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The Vandalic Language –
Origins and Relationships

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UMSCHLAGBILD

Münze: 50 Denari Silber, Vandalenkönig Gelimer,
Münzstätte Karthago (um 530 n. Chr.)

Content

Preface

This book on the Vandalic language is not a grammar in its true sense. However, it is a book that attempts to come as close as possible to what can be considered as a grammar of Vandalic. Rather, it is a hybrid between a linguistic analysis and a descriptive grammar as it sets out to first exhaustively survey what little is attested of this language before aiming at outlining the recoverable general and also more detailed structure of the Vandalic language. The general purpose of this volume is to put Vandalic on the table for Germanic linguistics by showing how many unexpected insights into early Germanic can be gained from researching into this language. I felt it necessary to devise this book in such a way that future textbooks and overview works on early Germanic are able to devote more than just a footnote to this language. Moreover, with the last book-length examination of Vandalic having been published entirely in German more than 130 years ago, I hope to contribute to Vandalic becoming part of contemporary linguistic discourse once again after its century-long absence.

This being said, this book is intended to target an audience familiar with the core concepts of (historical) linguistics and somewhat experienced in the early Germanic languages. In particular, an understanding, however cursory, of Proto-Germanic and its scientific underpinnings eases the comprehension of the key points addressed in this volume. The experienced reader may perceive this book as an introduction to the Vandalic language but it should not be taken as an introduction to Proto-Germanic, early Germanic or early Germanic cladistics as I often discuss the application of particular Germanic linguistic details to Vandalic without giving a lengthy introduction to these details themselves. I would refer the interested reader to the many excellent textbooks that give an overview of these topics better than this volume ever could, given its scope.

I came to this project during the end of my undergraduate studies at the University of Tübingen when I came across a brief mention of Vandalic in a decades-old textbook on Germanic. Having just been introduced to Gothic and German linguistic history, I eagerly started to study this language which became my first scientific exercise in historical linguistics. Vandalic soon presented itself to me as a hidden gem unlikely to be found in such a well-researched branch of Indo European. The project then greatly gained momentum as I was able to make my investigation the topic of my master's thesis which in 2019, being an early version of the book at hand, was awarded first prize for that year's best master's thesis in linguistics by the linguistics department.

The project finally outgrew its early stage as I progressed to become a PhD student at the University of Konstanz. For this reason, I owe my gratitude to the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* and the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* for supporting my PhD financially, during which time this project could be finalised.

First and foremost, I am greatly indebted to my current PhD supervisor and mentor George Walkden (Konstanz) who read and commented on the full manuscript multiple

Terms and abbreviations

Proto-Germanic (PGmc)
The term Proto-Germanic denotes the last common ancestor of the Germanic languages. Proto-Germanic is reconstructed by the comparative method and as a result is not an actual attested language. However, there is little doubt that the discoveries obtained by the comparative method about the language are very close to reality primarily because it is possible to reconstruct Proto-Germanic quite precisely.

East Germanic (EGmc)
The term East Germanic does not refer to a proto-language like Proto-Germanic. In this work, it stands for a categorical term including those languages which were not subject to common Northwest Germanic innovations. For further details and discussion see 6.2 and 6.3.

Early Vandalic (Early Vand) and Late Vandalic (Late Vand)
These terms are used for illustrating relative chronology pertaining to certain language-internal changes that are recoverable from the data. Hence, they are solely used relative to each other to outline changes which seem to have occurred previously or subsequently in relation to other changes. As it is in many cases unknown how exactly the internal development of Vandalic proceeded, these terms do not refer to actual datable stages of Vandalic.

Pre-Vandalic (pre-Vand)
Pre-Vandalic refers to a stage of the language which predates Early Vandalic. Whereas *Early Vandalic* is used to denote a stage of Vandalic where recoverable language-internal changes had not yet occurred, pre-Vandalic is used in the context in which a hypothetical intermediate or transition stage from Proto-Germanic is assumed to better illustrate certain PGmc – Vandalic changes.

Conventions

An asterisk (*) denotes a reconstructed form. Note that all Vandalic forms occurring in this work are indicated as reconstructed. This is due to a decision based on the fact that Vandalic is not attested directly but via Latin and Greek. The assumptions about Vandalic are therefore only interpretations of the attested graphemic situation and they are to be understood more as reconstructions than actual attestations. Sometimes it was necessary to assume sounds or grammatical forms that do not occur as graphemes in the attestations themselves but which rather have to be retrieved from the effects they had on the particular graphemic realisation. Vandalic forms are always given in standardised reconstruction generated by applying observed phonological or morphological rules to forms which originally did not show the particular effect in their attestation. This situation necessitates a special indication and additionally justifies Vandalic forms as being reconstructed rather than directly attested like other daughters of Proto-Germanic.

