

NACHRUF

Helmut Gneuss

(29 October 1927 – 26 February 2023)

Helmut Gneuss was Professor of English Language at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich from 1965 to 1997 and was widely regarded as the world's foremost authority on the Old English language and Anglo-Saxon literary culture. But his scholarly interests ranged far beyond Old English language and literature, narrowly conceived, and embraced the study of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and libraries, as well as early medieval liturgy and, in particular, Medieval Latin hymns and hymnals, to the study of which he made a distinctive and lasting contribution.

Helmut Gneuss was born and raised in Berlin, and although he spent his teaching career at universities far distant from Berlin, the city of his birth was always his first love. It was an enormous privilege to be taken by him on a walking tour of sites remembered from pre-war Berlin, and to see the city through his eyes. (I should add that, although I had known him personally since 1972, it was through lengthy periods spent together, such as vacations together in Berlin, that I got to know him well to the point that, in German, we were on ›Du‹ terms and I always addressed him by his Christian name: for this reason, I refer to him in the pages which follow as ›Helmut‹, not Herr or Professor Gneuss, though I realize that the use of his Christian name will strike German readers as an uncomfortable tone of informality.)

Like many teenagers of that time in Berlin, Helmut was assigned to duty manning an anti-aircraft battery (he always said, with a smile, »I'm quite sure I never hit anything«). In the immediate aftermath of Germany's surrender, he was held with other prisoners of war in a compound on the site of the present Tiergarten in Berlin. As he recalled, the shivering teenage prisoners were patrolled in the compound by an English sergeant-major (no doubt sporting a moustache and swagger-stick) who, oblivious to the chilly weather, was dressed in short trousers, and Helmut, impressed by this nonchalance, remembered saying to a companion, »And we thought *we* were the master race!« It was perhaps an incident such as this, and the courteous way in which German prisoners were treated, which inspired Helmut's life-long admiration for England and the English.

In any event, following the conclusion of the war, Helmut went to study English, Latin and German at the Freie Universität in Berlin, with especial con-

centration on the medieval period. He always acknowledged a personal debt to the inspiration of one of his teachers, the Germanist Ingeborg Schröbler, whose scholarly interests extended beyond pure linguistics, and involved publication (for example) on the Latin rhythmical verse of Aldhelm, Boniface, and the circle of Anglo-Saxon missionaries who accompanied Boniface to Germany. From Ingeborg Schröbler the young student first learned to understand the Old English language within the wider context of the Latin learning and literature of the Anglo-Saxons, and not to limit his interest to the study of sound changes and Indo-Germanic etymology which characterized Old English language studies at the time.

Following the completion of his undergraduate degree, he next proceeded to doctoral research at Berlin, on the subject of loan formations from Latin into Old English. The supervisor of this doctoral research was Bogislav von Lindheim, who in 1951 had become Ordinarius in the Freie Universität in Berlin, and who earlier, in 1941, had published an edition of the Durham Latin-Old English plant glossary (preserved in Durham, Cathedral Library, Hunter 100). However, other members of the faculty in Berlin were working on subjects related to Helmut's doctoral research, and he evidently learned much from contact with them: Werner Betz had in 1949 published a study of loan formations in the Old High German translation of the *Regula S. Benedicti*, and Ingeborg Schröbler in 1953 published a study of the Old High German translation, by Notker III of St Gallen, of Boethius, *De consolatione Philosophiae*. Helmut's doctoral dissertation was approved in 1953 and subsequently published as *Lehnbildungen und Lehnbedeutungen im Altenglischen* (Berlin, 1955). The loan formations which constitute the focus of the study are drawn from Old English glosses to the psalter, as represented in fourteen surviving Anglo-Saxon glossed psalters; principal among these is the ›Vespasian Psalter‹ (London, BL, Cotton Vespasian A. i). Although many of the Old English glosses in these psalters had previously been published in some form or other, the situation in the early 1950s was such that it was necessary for Helmut to see the manuscripts in the flesh, and to make accurate transcriptions of both text and gloss. Since twelve of the fourteen manuscripts in question are preserved in English libraries, it was essential for him to spend an extended period of study in England. Thanks to the support of a British Council grant, he was able to spend two years as a research student at St John's College, Cambridge (1953–5). During this period, he completed work on his doctoral dissertation, but, perhaps more importantly, he laid the groundwork for his lifelong study of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

