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Linguistic commentaries on the “Verzeichnis veralteter oder wenig bekannter litauischer Wörter” collected by G. Ostermeyer in Lithuania Minor (Kleinlitauen)

The “Verzeichnis” is an alphabetical list of approx. 158 lemmas collected and supplied with translations and occasional comments by Gottfried Ostermeyer (1716-1800), a Protestant pastor in Trempen (lith. Trempai) in *Lithuania Minor* – as it was part of Prussia, the author of “Neue Littauische Grammatik”¹. The list was obviously compelled while Ostermeyer worked at collecting and publishing 1793 Lithuanian folklore material under the title “Erste Littauische Liedergeschichte”². However his collection didn’t manage to attract proper attention, largely because of methodological disputes among the intellectual community in Prussia of late 18th cent. upon his publication 1781 of “*Giesmes sventos baznyčioje ir namej’ giedojamos su nobaznoms maldoms – vienas knygas suglaustos nu G. Ostermejerio Karaliaučiuje*”. It comes out from the brief comparison with the Lithuanian dictionaries of that time, primarily with that by Ruhig / Mielcke,³ which appeared in Königsberg 1800 – that is shortly after Ostermeyer issued his “Liedergeschichte”. Though Mielcke and Ostermeyer were in contact, the former was not likely to be familiar with the word list: his dictionary lacks certain lexemes of it and diverges in the translational equivalents of some other. Nor later dictionaries seem to incorporate Ostermeyer’s material. Mielcke (lith. Kristijonas Gotlibas Milkus) criticized heavily Ostermeyer’s pragmatic attempts to adapt Old Lithuanian folklore to contemporary perception and succeeded in abolishing his songbooks. That the two didn’t consider each other close friends is fairly obvious.

Later etymological dictionaries of Lithuanian on the one hand relied fully on Mielcke, on the other focused on “literary” lexicon of early Catechisms, leaving vernacular outboard.

The wordlist itself is of high interest from the linguistic viewpoint both as to the etymology, and to dialectal affiliation of different lexemes. It contains many lexemes, the dialectal status of which is to be verified. Ostermeyer was perfectly aware of the fact,⁴ that folklore wordstock was largely influenced by German spoken in East Prussia and sorted out carefully what he considered the authentic material.

The intended talk will take a closer look on some words survived due to Ostermeyer’s list and discuss them from the angle of language history.

¹ *Neue Littauische Grammatik ans Licht gestellt von Gottfried Ostermeyer*. Königsberg, 1791.

² *Erste Littauische Lidergeschichte ans Licht gestellt von Gottfried Ostermeyer...* Königsberg, 1793.

³ *Littauisch-deutsches und deutsch-littauisches Wörter-Buch / worinn das wom Pfarrer Ruhig zu Walterkehmen ehemals heraus gegebene zwar zum Grunde gelegt, aber mit sehr vielen Wörtern, Redens-Arten und Sprüchwörtern zur Hälfte vermehret und verbessert worden von Christian Gottlieb Mielcke, Cantor in Pillckallen.*

⁴ V. Gerulaitiene (2001), *Abraham Jakob Penzel und sein Interesse an der litauischen Literatur in Ostpreußen*. In: Annaberger Annalen. Jahrbuch über Litauen und deutsch-litauische Beziehungen 8(1): 73.