

Article

Scandinavian Studies in Germany

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Abstract: Scandinavian Studies in Germany are usually conceived of as comparative literary and cultural studies, encompassing the historical and current spaces where Northern Germanic languages were or are spoken. The article focuses on the current situation of Medieval Scandinavian Studies—one of the three branches of the discipline—in the German-speaking area, explaining their comparatively strong institutional position as a result of the long and peculiar history of the research and its entanglements with political ideology. Against this background, an overview is presented of the present research projects, and current structural and political problems, as well as challenges for the future are discussed.

Keywords: Scandinavian studies; Old Norse Studies; Germany; German-speaking area; funding; education politics and policy; history of research; Nordism

1. “Skandinavistik”: The Situation within the Discipline

Scandinavian Studies in Germany are usually subdivided into a medieval, a modern and a linguistic branch. While medieval studies were established earliest and constitute the root of Scandinavian Studies in the German-speaking world, modern literary studies have become dominant in recent decades. Nevertheless, courses in medieval studies and Old Norse language still form part of the curriculum in nearly all of the B.A. and M.A. programmes in “Skandinavistik” offered at German universities. The discipline is defined as comparative literary and cultural studies encompassing the region where Northern Germanic languages are or were spoken, i.e., Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the Old Norse-speaking world of the Middle Ages. The Scandinavian departments, therefore, offer or strive to offer courses in Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish up to the level C1 of the European Framework of Reference for Languages. Icelandic is also taught, although in fewer places and often to a smaller scale. At some places, the discipline is integrated into one department along with Finnish Studies, although this does not imply that the two subjects are merged regarding research and teaching. Only at Mainz are Northern European and Baltic Languages (“Sprachen Nordeuropas und des Baltikums”) combined in one study programme. Scandinavian Studies have their ultimate roots in the idea that a “Germanic” cultural continuum once integrated large parts of Europe—which is viewed as obsolete today. Therefore, linguistics have been a part of the discipline from the start; however, Scandinavian linguistics are only represented in few places today. As professorships constitute virtually the only permanent positions in German academia—apart from lecturers, who teach language courses but usually do not conduct research—an overview of the number of professorships and their denomination at the respective departments (Table 1) provides a fairly accurate impression of the research situation and the areas of specialisation. It should be noted, however, that the table mirrors the structural discrimination of early career researchers, which is inherent in the arrangement of departments around simple professorships (“Professuren”) or chairs (“Lehrstühle”), with the latter being equipped with more academic and administrative staff. The younger researchers employed as part of the “equipment” of a professor, or in externally funded projects, thus remain invisible, although they conduct valuable and



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innovative research in their non-permanent positions. While the focus on professorships does not imply any consensus with this problematic structure and its resulting bias on the part of the author, it still portrays the structures as they are. The same applies to the situation in Austria and Switzerland, which are included in the list.

Table 1. Scandinavian Studies in the German-speaking area; number and denomination of professorships; inclusion of medieval studies in B.A. curricula.¹

University	Medieval Studies	Modern Literature and Culture	Linguistics	Medieval Studies Included in Curricula (Mandatory)
Basel	1 ²	0	0	yes
Berlin (Humboldt-Universität)	1 (JP/tenure track) ³	2	1	yes
Bonn	1	0	0	yes
Cologne	0	1	0	yes
Erlangen	0	1	0	yes
Flensburg ⁴	0	1	1	no
Frankfurt (Main)	1 (vacant)	1	0	yes
Freiburg	0	1	0	yes
Göttingen	1 (JP/non-tenure track) ⁵	1 (vacant)	0	yes
Greifswald	0	1	1	no
Kiel	1	1	1	yes
Mainz	0	0	1	no
Munich	1	1	0	yes
Münster	1 (vacant) ⁶	0	0	yes
Tübingen	1 (JP/non-tenure track)	0	0	yes
Vienna	1	1	1	yes
Zurich	1	1	0	yes

