, the fact is that the texts are mostly found in one manuscript only or in two closely related manuscripts. This sets certain limits for Gothic philology. Of course, the Codex Argenteus is not free from scribal errors. Some of them are evident but others suspected. But such suspected errors can not be supported or rejected by consulting another manuscript.

Junius's and Stiernhielm's editions both have a glossary. In the beginning of his glossary, Junius has a relatively extensive discussion of Wulfila's alphabet. Stiernhielm only gives, in the beginning of his glossary, the Latin transliteration he uses as

he does not print the text in Wulfilian characters. On the other hand these two oldest editions have no grammar. In Benzelius's edition there is a short grammar on pages XXXIX–LXII written by Edward Lye. It begins with a short discussion of the alphabet but its main concern is the inflectional morphology, and it ends with a short syntax. On pp. 61–63 in Zahn's edition there is a list of Gothic grammars and glossaries available until ca 1800.

The alphabet and pronunciation

Although the alphabet has long since been deciphered there is still disagreement on the question if Wulfila, the inventor of the alphabet, based it entirely on the Greek or if he took some letters from the Germanic runes and/or the Roman alphabet. It took a considerable length of time to establish the modern transliteration of Wulfila's alphabet with Roman characters. The development can be seen by looking it up in the old editions and follow it up to present. Even though we believe that we have a relatively accurate picture of Gothic pronunciation and phonology, our knowledge is of course limited greatly by the fact that it has to be deduced from written sources. So, we will never know the details.

The alphabet exists in two types. In the Codex Argenteus the younger type (the so-called S-Type) is used. Each character has a numerical value also; two of them are only numbers. The last character is not found in the Codex Argenteus.

1	Α	a
2	Β	b
3	Γ	g
4	Δ	d
5	Ε	e
6	Υ	q
7	Ζ	z
8	Η	h
9	Ψ	þ
10	Ι	i
20	Κ	k
30	Λ	l
40	Μ	m
50	Ν	n
60	Ξ	j
70	Ο	u
80	Π	p
90	Υ	-
100	Ρ	r
200	Σ	s
300	Τ	t
400	Υ	w
500	Φ	f
600	Χ	x
700	Θ	hʊ
800	Ω	o
900	↑	-

Inflexion

The amount of text in the Codex Argenteus is enough to show the essence of Gothic inflections. As the other old Germanic languages, Gothic has three genders of nouns, masculine, feminine, and neuter. The noun is inflected in two numbers, singular and plural, and the four cases, nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive. The fifth case, the vocative, generally has the same form as the nominative but in some inflectional classes it has the same form as the accusative.

The adjective is inflected for gender, number and case, and, as in the other Germanic languages, it also has strong and weak inflection. Also the adjective has comparative and superlative along with the positive.

The pronouns are inflected for gender, number and case. They show only the strong inflexion, except two which only show the weak one. Then, the first and second person pronouns have distinct dual forms. A corresponding dual possessive pronoun is only preserved for the second person.

Conjugation

The Gothic verb shows two categories not found in the other Germanic languages: it has a dual number besides singular and plural, and an inflexional passive form in the present tense. Then Gothic has preserved separate forms for the third person singular and plural in the imperative, but these forms are evidently in the retreat. Else, Gothic has the same categories known from the other Germanic languages, two tenses, three persons, three moods, infinitive, present and past participle.

Syntax

Our knowledge of Gothic syntax is limited greatly by the fact that almost the whole corpus consist of word for word translations from Greek. Therefore, independent studies of Gothic word order are difficult. On the other hand, it is possible to study the use of grammatical categories such as for

example nominal cases or verbal moods, and the use of prepositions and conjunctions.

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