

The Sea in the German Heroic Epic: Notes on *Das Nibelungenlied*

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The sea plays an important role in much heroic literature and exploits at sea are common in the literary traditions of those cultures in which sea voyages are a part of everyday life: thus sea adventures are a central element of epic texts in literatures from the cultures of many of the sea-faring peoples of Europe. The poet of the most important medieval German heroic poem, *Das Nibelungenlied*, who probably came from the border region between today's Austria and Bavaria, was not, by all accounts, familiar with travel at sea, and yet adventures which include sea-crossings are also of central importance in his narrative. This paper intends to examine the way in which he envisaged sea travel, discussing the role the sea *plays* in his poem, considering the extent to which maritime space is given a symbolic meaning in *Das Nibelungenlied*, and finally also analysing the way in which crossing the sea is related to traversing other stretches of (inland) water (i.e. the rivers Rhine and Danube).