The number of departments has considerably declined in recent decades, and this trend is continuing: the departments at Bochum, Hamburg and Saarbrücken were dissolved, the future at Tübingen is uncertain, and Medieval Scandinavian Studies are to disappear from Göttingen. Due to the fact that professors are the only permanent staff conducting both research and teaching, early-career researchers being employed as non-permanent assistants (“Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter”), and as many departments only consist of one professorship, retirements and changes in employment repeatedly constitute critical moments for the very existence of these departments. This precarious situation is exacerbated by the funding structures. The basic funding of universities in Germany is provided not by the federal government but by the respective federated states (Länder). The ongoing shift in the funding of the universities from direct budgeting by the Länder to instable, non-permanent funding through third-party funds contributes to the financial pressure exerted on the faculties and their management of small departments. Programmes provided by the federal government and the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) solely rely on research projects and their output, and therefore do not contribute to the stabilisation of permanent structures. The small size of the Scandinavian departments, in turn, results from the history of the discipline in the German-speaking part of Europe. Therefore, an analysis of the present situation and its challenges will be based on a short overview of the historical factors that have shaped the discipline during the 20th century.

2. The History of Scandinavian Studies and Its Structural Implications

The predilection for Old Norse texts, especially the *Eddas*, among German-speaking scholars developed during the second half of the 18th century. Resulting partly from Paul-Henri Mallet's French translation of the *Snorra Edda* and the *Völuspá*, and transmitted through the German circle in Copenhagen (Bödl 2000, pp. 34–41; Zernack 2018a; Ljamin 2018), German critics such as Johann Gottfried Herder discovered the medieval Icelandic treatment of Scandinavian mythology as a source of new poetics, which came to be viewed as being more appropriate for the German people than those from classical antiquity (cf. Herder [1796] 1899, pp. 483–502; Schlegel 1812, pp. 165–67, 179–81, 194). While this enthusiasm for the North was originally a pan-European phenomenon, also including Ossian and “Celtic” mythology, emerging German studies (“Germanistik”) viewed the “ancient” North and its literary tradition as part of a common heritage for communities that speak Germanic languages. The idea rested upon the assumption that the mentalities, religious practices, legal customs and mentalities of ‘Germanic’ peoples had developed in the same way that the Germanic languages did, evolving from a common root. Jacob Grimm and his brother Wilhelm did not invent this idea of a common Germanic cultural sphere, but employed it in a way that is characteristic of 19th and early 20th century Germanistik, where Scandinavian texts came to compensate for the lack of mythological and early vernacular legal sources in the national tradition (Grimm 1828, esp. pp. vii f, xi f.; Grimm [1835] 1875, esp. p. viii f.; Timpe 1998, pp. 187–193; Kroeschell 1998; Timpe et al. 1998, for a general overview; Zernack 2018b). Thus, Göttingen, where the Grimm brothers were based between 1830 and 1837, came to be one of the first places in Germany where research on medieval Scandinavian texts was conducted. Consequently, it formed the corpus of medieval texts that at that time, were considered to be especially “genuine”, i.e., uninfluenced by Christian euro-Mediterranean culture, which first attracted interest in Scandinavian (and Old English) literature and culture among German-speaking scholars in the age of Romanticism. During the following decades, Old Germanic Studies, literally “Germanic Antiquity Studies” (“Germanische Altertumskunde”), developed as a major discipline encompassing literary studies, linguistics, history, archaeology, art history, legal history, and the history of religion. Its actual subject—“Germanic antiquity”—was defined not chronologically but typologically, by the absence of an alleged cultural amalgamation brought on by the adoption of Christianity, which was viewed as typically medieval. From this perspective, the North seemed to have conserved its Germanic character for longer than the continent.

