

Jackson, W. T. H., The Literature of the Middle Ages (Columbia University Press New York) 1960

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p. 174ff. There has been no lack of reseanch on the origins of the Germanic epic.

Since the rediscovery of the Nibelungenlied in the eighteenth century generations of scholars, principally German, have labored to uncover the details of epic transmission, /^{p.175} to establish the texts of epics that are extant, and to speculate about the form and content of works to which references can be found or which may be presumed from later tradition. The early nineteenth century remained in the shadow of the mighty Lachmann, who applied to the Nibelungenlied the theories of the formation of epics which split the Iliad and Odyssey into different lays and which made the author into little more than a compiler. The theory had unfortunate results, since it concentrated scholarly interest on hypothetical "pre-epic" lays (of which none were extant) rather than on the study of the actual texts. It led, furthermore, to the assumption that the Scandinavian works, in which a more primitive society was reflected, must necessarily be the origin of those written in Germany.

More careful study of the texts during the second half of the nineteenth century revealed that the few neglected voices which had spoken against ~~Lachmann's theories~~ had, nevertheless, been right. There were indeed short lays, of which the one extant example is the Hildebrandslied, but in style and treatment they differed so much from the extant epics that it was clear that mere assemblies of the one could not have produced the other. The Scandinavian Edda songs too, however closely their content might approximate certain parts of extant epics, were clearly of a different genre. The epic was reestablished as a definite art form which, as W. P. Ker wrote, "could not be made by a process of cobbling."¹

1. In Epic and Romance (1897)