North Asian studies in West Germany

In 1971 a remarkable project was started in Göttingen under the auspices of the "Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft". Titled "Nordasiatische Kulturgeschichte" (North Asian cultural history), the project was to combine the efforts of at least four competent scholars during a period of 12 to 15 years to yield ultimately a comprehensive modern picture of the history and prehistory of the North Asian peoples and languages with special reference to Tungusic. The original plan, as presented by the project initiator, professor Gerhard Doerfer (Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher 45, pp. 267—270), involved two basic tasks: first, the editing and translating into Western languages of a representative selection of Tungusic folkloric texts, and second, the compiling of a complete etymological dictionary of Tungusic. Both the texts and the dictionary were to be accompanied by extensive commentaries, planned to appear as special monographies devoted to various problems concerning the social structure and the material culture of the Tungusic peoples, dialectology, onomastics, descriptive lexicography etc.

The idea of covering an essential part of the general North Asian ethnic and cultural history within a single project of Tungusic studies was, without doubt, sensible. The central role of the Tungusic peoples in the North Asian area is obvious to anyone from a glimpse at the ethnic map of present-day aboriginal Siberia. Moreover, the comparative scarcity of modern scientific work on Tungusic seemed, in the early 1970s, to call for an immediate intensification of Tungusic studies. It is true, the importance of Tungusic had, by the start of the West German project, already been recognized by others as well, particularly in the Soviet Union, and some overlapping in the work carried out by Tungusological teams in the two countries seemed unavoidable. In its general extent, however, the West German project on "North Asian cultural history" knew, in its planned shape, no parallels in the history of Tungusology, nor, for that matter, in the history of the study of any other ethnolinguistic group in North Asia. Indeed, if duly completed, the project would have meant an immense contribution to North Asian studies, probably comparable only to the lifework of M. A. Castrén. Unfortunately, it remains to be said that the West German team of Tungusologists were apparently never able to overcome the initial problems of organization and coordination. Despite an ambitious start the whole project seems to have practically faded away in less than a decade, with results only remotely reminiscent of the eloquently presented original

plan. This is not to say, however, that the project resulted in nothing: on the contrary, its impact on the future development of North Asian studies is certainly of great value both directly and indirectly.

Two volumes have appeared in connection with the West German project on "North Asian cultural history". The originally planned multivolume ethnological and linguistic commentaries are so far represented by a single collection of Tungusological articles:

Beiträge zur Nordasiatischen Kulturgeschichte. Herausgegeben von GERHARD DOERFER und MICHAEL WEIERS. Tungusica, Band 1. Herausgegeben von MICHAEL WEIERS. Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1978. viii + 202 p., 1 map.

In view of the fact that this is the first volume in a series devoted to Tungusic studies, published by a selected collective of competent Tungusologists, it is rather surprising to note the heterogeneity of the contents. The volume contains seven articles, of which only two are of general Tungusological interest: "Classification problems of Tungus" by Gerhard Doerfer, and "Notes on a map of the Tungusic peoples and their dialects" (with a map appendixed) by Robert T. Service. Actually, one would have expected the new series to be opened by a whole volume devoted only to this type of general problems: classification, demography, history, anthropology and ethnography of the Tungusic peoples. Now, instead of this, as many as five of the seven articles deal with randomly chosen special problems concerning the folklore, historical phonology, grammatical and lexical materials as well as ethnonymics of various Tungusic peoples and languages: "Überblick über die Materialien zur lamutischen Folklore" by K. A. Novikova (aus dem Russischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen und bibliographischen Angaben versehen von Wolfram Hesche), "Urtungusisch ö" by Gerhard Doerfer, "Urtungusisch ö in erster Silbe (= *$ö_1$) im Lamutischen" by Wolfram Hesche, "Solonisches Material aus dem Huin-gol (nach R. Kamimakis Sprachmaterialien umgearbeitet, annotiert und herausgegeben)" by Hiu Lie, "Über die Benennung der Udihe" by Hiu Lie. The editor of the volume may have had his reasons for this thematic heterogeneity, but the reader cannot avoid the impression that a well-motivated worry about the future of the series, and of the whole project, has been the basic reason.