As far as written sources are concerned, Roman texts such as those by Tacitus and the early *Leges* in Latin, Runic inscriptions in the older Futhark, sources in Old High German, younger Scandinavian rune stones and textual witnesses in Old Norse from the 13th century such as the *Poetic Edda* came to be treated by the same group of scholars (cf. Beck 2004; Brather et al. 2021). Scandinavian heritage formed one cornerstone of the key disciplines in the process of nation-building (von See 1994, pp. 64–159; Scheel 2018). As a consequence, scholars in German Studies (Germanistik) all over the nation dealt with Old Norse texts in both research and teaching. The first professorship with an exclusive denomination in Old Norse Studies (“Altnordistik”) was established at Berlin in 1894, its first holder being Andreas Heusler. The position was turned into a permanent chair in 1914, securing the continuity of the expertise (Glauser and Zernack 2005). Before and during the First World War, the first edition of the “Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde” (Hoops 1911–1919) was finished. While Scandinavian mythology and heroic poetry had been known to the German-speaking public since Richard Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* and the popularisations by Felix Dahn (Dahn and Dahn [1876] 1888; cf. von See 1994, pp. 110–24), the “Sammlung Thule” strove to popularise not only the *Eddas* but also Kings' Sagas and Sagas of Icelanders between 1911 and 1930. The translations were mainly provided by acknowledged scholars such as Andreas Heusler or his successor Gustav Neckel, who also aimed to infuse German literary prose with their ideas of an exemplary “saga language” (Zernack 1994, pp. 124–256; Zernack 2000).

The years of the Weimar Republic thus witnessed a continuity in the orientation of Germanistik as far as Scandinavian aspects were concerned; however, the anti-Republican radicalisation in conservative circles also left its traces during the Weimar years, not least in the “Sammlung Thule” and the way the allegedly “own”, “Nordic” heritage was presented to the public by scholars. Völkisch and racist thought increasingly came to be associated with the advancement of medieval texts from Scandinavia, facilitating their appropriation by national socialist ideology and propaganda (Zernack 2001, 2018b). While some scholars readily supported the Nazi regime, others were more reluctant despite the prevailing anti-Republican sentiment in academia or came into temporary conflict with the pseudo-science supported by National Socialist party organisations, especially in the earlier years of the regime (cf. von See and Zernack 2004, pp. 17–23, 145–50, 179–86; Paul 1985, p. 15 f.). Overall, it can be stated that Old Germanic Studies profited from the Nazi regime’s ideological interest in an alleged “Nordic” heritage and the financial support that this entailed. The excavation project at Haithabu and the funding of a runological institute at Göttingen can be named as examples (Link and Hare 2015; Paul 1985, pp. 13–18. Cf., as well as the biography of Otto Höfler, who actively propagated Nazi ideology: Zernack 2005a; Burrell 2020).

As a consequence, the whole subject came to be viewed as compromised after the Second World War. While most scholars were allowed to continue at their posts, one of the main consequences was that the Germanic paradigm came to be viewed as obsolete. Scandinavian Studies, just as English Studies and German Studies, were now increasingly defined as separate disciplines in their own right, which is mirrored in the foundation of Scandinavian Departments in the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1950s and 1960s, either as separate institutes or as formal subdivisions of German Departments. This, however, did not automatically imply a sudden change in research paradigms, which largely depended on the individual professors (cf. Bödl 2005; van Nahl 2022, p. 10 f.). Nevertheless, despite the continuity in staff, the new structures resulted in increased attention being paid to modern Scandinavian literature, which accompanied the establishment of Scandinavist curricula. As another consequence, teaching in modern Scandinavian languages was intensified. Many of the former Germanists specialising in Scandinavia had also taught and published on modern Scandinavian authors, with modern classics such as Knut Hamsun or Henrik Ibsen receiving special attention. (cf., for instance, the legacy of Wolfgang Lange, who held the chair at the University of Göttingen from 1964 to 1977: http://hans.sub.uni-goettingen.de/nachlaesse/Lange_Wolfgang.pdf [7 June 2022].) This tendency was formalised in the denomination of the chairs in the new institutes, which demanded that the holder should be able to cover a broad perspective of Scandinavian Studies in their teaching. The attention to recent and contemporary literary, cultural and political developments in the Scandinavian countries, which were viewed as exemplary in their younger history, their welfare programmes and, not least, their literary production resulted in the establishment of second professorships in several places. They focused on modern Scandinavian literature and culture, and the growth of the departments also constituted a reaction to the increase in the number of students since the 1970s.

