



The Wessobrunn Prayer | Das Wessobrunner Gebet

Text Information

Author | Anonymous

Language | German

Period | 9th Century

Genre | Devotional literature, Devotional poetry

Source | Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 22053, fol. 65v-66r.

Collection | Hymns and Histories: Early German Writings, 800-1000 CE
Prayer, Spirituality, and Life after Death:
Global Medieval Perspectives

URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/wessobrun_prayer/

Transcription, translation and introduction by Hannah Frakes.

Introduction to the Text

The Wessobrunn Prayer is one of the only extant examples of Old High German alliterative verse, in which alliteration is the primary poetic feature. Notably it was intentionally preserved in a codex (manuscript book) of collected texts, including several Latin texts and German glosses. This is unusual: most extant Old High German texts were written in the margins and endpapers of manuscripts. Latin was preferred for church writing as the more prestigious and official language. The Wessobrunn Prayer is similar thematically and formally to the Old High German poem "Muspilli." The codex has been dated to around 810 CE, and the prayer is written in Carolingian Miniscule (the standard script of the time). The prayer was named for the abbey at Wessobrunn in Bavaria where the codex resided for centuries before it was discovered and studied by philologists and eventually moved to the state library in Munich. The location where it was written and the identity of the author are unknown, though it was certainly someone with a knowledge of theology, perhaps a cleric or a monk. The prayer itself speculates about God and the universe before Creation, and emphasizes the power of the Holy Trinity and the nothingness before creation. There is a possible Anglo-Saxon influence: a star shaped rune is used for the common prefix "ga-," and the format is similar to prayers used by Anglo-Saxon missionaries as they spread Christianity in Germany during the 8th century. Some of the language at the end of the prayer is parallel to the Nicene Creed, a declaration of faith standardized by the church in the 4th century. Scholars are interested in the Wessobrunn Prayer because of its unique poetic form. It is possible that there were many similar texts that did not survive.

Introduction to the Source

The Wessobrunn Prayer is held at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Clm 22053, fol. 65v-66r.



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De Poeta [Das Wessobrunner Gebet]

Dat gafregin ih mit firahim firiuiuizzo meista,
dat ero ni uuas noh ûfhimil,
noh paum ... noh pereg ni uuas, ni ... nohheinîig,
noh sunna ni scein
no mâno ni liuhta,
noh der mâreo sêo.
Dô dâr niuuiht ni uuas enteo ni uuenteo,
enti dô uuas der eino almahtîco cot, manno miltisto,
enti dâr uuârun auh manake mit inan cootlihhe geistâ.
enti cot heilac...
Cot almahtico,
du himil enti erda gaworachtos,
enti du mannun so manac coot forgapi,
forgip mir in dino ganada
rehta galaupa
enti cotan willeon,
wistom enti spachida enti craft,
tiuflun za widarstantanne, enti arc za piwisanne endi dinan
willeon za gauurchanne.

Of the Creator [The Wessobrunn Prayer]

This I learned among men as the greatest wonder,
That [once] there was neither earth nor heaven above,
Nor was there tree ... nor mountain nor... anything,
nor did the sun shine,
5 nor did the moon glow,
nor [was there] the great sea.
When there was nothing, neither end nor change,
there was the one almighty God, the most generous of all beings,
and with him there were many glorious spirits.
10 And the holy God...
Almighty God,
You who created heaven and earth,
And gave men so many good blessings,
in your mercy, grant me
15 true faith
and good will,
wisdom and cleverness and strength
to resist the devil, and to shun evil and
to work your will.