

# **Digital Germanic Philology? Questions, Challenges and Obstacles for Scholars of German**

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## **Introduction**

Is the digital future a blessing for philologists, especially those working the vast area of Germanic Languages & Literatures? Or does it rather come with problems that jeopardize philology, in the Germanic and the broader scope? This paper sets out to explore the status quo (1.) of digital source material in Germanic philology, ranging from medieval manuscripts to 21<sup>st</sup> century e-books and their, at times, highly restricted availability to the scientific community. Do we really face a quantum leap in terms of open access, or is this leap rather confined to those only who pay the exorbitant fees specialist libraries charge for the use of their rare manuscript and book collections?

How about Google Books (2.)? Are we in danger of neglecting everything that is (still) missing there? And what is in it for the German scholar? Can we believe that in some years' time we will be able to get our hands on every source text we desire within seconds since it is only a click away? This paper critically assesses the process and progress of the digitization of mankind's written records (3.), focusing on problems to be overcome by e.g. medievalists wishing to consult certain source material. This is illustrated by means of the example of how it is not yet possible consult certain materials related to the Franciscan preacher Berthold von Regensburg († 1272). A short concluding summary (4.) highlights perspectives for further thinking and discussion.

## 1. On the Status Quo of Digital Material Within Germanic Philology

As in probably all branches of modern philology today, there is a strong tendency towards adapting to the digital age and this is also the case within the field of Germanic philology. We are facing a seemingly unending and ever-increasing number of digital texts, concerning digital editions and databases as well as digital versions of relevant current and older relevant research scholarship. From the point of view of accessibility, the crucial Hamletesque question has to be asked each time prior to the use of each edition: to pay or not to pay? In the following, we are focusing on one example that brings together a wide range of materials and is accessible via one online address. Due to the limited scope of this paper no discussion of other portals will take place since the one chosen forms the major portal currently in use in Germanic philology.

Concerning editions, databases, and numerous other materials, the *Virtual Germanic Philology Library* or *Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Germanistik* <http://www.germanistik-im-netz.de/dbis/> [last accessed March 30, 2009], maintains probably the most comprehensive collection of online sources in the field of *Germanistik* today. The *Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Germanistik* is supported by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (*German Research Foundation*), the “central, self-governing research funding organisation that promotes research at universities and other publicly financed research institutions in Germany.”<sup>1</sup> This usually serves as an indication of a project commonly being recognized as being of high quality.

The user can choose from 201 different editions, databases, dictionaries, newspapers etc. which are labelled either as “F” (=free), “D” (=access from within Germany; *deutschlandweit*), or “L” (=licensed). A count conducted showed that of the 201 links compiled in the *Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Germanistik*, 89 are free and fully accessible from all over the globe, while 103 are licensed content and four portals are free within Germany’s

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dfg.de/en/index.html> [accessed March 30, 2009].

internet domain. Moreover, when following the link “Internetquellen” from the main site, one is transferred to a link site <http://www.germanistik-im-netz.de/fx/fx.html> [accessed March 30, 2009], which provides possibilities to access more sources under different headings, such as Author, Works, Bibliographies or even Multimedia.

Depending on how well one’s home institution has purchased licenses for the linked portals of the *Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Germanistik*, one can potentially conduct high class research even from remote places on our planet. However, many relevant portals charge high sums for institutions and/or individuals to join them so that participating is out of the question, especially when thinking of our colleagues from e.g. Africa, Eastern Asia, South America or the different members of the Russian Federation. Thus 89 free portals compiled in the *Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Germanistik* comprise a relatively small number of widely available online sources, or, in other words, leave a lot of room for more.

In terms of complete texts of books electronically available, the German language market to date lacks a wide availability of titles. Once again, a complete survey of this growing market segment cannot be provided here; this would go beyond the author’s expertise. General remarks, however, can be made: some publishers are following the trend to publish their titles as electronic full texts available in digital libraries such as Ebrary [<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/abo/home.action> e.g. for Åbo Akademi University; accessed March 30, 2009]. For the German language market one main publisher, Walter de Gruyter [[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com); accessed March 30, 2009], has been publishing many of its German and English language titles as electronic full text and has established its own portal exclusively for its e-publications: <http://www.reference-global.com/?cookieSet=1> [accessed March 31, 2009]. Many, in particular, smaller, publishers, however, have lacked the financial and technical means to compete with big players such as de Gruyter. For some time now the books published by smaller publishing companies have, however, been available on the Internet. The company responsible for this is none other than Google, which has come up

with a service called *Google Book Search*. In the following, the impact of *Google Book Search* on the field of Germanic Philology shall be reflected upon.