After the completion and publication of his doctoral work, Helmut Gneuss held various academic positions in England and Germany: as German Lector in the University of Durham (a position which had previously been held by

Bogislav von Lindheim) from 1955–6, and as Lehrbeauftragter and Wissenschaftlicher Assistent in the Englisch Seminar in the FU Berlin (1956–61), and then as Akademischer Rat in the FU Berlin (1961–2) and the University of Heidelberg (1962–5). During these years he began work on the huge research project which was to form the subject of his Habilitation, namely the study of Latin hymns and hymnals in medieval England, from the time of Bede to the late Middle Ages. When he first undertook this research, virtually nothing was known of the transmission of the hymns of the early Latin Church (particularly, but not exclusively, those of Ambrose), first to Merovingian Francia, and then to Anglo-Saxon England. Helmut's lasting contribution to this subject was his delineation of the two distinct phases of transmission, which he termed the Old Hymnal and the New Hymnal: the Old Hymnal, consisting essentially of the hymns prescribed by the *Regula S. Benedicti*, which had been brought to England at the end of the sixth century by the Gregorian missionaries, and which was known to Bede; and the enlarged New Hymnal, which was compiled somewhere in Carolingian Francia and was reintroduced into England during the course of the tenth-century Benedictine reform movement. Helmut reconstructed the contents of both hymnals, identified and described the manuscripts in which they were preserved, and identified and edited an *Expositio hymnorum*, a school-text preserved in two Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (London, BL, Cotton Julius A. vi and Cotton Vespasian D. xii) which was accompanied by Old English interlinear glossing.

The Habilitationsschrift was published as *Hymnar und Hymnen im englischen Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1968); it remains to this day the standard work on the hymns of the Anglo-Saxon church. In 1965 Helmut had been called to the Chair of English Historical Linguistics and Medieval English Literature at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich (surprisingly, and as an index of his great promise as scholar and teacher, he received the call before he had completed his Habilitationsschrift). He held this Munich chair from 1965 to 1997 (interrupted by two periods as Visiting Professor in the United States, first at North Carolina, and later at Stanford). During his lengthy tenure of the chair, he established what came to be known in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies as the ›Munich School‹. That is to say, he devised and directed a substantial number of doctoral dissertations, many of them published in the Munich series ›*Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischen Philologie*‹ (of which he was general editor), on an inter-related series of topics, all of which could be seen as arising from his own work on Anglo-Saxon liturgical manuscripts and the Old English glossing which frequently accompanies them: on religious poetry of the later Middle Ages (Karl Reichl), on the Old English translation of the *Regula S. Benedicti* (Mechthild Gretsch), on monastic canticles and their Old English glosses (Michael Korhammer), on the Old English Martyrology and its lost

Latin exemplar (Günter Kotzor), on the G-text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Angelika Lutz), on Winchester and the emergence of a standard Old English vocabulary (Walter Hofstetter), on the Old English translation of the *Capitula Theodulfi* (Hans Sauer), on the Old English translation of the ›Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang‹ (Brigitte Langefeld), on early Latin loanwords in Old English (Alfred Wollmann), on Ælfwine's Prayerbook (Beate Günzel), on the Durham Hymnal (Inge Milfull), on Old English interlinear glossing to the *Regularis Concordia* (Lucia Kornexl), on pericopes from the West Saxon Gospels (Ursula Lenker), on the study of classical rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England (Gabriele Knappe), on the Alfredian translation of Gregory's *Regula pastoralis* (Carolin Schreiber), on Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in the libraries in Paris (Birgit Ebersperger), and others. In sum, the publication of these dissertations stands as a major, indeed indispensable, contribution to our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon England, its language, and its Latin ecclesiastical culture.