In the classical distinction between chairs equipped with more associated staff and professorships maintained up to this day in most of the Länder, medieval studies mostly constituted the chairs at the beginning of this diversification. At present, the situation is reversed. Due to public interest and the area of specialisation chosen by the majority of the students, the focus has shifted towards modern Scandinavian literature and culture. This also resulted in the re-definition of the denomination in several places with only one chair. As the above table demonstrates, medieval studies constitute the smaller part of the discipline at present, and their situation is precarious in several places. Nevertheless, the medieval tradition still constitutes an integral part of the curricula, at least at the beginner level, at most of the universities where Scandinavian Studies are taught. At least on the level of research assistants, medievalist scholars are employed at nearly all the departments. This is not only due to the tradition of the discipline in Germany, but also to the obvious

importance of this cultural heritage for the modern Scandinavian nations. Therefore, the majority of scholars within the discipline perceive both fields of literary and cultural studies to be indispensable and closely connected to each other. However, the shift in university politics towards phenomena and trends that are of interest from a present-day perspective leaves medieval studies with a decided disadvantage, although the necessity to maintain expertise in analysing and explaining a tradition that is currently used and abused in many spheres of popular culture and politics is keenly felt at least within the discipline itself. At present, the situation of Medieval Scandinavian Studies resembles the general impression on the international level (van Nahl 2022).

3. Current Trends in Research

The history of the discipline in Germany is palpable up to this day, especially in medieval studies. Four main fields of interest are discernible today, one focussing on diachronic questions, addressing the culture and belief systems of the Late Iron Age (“Viking Age”) through the traces they left in the medieval tradition, maintaining connections to archaeology, folklore studies and the history of religion. The new edition of the “Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde”, which appeared in 35 volumes between 1968 and 2007, featuring a critical perspective of the Germanic paradigm while retaining the diachronic arrangement of its material, and its successor, the database “Germanische Altertumskunde online”, was and is co-edited by representatives of Scandinavian Studies. Thereby, the project also provides a connection between the participating disciplines, which have developed independently since the 1950s. The number of supplementary volumes (Ergänzungsbände), appearing since 1986 amount to more than 130 at present (<https://www.degruyter.com/database/gao/html> [7 June 2022]). The classical diachronic approach is tied to the revived interest in oral art forms and their transmission at an international level.

A second main direction defines Scandinavian Studies from a decidedly medievalist point of view. Influenced historically by the Icelandic School and by medieval studies in neighbouring disciplines, the medieval texts are primarily analysed as witnesses of their synchronous cultural surroundings, resulting in a focus on the transcultural aspects of the development of literature and culture in the North (cf. von See 1981; Zernack 2005b, pp. 121–26).

A third aspect, which has received a considerable increase in attention in recent years, is the manuscript culture of medieval Scandinavia. While this trend in medieval philology has been well-established for some time, scholars from the German-speaking world were among the earlier ones who focussed on manuscript culture beyond the Arnarnaganaean institutes preserving the manuscripts (for instance, Rohrbach 2014; Seidel 2014; Kupferschmied 2017). Due to the classical textual canon, the main interest in German academia has always been in Icelandic or West Norse texts. Only in recent years, and as part of the material turn, has the East Norse tradition has received increased attention (Brandenburg 2019; Bampi and Richter 2021).

The fourth field of research constitutes reception studies. The “Vikings” and Norse mythology have enjoyed great interest among the public for centuries, resulting in numerous and varied, often problematic, appropriations in politics, literature, fine arts, music, and popular culture. While the manifestations in high culture have been investigated for some time (e.g., Bödl 2000; Teichert 2008), research in popular culture is a comparatively recent and emerging field, which met the increased public interest in things that appear to be “Old Norse”, and among the students (cf. the projects at Frankfurt and Göttingen mentioned below).

Besides these main research directions, the history of the subject and its connections to the peculiarities of modern German history has received some attention. Due to the awareness that the German translations of the sagas in the “Sammlung Thule” had become obsolete and a new series of translations (“Saga—Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur”) was never completed, a new translation of the Sagas of Icelanders, accompanied by a longer

commentary, was edited in 2011, addressing the discipline's responsibility to explain its subject to a wider public (Bödl et al. 2011).