## 2. On the Impact of *Google Book Search*

Even though it is quite unstructured, compared e.g. to the *Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Germanistik*, *Google Book Search* certainly can be considered a valuable tool to researchers working in Germanic Philology today. Why so? There are several answers to this question that shall be given in the following.

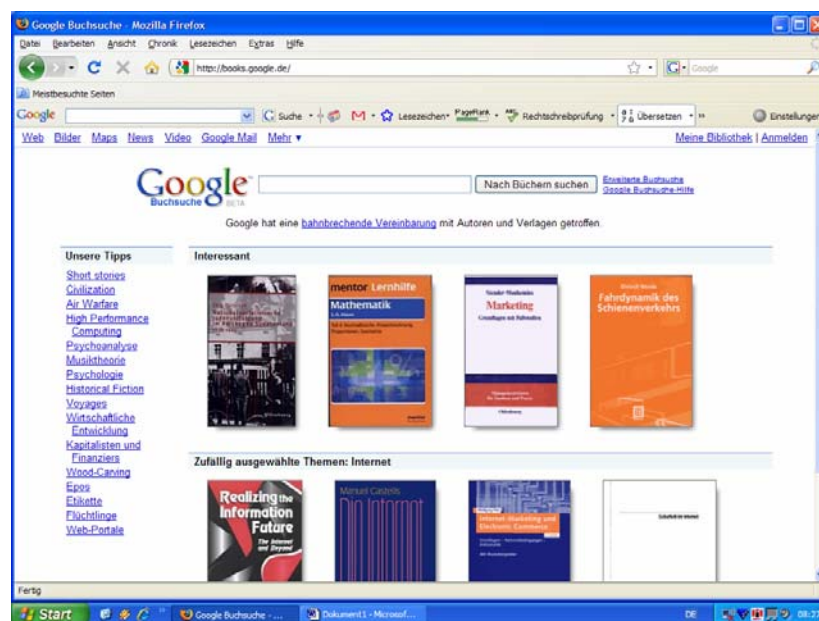


Figure 1: Main page of *Google Book Search*'s German version, the *Google Buchsuche* [March 19, 2009]

First, *Google Book Search* provides access to older, out-of-print literature in PDF full text. This is the case for books the copyright of which has run out. More recent books, which are either still in print or the copyright of which has not run out yet, can be displayed in various ways: a) as so-called 'snippets', i.e. only very limited parts (usually some lines at a time) can be displayed; the book, however, is searchable for key words in its entirety. b) The second alternative, depicted in Fig. 2 below, is the so-called 'limited preview': here most of the book can be read via an internet browser, but some pages have been blocked.

Both described ways of browsing books via *Google Book Search* are highly useful to Germanic (as well as all other) philologists, since already via the ‘snippet view’ it can often be determined whether the book is of use to oneself. Another helpful tool in this respect is that one can check the availability of the book in a large number of libraries with a simple click. The ‘limited preview’ option can serve the same purpose of determining whether the book is of use to oneself, but one could go further and even quote from the book, at length if one so wishes, since most of it is freely accessible.

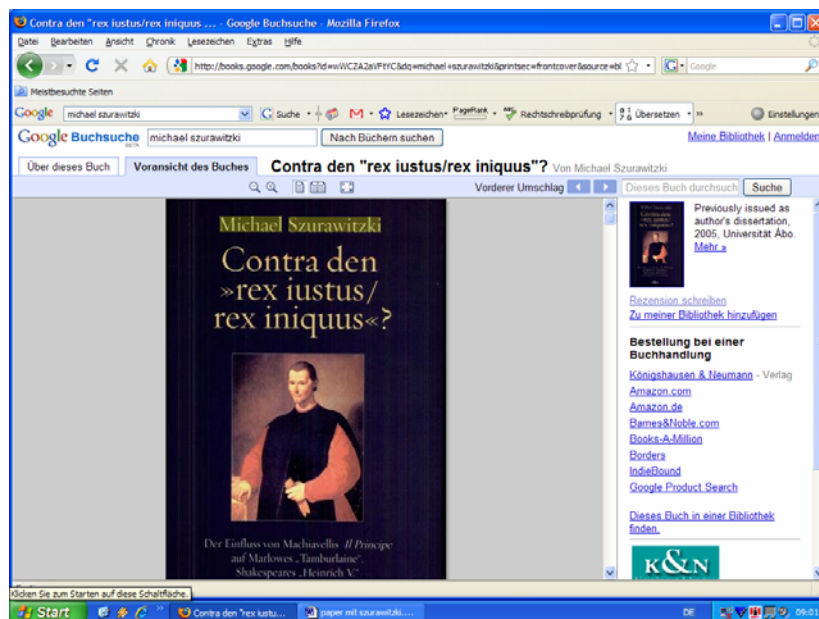


Figure 2: Accessing a Nearly Fully Digitized Book via *Google Book Search* [March 19, 2009]