There is no doubt that all of the articles published in the first volume of "Tungusica" are qualitatively of the highest class: the presentation of facts is consistent, the documentation is accurate, and the suggested conclusions are logical, well-balanced and, there-

fore, normally very convincing. It is evident that this high qualitative level has been achieved, in the first place, thanks to the guidance and general involvement of professor Gerhard Doerfer. It seems, indeed, that most of the original ideas presented in the volume, especially as far as interpretations of dialectology and diachronic phonology are concerned, derive from him. Of immediate value for all future Tungusological work are, for instance, Doerfer's remarks on the classification of the Tungusic languages, now presented in a partly revised version. Well aware of the complexity of the problem Doerfer recognizes two basically different types of classificatory criteria: diachronic (based on the relative chronology of dialect splitting) and synchronic (based on the degree of superficial linguistic similarity). However, the concrete classification suggested by Doerfer seems to be neither diachronic nor synchronic, but an attempt at a synthesis of the two approaches. Typically, Doerfer prefers to divide the Tungusic language family in three (Northern vs. Central vs. Southern), not two (Northern vs. Southern) major branches. The problematic transitional idioms of Arman (between Lamut and Evenki) and Kili (between Evenki and Nanai) are interpreted by Doerfer as independent languages, not as aberrant dialects. Justified as all interpretations of this type may be, it would be interesting to know how native speakers themselves would evaluate various alternative classifications. For instance, the speech of the Orochi is normally, and by Doerfer also, considered to be classificatorily closer to Udihe than to the Nanai-Ulcha-Orok group, but native speakers are reported to view the situation differently (see V. A. Avrorin, Rodstvennye svjazi oročskogo jazyka s drugimi tunguso-mańčžurskimi, in: Istorija i dialektologija jazykov Sibiri, Novosibirsk 1979).

The other volume produced by the West German Tungusological team is a Lamut dictionary, which alone stands for the initially projected series of descriptive lexicographical works on various Tungusic idioms:

GERHARD DOERFER & WOLFRAM HESCHE & HARTWIG SCHEINHARDT. Lamutisches Wörterbuch. Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1980. xc(xcii) + 1181 p.

It has, without doubt, been justified to choose Lamut among all the Tungusic idioms as the primary object of a comprehensive dictionary project. Although morphophonologically rather innovative, Lamut is both phonologically and lexically one of the most archaic Tungusic languages, apparently because of its geographical position in the northeastern periphery of the language family. Moreover, the existing standard dictionaries of Lamut are not

very suitable as sources for detailed linguistic work because of the orthographical problems created by the complicated Lamut phonological system. Thus, the preparation of a critical reedition of the available lexical materials of Lamut has long been one of the most urgent tasks in Tungusology, and this is exactly what the compilers of the new "Lamutisches Wörterbuch" have attempted. As it has been impossible to carry out any new fieldwork among native speakers of Lamut, the dictionary is based completely on printed sources, the most important of which are, of course, the Russian-Lamut and Lamut-Russian dictionaries by V. I. Cincius and L. D. Rišes (Russko-èvenskij slovar', Moskva 1952; Èvensko-russkij slovar', Leningrad 1957). Several other relevant collections of Lamut words have also occasionally been consulted, but, unfortunately, some of the most recently published literature has remained unconsidered, notably the Western Lamut materials collected by Arvo Sotavalta and published by Harry Halén (Westlamutische Materialien, Mémoires de la Société Finno-ougrienne 168, Helsinki 1978). Generally, it seems that the "Lamutisches Wörterbuch", despite its apparently very careful preliminary work, has finally appeared in a somewhat unfinished shape. For instance, the entries are ordered in two separate alphabetical sequences, corresponding to the two basic sources: the incorporation of all entries in a single alphabetical sequence would have been a minor task that would have greatly added to the practical value of the dictionary. Nevertheless, such shortcomings should not hide the fact that the "Lamutisches Wörterbuch" is, and will probably long remain, the only truly reliable source of Lamut lexical material. Of special interest is also the extensive introductory part of the dictionary, with detailed comments on Lamut phonology and orthography, and, somewhat surprisingly in a descriptive work, on foreign (Turkic, Mongolic, Russian) elements in Lamut.