In recent years, members of the Scandinavian departments in the German-speaking world have coordinated or participated in a vast number of externally funded research projects, of which many included interdisciplinary and/or international cooperation, demonstrating the traditionally close links to the Scandinavian countries. The most well-known project is perhaps the Frankfurt “Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda”, which was published in seven volumes between 1993 and 2019. A large project on the reception of the *Edda* in modern times was also hosted at Frankfurt (see the series *Edda-Rezeption*. 6 vols. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009–2019; esp. Zernack and Schulz 2019). The project “RuneS” (“Runic Writing in the Germanic Languages”) was, or still is, based at Kiel, Munich, and Göttingen (<https://www.runesdb.eu/project/> [7 June 2022]; cf. Düwel et al. 2020; Bauer and Heizmann 2022), while the department at Kiel also participated in the international project “Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages”. Further projects address the Scandinavian ballad tradition (Kiel/Munich: Heitmann and Ygnborn 2016; Bödl and Preißler 2018; Heitmann and Martin 2018; Preißler 2019; cf. <https://www.isfas.uni-kiel.de/de/skandinavistik/forschung/balladen-projekt-1/balladen-projekt> [7 June 2022]), Sagas of Icelanders and narratology (Tübingen: “Texts in the Insular Distance. Narrative Concepts in Medieval Icelandic Literature”, <https://www.hf.uio.no/iln/english/research/projects/modes-of-modification/index.html> [7 June 2022], cf. Gropper and Rösli 2021; “Narrative (Selbst-)Reflexion in den Isländersagas”, <https://uni-tuebingen.de/forschung/forschungsschwerpunkte/sonderforschungsbereiche/sfb-andere-aesthetik/forschungsprojekte/projektbereich-b-manifestationen/b5-gropper/> [7 June 2022]), the idea of the “Viking” in modern museum exhibitions (Göttingen/Uppsala: “Mythos ‘Wikinger’—Konzeption und Rückwirkung auf die museale Ausstellungspraxis”, <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/598969.html> [7 June 2022]), and connections between Iceland and the Gaelic world and between landscape and myth in medieval Iceland (Munich: Egeler 2018, 2019; https://www.nordistik.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/heisenberg_islandfremdbilder/index.html [7 June 2022]).

4. The Situation of Medieval Scandinavian Studies

While medieval studies can be said to be firmly rooted in international networks and collaborations and are very visible with regard to research projects, the structural development of universities in Germany makes their situation precarious for a number of reasons.⁷

Rather unsurprisingly, the main problem is funding. As all the universities are state-run or function as a foundation under public law, they are also government-funded. Educational sovereignty in Germany, however, lies with the Länder and not with the Federal Republic. Therefore, each Land defines its own rules for the budgeting of its universities, which, due to the absence of noteworthy tuition fees, comes from tax revenues. Basically, funding is provided according to the number of students in the different faculties and departments but depends on the requirements of a certain degree of capacity utilisation in every teaching unit, on students finishing their studies within a maximum time frame, and on a maximum drop-out rate. In many Länder, these formulae heavily penalise subjects that rely on extensive teaching in foreign languages and cultures, especially those not taught in school, i.e., Slavonic Studies, Scandinavian Studies, Indian Studies, Portuguese, etc. As lecturers in foreign languages usually have only teaching and no research obligations, the high number of lessons they teach creates an enormous capacity according to the formula because the calculation method does not differentiate between foreign language studies that require more actual teaching and disciplines such as history.