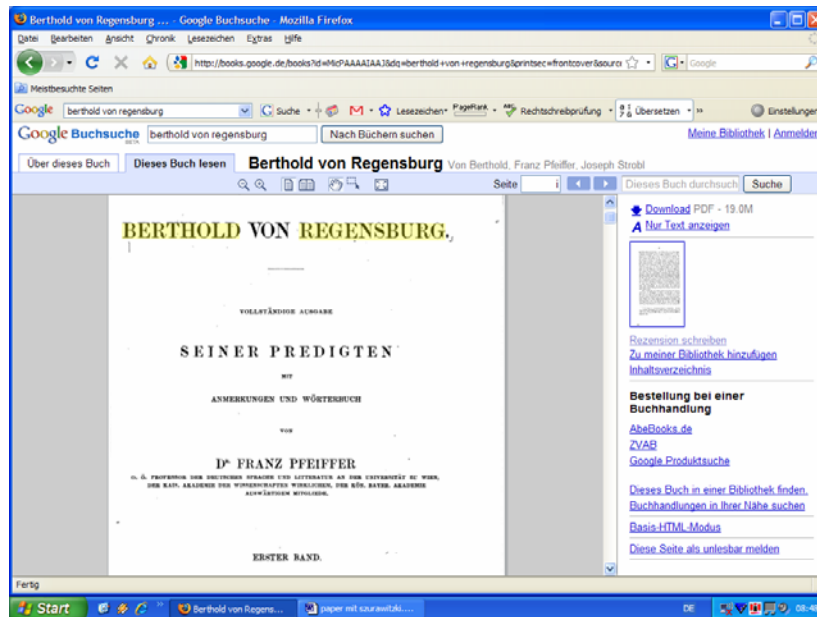
The *Google Book Search* as it works today can be perceived and used as a powerful research tool within Germanic Philology, since it enables researchers to evaluate a book and its usefulness to their own research prior to ordering it from a library that charges high fees. For those scholars who cannot easily access libraries and interlibrary loan services, e.g. colleagues from Asia, Africa etc., *Google Book Search* might even prove of crucial importance in keeping up with the most recent trends in research for just the cost of their internet connection.

### **3. A Critical Assessment of the Process and Progress of the Digitization of Mankind's Written Records**

The process of digitizing Mankind's written records and making them potentially available to everyone online is underway. Most of us will live to see impressive amounts of records and scholarship available on the Internet, either through free full text access or via licensed accounts. It seems that today we are encountering a broad willingness to support these efforts carried out by Google and others, especially many university libraries, and not only those participating in the joint *Google Books* effort.

However, there are challenges to be overcome to make accessible all kinds of written records. Many materials that would be essential for research within Germanic philology are not available in any form to date, neither in libraries nor online. There is a high demand for such materials to be made available at least to an interested group of expert recipients. The following paragraphs sketch such a situation in which the fate of a specialized research field depends on the digitization of certain materials. No doubt, there are countless examples of similar situations which could be incorporated in this paper. Due to this paper's limited nature and the author's limited expertise, we will discuss one situation which serves as an example for many.

The case reported here focuses on the urgent need for the digital availability of materials related to the Franciscan preacher Berthold von Regensburg († 1272). Medievalists within Germanic philology have shown a keen interest in the Latin and German vernacular sermons and sermon condensates existing that are either authored by or attributed to this medieval monk. Dagmar Neuendorff of Åbo Akademi University is one of the most renowned international experts on Berthold von Regensburg and reported her work in progress with the aim of digitizing a series of texts highly relevant for the Berthold scholarship to me in an interview conducted on March 30, 2009.