Helmut's own experience with Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in English libraries, during work on his doctorate and later on his Habilitation, made him aware of the need for a reliable register of all Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. Although Anglo-Saxon manuscripts containing Old English had been expertly catalogued by Helmut's friend and colleague Neil Ker in 1957, at the time Helmut took up the Munich chair in 1965 no one had a reliable notion of how many manuscripts of Latin texts written in Anglo-Saxon England (that is, in the period before the Norman Conquest in 1066) existed, or where they were preserved. With the help of his Munich students, who were employed from departmental funds as Hilfskräfte, Helmut began assembling bibliographical files on all manuscripts which could be identified as having been written or owned in England before roughly 1100. Work proceeded during the 1970s to the point where a preliminary list of all such manuscripts thus far identified, consisting of 947 entries, was ready to be published in 1980 (*Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1980) 1–60). The publication of this »preliminary list« inevitably brought more Anglo-Saxon manuscripts to light, with the result that a much-expanded list could be published twenty years later as the *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* (Tempe, AZ, 2001); and this publication was followed by two sets of further addenda and corrigenda, published in the journal *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003) and 40 (2012). Both versions of the list (1980 and 2001) were essentially lists of library shelf-marks, with only skeletal information about the date, origin, and content of each manuscript. But it had always been Helmut's intention to provide a full account of each manuscript, with bibliography pertaining to contents, physical structure, script, decoration, etc., for each item. This intention was finally realized with the publication of *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments written or owned in England up to 1100* (with

M. Lapidge; Toronto, 2014). By now the list of manuscripts and fragments numbered some 1,291 items. *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* is recognized as a standard work of reference in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies and is consulted by scholars working in many related fields of Medieval Latin studies. Following publication in 2014, Helmut continued to accumulate bibliographical information pertaining to the manuscripts, with the intention of eventually publishing a revised edition. Unfortunately, Helmut's death has put an end to this intention. But the original files (on which *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* was based), with such up-datings as had accumulated by the time of his death, are now preserved in the Nachlassabteilung of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich.

Helmut Gneuss worked tirelessly for the advancement of Anglo-Saxon studies. He was a general editor of *Anglia* from 1965 until 1996 and continued to contribute book reviews (and to act as an anonymous reviewer) to the journal thereafter. He was an active member of the editorial board of *Anglo-Saxon England* from its inception (1972) until his death. He acted as an adviser to the Toronto *Dictionary of Old English*, and was active in a number of scholarly societies, including the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists (ISAS) and the Henry Bradshaw Society. He was elected an Ordinary Fellow of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in 1973 and acted as Chairman of several of the Akademie's Kommissionen, including those which oversaw publication of the *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* and the *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz*.

His international standing in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies was recognized by his election as Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy (1991), of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (1992) and of the Medieval Academy of America (1993). He was the honorand of three separate Festschriften: *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Cambridge, 1992); *Bookmarks from the Past: Studies in early Language and Literature in Honour of Helmut Gneuss*, ed. Lucia Kornexl and Ursula Lenker (Frankfurt am Main, 2003); and *Anglo-Saxon Books and their Readers: Essays in Celebration of Helmut Gneuss's Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, ed. T. N. Hall and D. G. Scragg (Kalamazoo, MI, 2008). On the occasion of Helmut's 90th birthday in October 2017, a conference by invitation was held in his former department in Munich on the subject of Anglo-Saxon ›micro-texts‹, followed by a dinner party attended by a hundred or so friends, former students and colleagues who had come from all over Germany and abroad. Helmut made a special point of touring the room in order to speak individually with everyone present in person. The proceedings were published as *Anglo-Saxon Microtexts*, ed. Ursula Lenker and Lucia

Kornexl (Berlin, 2019), and included an article by Helmut himself containing the edition of an unprinted Anglo-Latin liturgical poem from a manuscript in Rouen, which he himself had brought to light many years earlier. He kept actively engaged in scholarly activity like this up to his 95th birthday.

In the years following his retirement, he lived peacefully at Eichenau, a village some 20 km west of Munich, with his wife Mechthild Gretsche, a former doctoral student whom he had married in 1974, and who was a member of Helmut's department at the LMU until her appointment as Professor of Medieval English at the University of Göttingen (2002). After Mechthild's premature death in 2013, Helmut continued living alone and working quietly in the house at Eichenau, where he was frequently visited by former students and colleagues, both from Munich and (often) much further afield. He now lies peacefully beside Mechthild in a shady corner of the cemetery in Eichenau, secure in the huge scholarly achievement which marks him as one of the twentieth century's greatest medievalists.

Michael Lapidge