

Old Frisian Terms in the "Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch".

The Multilingual Approach of the Dictionary of Historical German Legal Terms

The Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch (German Legal Dictionary) is the most comprehensive dictionary of German technical terminology. Despite its name, it focuses exclusively on older legal language. Moreover, the dictionary does not only contain German historical legal terms, but also legal terms from all West Germanic languages. It covers the legally relevant terms from the beginning of Germanic written tradition (about 400 AD) up to 1815 (word occurrences in the online version until 1835) and comprises, in addition to Modern and Middle High German, e.g. Old English (500-1100), Lombardic (650-1000), Old Dutch (700-1200), Old Saxon (800-1200), Old Frisian (800-1500), Middle Dutch (1200-1600) and Middle Low German (1200-1650). Each entry analyzes a word from its first historical record until the beginning of the 19th century, which in some cases spans more than 1400 years.

From the perspective of legal historical research Old Frisian is of special interest. This language has been handed down mainly in numerous legal sources, which not only represent a specific vocabulary, but also provide an exciting insight into past living conditions – demonstrated by words like “sinekerf” (Sehnekerb, punishable dissection of a tendon), “sawenbethe” (Siebenbuße, sevenfold fine) or “sponste” (Sponst, seduction).

When the project will be completed, the Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch is expected to consist of 16 volumes with about 120,000 main entries. About 95,000 main entries in more than 20,000 columns have been printed so far – in alphabetical order from Aachenfahrt (pilgrimage to the coronation church of the Holy Roman Empire at Aachen) to Stadtkanzlei (city chancellery). Every year more than a thousand new entries will be added.