While the number of employed staff is not the decisive economical factor, foreign language studies contribute to increasingly harsh penalty calculations, i.e., cuts in the faculty budget due to low capacity utilisation. This low utilisation, however, is often only found in the calculation charts. Another factor contributing to this imbalance between courses being

well-requested in reality and having low utilisation on paper is that, more often than not, only students with a major in Scandinavian Studies are included in the calculation. After a decline, their number has stabilised at a lower level in recent years, while the share of students with a minor has increased. At the same time, there is an enormous transfer of single courses and modules to other subjects, such as World Literature, Comparative Literary Studies or Linguistics, as well as a great interest in learning Scandinavian languages among students from all faculties. These students, and their contribution to the relevance of Scandinavian Studies, are usually overlooked in the statistics. As it is usually feared that a thorough re-evaluation of the formulae measuring the universities' performance would worsen the overall situation, a change in this peculiar situation for Scandinavian Studies is not in sight. Neither do Scandinavian departments have the right to choose their students; the absence of minimum criteria for being accepted as a student prevents the institutions from reducing the drop-out quota if they do not lower the standards of the exams.

The consequence is that faculties, depending on the overall financial situation of the respective Land and university, tend to perceive their Scandinavian departments to be an expensive nuisance, explicitly not due to the discipline being perceived as obsolete but rather to the funding mechanism. The situation is exacerbated by the shift towards large temporary research programmes such as the "Initiative for Excellence" (Exzellenzinitiative), funded by the federal government. In the case of success, the resulting research compounds create a surge of funds and positions, which usually prefer larger and emerging disciplines. As a consequence, new financial obligations for the universities are created because, once the programmes end, the funding is left open. The continuation of the new structures enhances the demand for cuts in other departments.

Further pressure on the philologies in general, and especially those not educating future schoolteachers, is exerted by the demand to professionalise students for the employment market, putting into question the relevance of in-depth literary and cultural studies. As professorships and (partly) lecturers in the languages constitute the only permanent staff, and due to the small size of the departments, the vacancy of a professorship often leads to considerations of closing down the department, or, where Scandinavian Studies form a subdivision of a larger departmental structure, to relocate the professorship towards larger neighbouring disciplines, for instance, German Studies. In the latter case, the sheer number of votes in the self-government of the departments leaves the smaller discipline in a helpless situation. In 2021 alone, two universities were affected by such developments: at Göttingen, the closing of the Scandinavian Seminar could be averted, but the junior professorship (Juniorprofessur) in Medieval Studies will be discontinued; at Tübingen, the chair has been replaced with a non-tenured junior professorship, enabling the university to close down the department after six years (cf. the protest on the internet: <https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/schuetzen-sie-die-skandinavistik-vor-streichungen> [7 June 2022]). Although an initiative by the Federal Republic, which monitors the status of small subjects, was installed in 2012 (<https://www.kleinefaecher.de/> [7 June 2022]), there is unfortunately no known strategic plan between the Länder to secure an even and stable representation of Scandinavian Studies (or other small subjects) all over Germany.

According to these structural issues, the situation of Scandinavian Studies is paradoxical. In a world which is increasingly globalised, with Scandinavian countries being very important trade partners and forming part of a closely entangled Europe both culturally and economically and the universities growing, the representation of Scandinavian Studies is declining. The resulting threat concerns first and foremost medieval studies, which constantly have to explain their relevance to modern society, as Jan van Nahl points out in his editorial to this Special Issue. Financial pressure thus implies that, in places with two professorships, medieval studies are plausible candidates for cuts, and departments with single professorships in medieval studies are endangered. In the face of recent developments in the intensified use and abuse of Old Norse sources in popular culture, questioning the relevance of Medieval Scandinavian Studies to present discourses appears absurd, particularly since highly problematic interpretations were coined by the Germanistik as it defined itself

up to the middle of the 20th century. At present, the omnipresence of “Vikings” in museums, movies, tv series and metal music, as well as the highly problematic appropriation of traditions viewed as “Nordic” or “Germanic”, such as the *Poetic Edda* and runic script by right-wing extremists, coincides with the re-appearance of völkisch ideology in the political discourse, as well as within parliaments (cf. Detering 2019; Langebach and Sturm 2015; <https://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/173908/glossar> [7 June 2022]). Parallel to this development and the enforced re-appearance of Scandinavian material in racist and extremist contexts, old scholarly publications representing such leanings are currently going out of copyright and, therefore, are more easily accessible to the public. It is the task of Medieval Scandinavian Studies to address these current abuses and to analyse and explain the history of the discipline, especially since, in German Studies, this aspect is no longer regarded as part of one’s own subject (Penke and Teichert 2016; Zernack 2018b; Meylan and Rösli 2020). Despite these obvious connections to the present—often enough, interest in the “Vikings” is part of the students’ decision to select Scandinavian Studies—and the fact that they are constantly addressed in publications and conferences and the amount of research in reception studies is growing, this relevance has to be explained and defended in communication with education politics both in and beyond the own faculties.