Forms marked by two asterisks (**) denote hypothesised reconstructions. These forms serve to indicate forms not based on secure attestations. These forms include both hypothetical forms from attestations that are uncertain to be Vandalic and forms which are yielded by uncertain or unlikely phonological or morphological rules.

Although PGmc */au/, PGmc */ai/ and PGmc */eu/ (~ *iu) are displayed as phonemes in this work, it is assumed that they were always of the form vowel plus semi-vocalic *w, *j in Proto-Germanic (cf. Ringe 2017, 243-244). However, only where the diphthongs have different reflexes in the daughter languages in combination with certain consonants are they represented as */aw/, */aj/ or */ew/ (~ *iw) in these special cases.

Reconstructed Vandalic stems are indicated by '-' following the form. In cases where it is not clear if the Vandalic form possessed a thematic vowel, the reconstructed form shows '-' likewise. If only stems are reconstructed in Vandalic, it means that neither a nominative singular ending nor an infinitive can be securely reconstructed.

If in given Vandalic reconstructions the stem shows the character 'V' instead of a stem vowel, the stem vowel cannot be securely reconstructed, or the form is affected by word-final sound alternations. For this reason, the normalised, non-final form preceding a vowel is given, indicated by final 'V'.

The '-' at the end or the beginning of attested morphemes means that this attestation is the first or second element of an attested name.

Vowels marked with a macron '¯' denote bimoraic vowels, and those marked with a circumflex '^' indicate trimoraic vowels.

1   Introduction

This book sets out to be an exhaustive survey of the Vandalic language and the first book-length treatment of this language since Wrede (1886). It is also, at least in part, intended as a re-examination of the linguistic material with statistical means and in consideration of the current state of Germanic historical linguistics. Vandalic itself does not have a rich text corpus as Gothic does; rather, it is only scarcely attested in words found in inscriptions and historiographical work by contemporary authors. This lack of linguistic data is likely the main obstacle any investigation into Vandalic faces and the ramifications of this situation have strongly influenced how Vandalic is viewed in the context of Germanic historical linguistics. As a result, Vandalic is often perceived as a language that, for certain historical reasons, needs to be classified as 'East Germanic' (e.g. Reichert 2009; Wagner 2002; Wrede 1886) even when solid evidence is meagre.

A significant part of the problem is the vague definition of Vandalic as a language itself. It has been most saliently defined as the language of the Germanic-speaking community called 'Vandalii' by classical historians. This particular community achieved prominence in the so-called 'migration period' during late antiquity by putting an end to Roman rule of northern Africa. As famous as the Vandals became through their historical role in the decline of the Roman Empire, their origin is still nebulous and speculative. They had been mentioned several times by historians in antiquity, but these mentions were not consistent over a large time period, and nor did they agree on very basic facts. Moreover, classical historians identified two communities, which they called 'Lugii' and the 'Vandalii'. The contemporary consensus is, however, that those were, in fact, two different names for the same social group in the south of central Europe (e.g. Wolfram 1997).

Despite these apparent inconsistencies, early works on minor Germanic languages, including Vandalic, have often incorporated the Roman accounts as cladistic evidence into their linguistic examinations of those languages. The reasons for this can be found in earlier works on Germanic history. For a long time in the historical sciences, the Germanic communities were considered as proto-nations, each with an ethnicity, language and identity of its own. This view follows the nationalistic and ethnocentric political tendencies of the 19th and early 20th century where belief in the nation-state as a unity of ideas, values, language, and ethnicity was strong, especially in west and central Europe. Many researchers dedicated their academic lives to the investigation of the character, ethnicity and values of the 'Germanic' human. They mainly focussed on the testimony of Greek and Roman historians who described the history, politics and heritage of these peoples. [1] The sources were interpreted very freely and in most cases with the preconception that the 19th-century nation-states in central Europe can trace their origins

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[1]   A good overview of the different tendencies in the history of the field is provided by Kulikowski 2007, 34–70.

