

Paul Kwauka/Richard Pietsch. **Kurisches Wörterbuch.**

Mit einer Einführung von Prof. Dr. Erich Hofmann. Verlag Ulrich Camen, Berlin, 1977. (=Schriftenreihe Nordost-Archiv, bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Eckhard Jäger. Heft 13). With a large color map of the Couronian area. Paper. 86 pages.

This book is really unique: it presents the relics, or the remains of a language that is no longer spoken. Generally speaking, this Couronian language is the most mysterious language in the Baltic group of the Indo-European language family. The only thing that all the linguists, who had been interested in this language, now agree about is the fact that this language does belong to the Baltic group. Although earlier there had been opinions (e.g. V. Kiparsky) considering this Couronian language as an originally non-Baltic, non Indo-European even, namely, as a kind of Balticized wayward branch (or dialect) of the (Ugro-Finnic) Livian (also known as Livonian).

Now, the real, the older Couronian was a Baltic language that had died out many centuries ago. It was then spoken in the peninsula of Courland, in the present-day Latvia, stretching for some distance into NW Lithuania, i.e., into the present-day Samogitia. This real, older Couronian died out in the 14th and 15th centuries; the remnants of this language were absorbed by Latvian in the North and Lithuanian in the South.

The Couronian represented in this Dictionary was spoken, for centuries, on the (Lithuanian) Couronian Isthmus, and some of it also existed on the eastern shores of the Couronian Lagoon. Whether this latter Couronian has much, if anything, to do with the Couronian of the 14th century, is not clear. Only, perhaps, the name is the same. Most linguists consider this latter Couronian as a later Latvian dialect which was heavily influenced by Lithuanian on the one hand and by German on the other.

The Dictionary itself comprises pp. 17-87, each page in two columns: Couronian-German, about 100 words per page; thus, about 8,000 words of this language preserved. In such a way, at least partially, this now extinct language has been rescued from total oblivion, from complete disappearance. One wonders, however, how reliable the data are. If it is, indeed, reliable, then one can see from the first glance that some of the words preserved in this Couronian are very important both for Baltic linguistics as well as for Indo-European (comparative) linguistics. A few simple examples will illustrate the above.

On page 19, we note the Couronian word *dag* f. — Ernte ('harvest'). The f. signifies the feminine gender. This is a very important piece of evidence that this word has, indeed, originally meant "the warmest/hottest period of the summer when harvesting is done." It is derived from the basic Proto-Indo-European root **dheg-/*dhog-* "to burn." Cf. Lith. *degti* "to burn", etc. (English *day* also comes from this root as well as German *Tag* 'day'). Another interesting feature here is the fact that this word is of feminine gender in Couronian, while in most of the other Indo-European languages it is masculine.

On page 47, we find the word *laps* m. — Fuchs ('fox'). In Couronian, apparently, this word is masculine, while in most other Baltic languages it is usually feminine.

There are many German loanwords in this Couronian. It is not surprising since Couronian and German have been neighbors for centuries. Some of the German loanwords show a curious twist, or shift, in their meaning. On page 57, cf. the word Cour. *pankok* f. — Spiegeleier ('eggs sunny-side up'). Obviously, it was borrowed from some German dialect of northern East Prussia, but it must have undergone some interesting shifts in meaning because in most German dialects as well as in Standard German the word *Pfannkuchen* simply means 'pancake(s)'.

The compilers, the editors, and the publishers of this Dictionary deserve a sincere bunch of thanks!