This tendency is encountered by a high cohesion within the Scandinavian departments themselves, which is structurally mirrored in the firm integration of medieval studies into the curricula in most places, making medievalists among the staff indispensable. Establishing teaching and research networks beyond the departments is a second pillar providing a certain stability. In many places, medieval studies from different disciplines have formed centres, which provide a framework for interdisciplinary research projects as well as for M.A. programmes in Medieval or Premodern Studies, by which, in turn, the transfer of courses to other subjects is also enhanced. This increasing cooperation with other subjects ensures that young scholars have access to a thoroughly interdisciplinary education, securing the integration of Medieval Scandinavian Studies into the network of the humanities in the future.

5. Conclusions

By conclusion, the general picture of Medieval Scandinavian Studies in Germany resembles the global situation of the humanities, and especially that of smaller philologies and cultural studies. However, there are some peculiarities. Due to the history of the discipline, the position of medieval studies was relatively strong to begin with, and while its situation today is definitely more precarious than that of Modern Scandinavian Studies, its very existence is not endangered at present. The sovereignty of the Länder makes it hard to survey the overall situation. This implies risks due to the absence of a national strategy to develop the universities but, at the same time, reduces the risk of rigorous centralist cuts, which could ruin the discipline over a short period of time. This threat, however, is realistic in the long run due to the low share of staff with permanent employment contracts and the extremely long time spent by scholars in non-permanent positions in German academia. Compared to international standards, this is a grievous disadvantage, first and foremost for the researchers but also for the departments themselves. As only professors are usually employed permanently, their age of retirement or change in position—totally arbitrary factors—dictate the rhythms of employment contracts and decisions about the future of a department. Therefore, faculties are tempted to regard their smaller departments as pawns, which they can redeem at rather regular intervals. Due to this instability and the shrinking number of professorships, the long-term prospects of young researchers within Germany are bad. As the chances of permanent employment are infinitesimal, depending on when professors retire and if professorships are retained, engaging in a post-graduate education and a non-permanent employment at the university necessarily implies a transfer to a different field of employment at a later stage, or emigration. The presence of German scholars abroad, especially in Medieval Studies, is a well-known

result of this constellation, which leaves smaller subjects in Germany with an especially marked international disadvantage in recruiting and securing talented and innovative young colleagues, even from within the country. As there is no discernible tendency to fundamentally alter the organisation of research units and the ensuing career structures, the resulting problems remain unresolved, and it is to be greatly hoped that Medieval Scandinavian Studies will continue to attract talented students and future colleagues despite these structural insecurities.

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- ¹ Cf. <https://skandinavistik.org/institute/> (7 June 2022); the curricula of the respective universities have been checked for mandatory modules with medieval contents at a basic level (i.e., introductions to medieval Scandinavian literature and culture/basic courses in Old Norse).
- ² The professorship is divided between the departments at Zurich and Basel.
- ³ The “Juniorprofessur” (junior professorship (JP)) is a non-permanent position offered to scholars who have finished their PhD. While it was originally intended to mirror the Anglo-American career scheme, offering tenure after a successful final evaluation at the end of a six-year period, most of these professorships at German universities are non-tenure track positions, terminating after six years without the option to continue.
- ⁴ Due to its position close to the Danish border and the education of Danish teachers, Flensburg University focuses exclusively on Modern Danish Studies.
- ⁵ After the end of the current contract, the position will be discontinued.
- ⁶ The denomination of the chair is not specified. Former professors specialised in Old Norse Studies.
- ⁷ The following presentation is based upon the author’s own experiences at Göttingen and communications with colleagues at other universities.

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