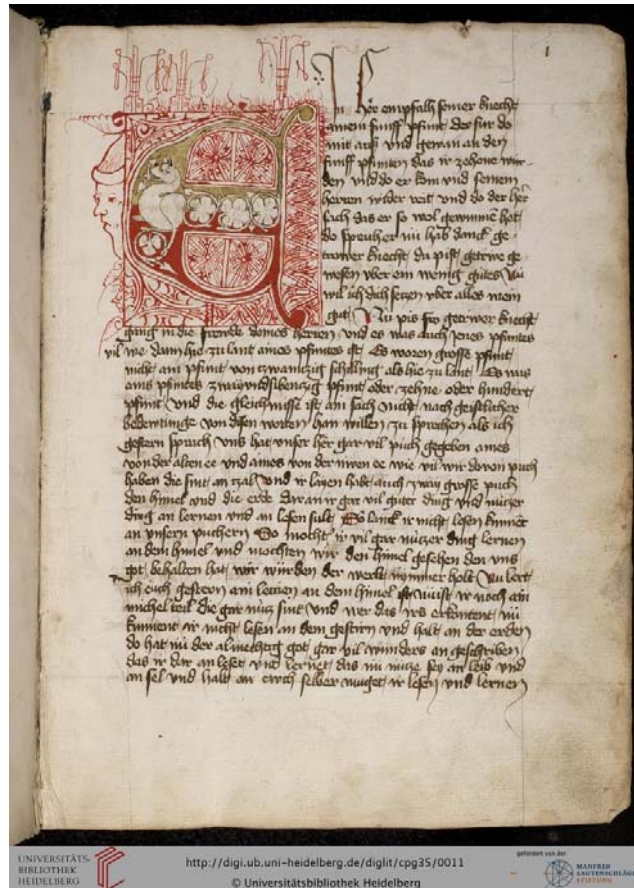


**Figure 3: Front page of Pfeiffer/Strobl's 1862 edition of Berthold von Regensburg's attributed German sermons [Google Book Search, March 19, 2009]**

The issue Dagmar Neuendorff raised in the interview is connected with two series of texts, i.e. sermon condensates (the so-called *Rusticani de Dominicis* and the *Rusticani de Sanctis*) in Medieval Latin, which might be traced back to Berthold von Regensburg. The problem with these texts, however, is that they cannot be found in any library but are in private ownership. The texts stem from the estate of the Franciscan monk and scholar Laurentius Casutt who had dedicated his life to researching and, above all, editing Berthold's sermons. The materials that had originally belonged to Casutt were, after his death, transferred to private hands and into the ownership of Dr Payr (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich). Neuendorff was in touch with Dr Payr as early as 1984/1985 and gained permission to edit and publish the Berthold von Regensburg material she was going to select for her Habilitation thesis.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Habilitation, Freie Universität Berlin: Neuendorff, Dagmar. 1994. *Berthold von Regensburg. 1: Untersuchungsergebnisse* (ca. 511 pp.). 2. *Auswahledition* (ca. 320 pp.), 3. *Anhänge und Bibliographie* (ca. 112 pp.).





**Figure 4: Cod. Pal. germ. 35  
Berthold von Regensburg (Bertholdus Ratisbonensis),  
Deutsche Predigten, Überlieferungsgruppe \*Y, sig. 1<sup>r</sup> [March 19, 2009]  
Heidelberg University Library**

Persistent URL: <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg35/0011>

Incorporated with the kind permission of Heidelberg University Library (query no. 8457, March 20, 2009)

Neuendorff stayed with Dr Payr's and worked on many relevant texts in her possession, even reproducing small parts of the Medieval Latin sermon condensates for the purpose of later editing these texts. However, Neuendorff confined herself to using the material that at that time was absolutely essential to her work. This did not entail the Latin sermon condensates sought now. These were not reproduced and thus not made available to the community of Berthold von Regensburg scholars.

On Dr Payr's decease, the Berthold material owned by her stayed in private ownership and was transferred to Fribourg, Switzerland.<sup>3</sup> Neuendorff had had hints<sup>4</sup> that some parts of

<sup>3</sup> We do not expose the name of the current owner in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> See Richter, Dieter (1969): *Die deutsche Überlieferung der Predigten Bertholds von Regensburg*. München.