The West German project on "North Asian cultural history" had an important message: North Asia is a huge geographical territory whose complex ethnological and linguistical study has long been neglected on the international level. It may be satisfactory to note that Soviet scholars are doing increasingly intensive research on North Asia. However, to develop the field internationally, projects such as that initiated by professor Gerhard Doerfer should definitely be encouraged. Today, in the early 1980s, it can, of course, be asked whether Tungusology should any more stand in the center of such projects. After the appearance, under the editorship of V. I. Cincius, of the Soviet comparative-etymological dictionary of Tungusic (Sravnitel'no-ètimologičeskij slovar' tunguso-man'čžurskix jazykov I - II, Leningrad 1975—1977) it is, for instance, not so urgent to proceed directly to a more detailed analysis of the history of the Tungusic lexicon. Why not

concentrate efforts, say, on an intensive project on the Palaeo-Siberian peoples and languages, perhaps with special reference to Yeniseic? However, whatever the object of study, it is clear that no scientific project will flourish without the smooth collaboration of a sufficient number of competent scholars representing a broad basis of expertise.

JUHA JANHUNEN

Streiflichter aus Sowjetkarelien

Wir sind gewohnt, personengebundene Kulturgeschichte in Buchform erst dann zu lesen, wenn die Schaffensperiode der Beteiligten abgeschlossen ist. Es ist eine Seltenheit, wenn ein Autor dem interessierten Leser ein derart aktuelles Buch beschert, wie es hier der Fall ist. Dass es sich dabei um eine zuverlässige und objektive Beschreibung einer Gegend handelt, die nicht ohne weiteres jedem zugänglich ist, erhöht den Wert der Publikation, die hier vorzustellen ist:

PERTTI VIRTARANTA, Karjalaisia kulttuurikuvia (Karelische Kulturbilder). Ihmisiä ja elämänkohtaloita rajantakaisessa Karjalassa (Menschen und Lebensschicksale im Karelien jenseits der finnischen Grenze). Weilin & Göös. Espoo 1981. 272 S. + 64 Bildseiten.

Es ist ein sehr persönliches Buch. Es ist mehr als eine moderne Reisebeschreibung par excellence, die uns Pertti Virtaranta, der Lönnrot unseres Jahrhunderts, der Lönnrot des Tonbandzeitalters, wie er in Finnland auch heisst, hier vorlegt. Lebendig, ja spannend geschrieben, durch hervorragende Fotografien von Helmi und Pertti Virtaranta ergänzt und umrahmt, voller erstaunlicher Detailkenntnisse und -angaben.

Virtaranta beschreibt — sine ira et studio — die geistige Kultur des heutigen Sowjetkareliens aus finnisch-karelischer Sicht, wie sie sich ihm bei seinen zahlreichen — insgesamt elf — Forschungsreisen darstellte, die er zum Zwecke linguistischer bzw. folkloristischer und auch ethnographischer Tonbandaufzeichnungen meist gemeinsam mit seiner Frau unternommen hat. Das vorliegende Buch ist gewissermassen ein Nebenprodukt dieser Reisen.

Virtaranta ist ein ausserordentlich produktiver Autor. Wir verdanken ihm nicht nur unzählige Tonbandstunden mit Aufzeichnungen aus verschiedenen finnisch-ugrischen Sprachen, vor allem dem Karelischen (660 Std.) und Lüdischen (55 Std.); er gehört