back to these Germanic proto-nations. Sources like Tacitus' *Germania* in particular were regarded as scientifically exact ethnographies of the Germans without noticing the need to contextualise these works within the historical, social and personal framework of the author in question. It is clear that historical linguistics itself was therefore put in a problematic position as the theories of that time proposed linguistic unity of all Germans and within the Germanic communities themselves. The interest in Germanic linguistics at that time was always accompanied by an interest in ethnic and cultural properties and the national identity of the Germanic communities which led to an intermixture of research interests. This historical excursus into the beginnings of Germanic historical linguistics is, however, necessary to understand the context in which the first approaches to the Vandalic language were made. In 1886, Ferdinand Wrede published his dissertation *Über die Sprache der Wandalen* where he examined Vandalic names and words with the intent to discover the true Vandalic idiom and to prove Procopius' and Jordanes' assumptions about the history of the (East) Germanic communities. He writes about a Vandalic nation with 'Arianism'[2] as the common religion for all members which would automatically result in all names of Catholics being seen as not Vandalic (Wrede 1886, 7-9). These assumptions clearly reflect how strongly nationalism and political ideas influenced the interpretation of ancient societies which in turn affected linguistic research to a great extent. For modern research within the same field of study, it is therefore necessary to evaluate the term 'Vandalic' again and what it denotes in all further references.

It is important to ascertain that Germanic communities were not homogeneous 'nations' as Wrede saw them. They were not a unitary society but a group that gathered around leaders they were obligated to serve or whom they trusted (cf. Wolfram 1997). This means that most likely the Vandals had neither a common ethnic or linguistic consciousness nor a Vandalic identity in the modern understanding of the term. What made them unitary was the Roman and Greek perspective which was biased by perceiving every social group from north of the empire's borders as distinct from Greeks and Romans but unitary in their difference as such. Instead, they were a political union under one or more leaders and/or divided into different political subgroups, merging with other communities and therefore a multi-ethnic, multilingual society (for the internal structure of Germanic communities see Wolfram 1997, 159–82). Therefore, the linguistic approach to Vandalic as a language should be careful to distinguish the language from the Vandalic community – in particular because the name 'Vandals' itself is an ethnonym that was attributed to this group by Romans and Greeks who were unfamiliar with the internal structure of tribal societies. The fact that they even distinguished the 'Lugii' and the 'Vandalii' by name even though they are seen as identical today shows the unreliability of ancient sources concerning Greek and Roman central European ethnography. It is therefore not necessarily the case that they perceived themselves as 'Vandals' or that there was any uniformity within the group. We would not even have any linguistic grounds for investigating the language of this group if it were not for the Germanic attestations in North Africa. Yet to avoid

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[2] The term Arianism denotes a Christological Homoiousian view which was a common doctrine amongst earlier Christianised Germanic-speaking communities. See Berndt and Steinacher (2014) for an introduction.

misconceptions associated through the influence of the classical historians, the language needs to be neutrally defined: In all further references 'Vandalic' denotes a Germanic language spoken by a community of speakers in northern Africa in the fifth and sixth century who were called 'Vandals' by Roman and Greek sources. It is clear that even adopting the name from the historical community is problematic as it inevitably leads to connecting the language to the community itself. One should therefore bear in mind that linguistically, the language must be examined detached from cultural or historical preconceptions as far as possible. Hence, this work is not intended to be a contribution to the historical sciences in the broad sense nor does it aim for new knowledge about the Vandals as a community or society as many other works do.

Vandalic is, as previously mentioned, considered to be an East Germanic language and, in this position, probably the best-attested language other than Gothic.[3] If one is interested in investigating the development of the earliest non-Northwest Germanic languages to split from Proto-Germanic (commonly referred to as 'East Germanic'), one would first have to start with a comparison of Gothic and Vandalic. Yet the missing information needed for further insights into East Germanic is the features of Vandalic itself. This work therefore aims to fill that void by creating the so far best possible exhaustive grammar of the Vandalic language and also to shed light on the implications for East Germanic which result from the findings. On the other hand, Vandalic also has the potential to be recognised as an independent language in the Germanic branch instead of being seen as a variety of Gothic. The similarity to other Germanic languages needs to be examined and addressed at the end of the analysis. Previous researchers[4] have compiled linguistic evidence about Vandalic from the existing attestations in the past, but they have neither attempted an extensive examination of the language on the basis of recent studies on Proto-Germanic, nor integrated modern methods of corpus analysis and statistics into their works.