the desired material might have been part of the collections of Fribourg University Library. An extensive search conducted on site, however, did not lead to the necessary findings. Subsequently she turned to the current owner of the Berthold material originating from Casutt's collection. Neuendorff tried to set up a major international research project in 2005/2006 which should have entailed an edition of the missing medieval Latin *rusticani de communici*. The efforts were put on hold since funding for this intended project was not granted. In 2007, however, Neuendorff secured research funding as Senior Researcher with the Academy of Finland to work on a related project<sup>5</sup> and informed the owner of the project. She also sent him a list of her own publications to legitimize herself as an expert in the field. The subsequent result was that she was denied permission to do on site work or to digitize the texts to make them widely available to scholars. The *Rusticani de Dominicis* and the *Rusticani de Sanctis* are crucial documents to all Berthold von Regensburg scholars, since, as Neuendorff puts it in the research plan for her project funded by the Academy of Finland,

Latin collections of sermon condensates are based on vernacular (pulpit) sermons which (most likely are *not* handed down to us) and offer in their Latin form the structure and material with the help of which one could again formulate pulpit and read sermons in the vernacular.<sup>6</sup> It is important in the context of the project that on the basis of the Bertholdian sermon condensates there were written ca. 1250-1370 vernacular (read) sermons, which were handed down between ca. 1370 and 1450 in manuscript collections. These (read) sermons are prototypes of representatives of the new textual elements that religious prose contributes to

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<sup>5</sup> Between Latin and vernacular spheres - Latin sermon condensates and vernacular sermons attributed to Berthold of Regensburg (subcollections \*Y1 and \*Y2); application no. 119623, funding granted April 27, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> "The central collections, which have been verified as genuine through a prologue, are *Rust. de Dom.* and *Rust. de Sanct.* and *Rust de Com.*" The *Rust. De Com.* could not be found in Casutt's estate.

vernacular writing. The vernacular sermons attributed to Berthold of Regensburg thus form an intersection at which the relation between the Latin tradition and the emerging vernacularism can be shown. This is possible because the vernacular texts are bound to their Latin models so that the complex process of interaction between Latin scholarship and the vernacular for the laymen can be grasped here.<sup>7</sup>

Even though there persists an urgent need to make the Latin Bertholdian sermon condensates available digitally to scholars around the globe, the status quo in 2009 still is that there can be no certainty that they will be available on the Internet any time soon. This is one challenge scholars face on the threshold towards a genuinely digital research age.

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<sup>7</sup> This relation has not yet been explored by the relevant scholarship (cf. Richter (1969) and Heinzle, J. (ed.). (1984): *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit*. Band II/2. Königstein/Ts.). Separate studies are Neuendorff, Dagmar (2002a): Deutsche Berthold von Regensburg zugeschriebene Predigten als Herausforderung an die Editionswissenschaft und die Literaturgeschichtsschreibung. *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik* 34.2, 147-166; Neuendorff, Dagmar (2002b): Die typisierte Wirklichkeit – zu Predigten Bertholds von Regensburg. In: Matti Luukkainen/Riitta Pyykkö (eds.): *Zur Rolle der Sprache im Wandel der Gesellschaft*. Helsinki, 216-227; Neuendorff, Dagmar (2002c): Überlegungen zur Textgeschichte und Edition Berthold von Regensburg zugeschriebener Predigten. In: K. Luff/R.K. Weigand (eds.): *Mystik – Überlieferung– Naturkunde. Gegenstände und Methoden mediävistischer Forschungspraxis*. Hildesheim/Zürich/New York (= Germanistische Texte und Studien 70), 125-178; Neuendorff, Dagmar (2004): Etymologien in *Rusticani* und deutschen Predigten Bertholds von Regensburg. Struktur und Funktion. In: Irma Hyvärinen et al. (eds.): *Etymologie, Entlehnungen und Entwicklungen. Festschrift für Jorma Koivulehto zum 70. Geburtstag*. Helsinki (= Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique LXIII), 207-221; Neuendorff, Dagmar (2006): Si vis exponere, hoc fac. Zu deutschen Berthold von Regensburg zugeschriebenen deutschen Predigten und ihren lateinischen Vorlagen. Jarmo Korhonen zum 60. Geburtstag. *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 107, 347-359.

#### **4. Summary: Perspectives**

As our Berthold von Regensburg case probably has highlighted, there are many difficulties in addition to the financial power to purchase and subscribe to library licenses when searching for all kinds of philologically interesting materials in the digital age. Genuine difficulties arise when persons or institutions claim a monopoly for themselves and do not grant permission for certain materials to be made digitally available. The purpose that this restrictive behaviour serves will not be discussed here. It can only be stated that there certainly are many cases, Berthold von Regensburg being one of them, in which more tolerance for the needs of philologists worldwide could be desired. It sometimes seems that today we are faced with a continuation of the power games which date back to the Middle Ages, if not to Antiquity.