Moreover, most research into Vandalic has been based on the method of determining the most plausible forms out of the large variety of attested names and words on the basis of Gothic phonology and onomastics free from Greek and Latin influence. This, however, is fairly problematic as there is a risk that findings about Gothic interfere with the actual findings about Vandalic. Furthermore, it seems tautological to examine only those variants of particular names that seem the most plausible from the perspective of Gothic. It is therefore unsurprising that it is often claimed that Vandalic was particularly close to or even identical with Gothic. It would be more suitable to clean the corpus of Vandalic attestations and the analyses from attempts to judge the Vandalic attestations too early in the process by discarding phenomena that do not accord with the Gothic (or presumed 'East Germanic') evidence. It is too often the case that observations in Vandalic are discarded solely because they do not match their Gothic counterparts.

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[3] Other East Germanic communities which might have spoken an East Germanic language, mentioned mostly in earlier works, include the Gepids, Burgundians, Rugii, Herulii and others. (König and van der Auwera 1994, 20; Lockwood 1972, 97; Hutterer 2008, 133)

[4] E.g. Wrede (1886), Reichert (2009), Tiefenbach (1991), Snædal (2009), Scardigli (1974) and Francovich Onesti (2002).

I therefore decided not to compare Vandalic with Gothic during the initial stage of the analysis or to assess the results and their likelihood by using Gothic as standard reference. The only reference of this corpus will be reconstructed Proto-Germanic, i.e. how Vandalic differs from its parent language. In these sections, Gothic only appears in examples to illustrate a certain linguistic phenomenon. It is not used to serve as a reference point for the analysis of the Vandalic material itself. Whether or not Vandalic is similar to Gothic at the end is up for discussion which I will also conduct later in the process (see section 6). Proto-Germanic is the only suitable frame of reference, as it guarantees that the results for Vandalic reflect a neutral development from the parent language, treating Vandalic as independently as possible. Previous researchers who used Gothic spelling, phonology and morphology as a reference point have provided possibly biased findings as they let preconceptions about the supposedly close relationship between Vandalic and Gothic influence their judgement.

In this process, it is also necessary not to cleanse the Vandalic source material from Latin and Greek influence but rather to use our knowledge of Late Latin and Greek phonology to identify the properties of the Vandalic phonetic system. As we are fairly certain how individual graphemes were used and which sounds were part of the phonetic inventory of Latin and Greek, we can determine how speakers of Greek and Latin in the late antiquity may have perceived Vandalic. By examining their spelling, we can reconstruct the Vandalic sound system and its development from Proto-Germanic. Most times I will analyse at Latin and Greek attestations separately as they often follow different spelling conventions and have a different phonology. I will also contrast Latin with Greek attestations for particular Vandalic characteristics as evidence for some phonetic qualities of certain attestations become clearer in comparison. This can occur when each language exhibits only parts of the sound qualities and the reconstructed sound quality can be obtained by combining the evidence from both languages.

In this work, I present a different approach: I will take all attested Vandalic names and words into account, including all attested forms and variants. In this way, each representation of a Vandalic sound recorded via Greek or Latin graphemes enters the corpus. The most likely form will therefore not be determined in advance but rather by statistical methods.

1.1   The Vandalic language in its historical context

As I have already touched on in previous sections, previous treatment of the Vandalic language has not sufficiently taken into account the special circumstances under which Vandalic was attested. Therefore, I will go into more detail about the historical context of the Vandalic language, mainly regarding the definition of what is 'Vandalic' and what we know about the structure and group identity of early Germanic-speaking communities. The purpose of this chapter is not to give a detailed elaboration of the history of the Vandals as this would draw the scope of this book away from the linguistic points. Other works have given much more in-depth analyses and outlines of the history of the Vandals (e.g. Francovich Onesti 2002; Berndt 2007; Miles and

Merrills 2010) than this chapter could ever do. Instead, I will illustrate the social and historical circumstances which are necessary to define the Vandalic language and that give insights into the specific background of political communities at that time which can in turn help us understand what problems defining a 'Vandalic language' entails.

First of all, classifying the Vandals and their language as 'Germanic' is a primarily linguistic argument which holds primarily for a majority of Vandalic attestations. However, the linguistic records clearly show that Vandalic is not the only language attested in the group identified by Roman and Greek sources as 'Vandals' since we find Suebian and Alanic words and names alongside the Germanic, indicating that Vandalic was spoken in what was a multilingual community (as suggested by the heterogeneous composition of these groups (Heather 2009, 20)). [5] We find, for example, the name <Basa> in a North African inscription which can be identified as cognate to Middle Persian /bāz/ 'falcon, hawk' (Francovich Onesti 2002, 179).

The earliest roots of the Vandalic language trace back to Proto-Germanic from which it split and hence need to be located in the area where the Proto-Germanic language was spoken in central Europe. Reconstructible Proto-Germanic itself was, according to the contemporary scientific consensus, an Indo-European variety spoken in northern Europe after 500 BCE (cf. Mallory 1989, 87; Ringe 2017, 84; Fortson 2011, 338.). The origins of the Vandalic language, however, are much younger: The Germanic languages slowly diverged over a longer time period during which certain linguistic features develop independently of each other until the varieties diverge to a degree which is cladistically significant to establish subgroupings. Exactly how much younger the language is is probably indeterminable, as dating the inception of the Vandalic language is very much conditioned on how the linguistic relationship to other early Germanic languages is determined (see section 6). What can be stated, however, is that the environment in which Vandalic emerged was the dialect continuum in the area which Roman sources called *Magna Germania* (cf. Frey and Salmons 2012, 6).

These accounts have to be treated with caution as classical sources contradict each other. The Vandals are sometimes regarded as a collection of smaller subgroups, sometimes as a coherent community (Pohl 2000, 23). This confusion might be due to the Roman and Greek authors' ignorance regarding the community structure of the population in this area at that time.

Rather than attempting to identify a coherent, temporally and spatially stable group as 'Vandals', we have to consider the circumstances of the various groups to better understand their internal structure:

Other than what the Roman and Greek sources suggest by identifying individual communities in the Magna Germania region, group identities and groups themselves were fluid among the population at that time. This means that we cannot speak of 'ethnic identities' that the members of various communities have towards a certain group since ethnicities are not fixed reference points of identity at that time (Heather 1996, 4-5). What characterizes a member of one group in contrast to the other is not so much defined by language or history but a momentary allegiance with a certain

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[5] See Francovich Onesti (2002, 179-183) for a comprehensive list and discussion of Alanic and Suebian names.

community. This means that the borders of a group are open to incorporate members of various different backgrounds (Heather 1996, 4-5).

Within these heterogeneous groups, it is often the political aspect that rallies group members around the leaders of that group. The political groups themselves often emerged as heterogeneous entities as they came into contact with the Roman Empire (Heather 2009, 20). *Political* in this context is meant to denote common political acting on the part of a certain group towards other communities, be it alliances, war or collective movement. Insofar as the identification of the Vandals is concerned, this means that what Roman and Greek sources identify as 'Vandals' was a group that did not have internal linguistic nor ethnic or cultural coherence but was perceived as a political actor relative to other groups.

For this reason, the group which constitutes the 'Vandals' from the linguistic perspective is the political unit which crosses the Rhine in the year 406/407 and raises Roman awareness. Before this event, we have few written records from which to draw insights about this group (Berndt 2007, 73). In this earlier period, 'Vandals' is a — probably unjustified — collective name for multiple different communities (Berndt 2007, 82).

The linguistic history of the Vandals thus continues only with this particular heterogeneous group which becomes the main and only source of Vandalic linguistic material. Linguistically, the movement away from the Germanic dialect continuum which marked the spatial separation of the Vandalic language thus constitutes the latest possible point at which Vandalic split from the core Germanic area. It means that this 'ethnogenesis' of the Vandalic group encompassed many different groups and speech communities and in this process, many different groups were additionally incorporated in the following time (Berndt 2007, 142-44). To conclude the examination of the historical circumstances, it is worth emphasising that the Vandalic language as such came into existence not by linguistic definition but by the migration of the speech community away from the dialect continuum.

After having looked into the historical context of Vandalic, we need to ask the question of how this affects linguistic research on the Vandalic language. What conclusions can we draw and how do we need to view the language as a result?

Firstly, it is necessary to conclude that Vandalic is not a monolithic entity insofar as it, too, was comprised of multiple varieties which were, at the outset of the language, integrated into the early Germanic dialect continuum from which Vandalic formed. This observation is unsurprising and likely trivial since contemporary Germanic linguistics, for the most part, does not treat the Germanic daughter languages as monolithic entities as if they were supra-regional standard languages. We know that the broad definitions of e.g. Old English and Old High German are umbrella terms for various smaller regional variants that do not adhere to a common standard but which share features that make it possible to define broader linguistic groupings. The treatment of Vandalic, however, requires even more caution concerning this issue as it is different from the other Germanic languages in two important aspects: (1) intra-textual coherence and (2) circumstances of attestation.

(1) Intra-textual coherence cannot be established in Vandalic since the entire source material is made up of attestations of individual words or small phrases. This means that, in essence, every attested instance of a word in Vandalic could potentially have a