

The Kaschuben

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When translating a document that contains proper names, I am never sure which direction to go. Keep the original name, or make it more Anglicized. In the following translation, I have done both because sometimes it seemed to be significant to stay with the original, while at other times nothing seemed to be lost in Anglicizing it. I have no information as to who author F. St. was. I browsed the whole 1931 Calendar and did not come across any other mention of a person that would fit the F. St. signature.

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[Translation Begins]

The Kassuben

Historical Study by F. St.

All Swabian people in Bessarabia call those who speak the Low German (*plattdeutsch*) language, Kashuben (Kassuben). Today, our Swabian and Plattdeutsch folks peacefully live in full harmony next to and with each other, the later primarily in purchased land of daughter communities, hundreds of Plattdeutsch folks have cheerfully taken Swabians to be their wives and many a Swabian has chosen a smart Kashuban woman to be his companion. And they do not regret it. If they were to be free and had to marry again, they would probably do it once again. —It was not always like that. Swabian and Kashuban folks were only too glad and eager to tease, mock, make a fool of, josh, and irritate one another whenever they came together, for example, at a place of business, or a tavern, at the market, at a wedding, or at the occasion of some special festival; during military recruitment, etc. There were then rude jokes, foul jokes, rough jostling with words and sometimes, in fact, clenched fists if it actually came to that. It started off with “Hey, Schwab, Hey, Kaschub,” and those words were both considered as insult names. Using the word “Schwab,” the Kaschuban insinuated dumb head and with “Kaschub,” the Swabian implied an inferior, second class person.

However, we actually do not have any old Kaschuban (proper Kassuben) in South Russia, at the most, a few migrated from or via Poland to the south along the Black Sea.

Our task for today will be to confirm the fact and establish it. In olden times, a *plattdeutsch* person was not a Kaschub, not the ones from the Paris Colony, who came from Mecklenburg.

Even their great funny compatriot Fritz Reuter was no Kassube, but a *plattdeutscher*, a northern or Low German, and the Mennonites are also not Kassuben. I say this up-front: The Kassuben were in no way Germans, but originally of Slavic origin and made up their own twig, branch or root of the Slavic race, the Wends in Pomerania, which are now happily germanized and want to be considered as proof of being one hundred percent full Germans. To my knowledge, this topic in the "DZB" and its calendar, or in the one-time *Odessa* [newspaper], or in some other German Colonist newspaper, has not yet been thoroughly or exhaustively treated, but it has in the daily press of Germans abroad. Over time, I have read some, but more so I heard from a junior German officer who, in 1918, was here with the German Army of Occupation and knew his way around concerning this question, because he was born in Pomerania and in his private profession was teacher, called himself "Schoolmaster by God's grace, numbered among the Water Poles (*Wasserpöhlen*) or Wends". Today, after a few decades, the difference has almost completely disappeared, at least externally and in economic terms, between the Swabians and the Low Germans (*Plattdeutschen*), mistakenly called Kassuben, The Low Germans have adapted to the Swabians, at least have become much closer. With this introduction, we move on to our actual topic.

Of all Slavic tribes who, during the time of people migration, settled in the abandoned German lands, no one had as sharply a marked out natural region as the tribe that lived between the Oder River and the lower course of the Vistula River. For many centuries, their nationality ranged from the shores of the Baltic Sea to the valleys of the Warthe and Netze Rivers, where wide, and only in very few places able to be crossed, wilderness swamp areas formed the protective borders next to Greater Poland.

We have the Germanic writers to thank for the first historical reports about the Baltic Sea Slavs beyond the Oder River. They are distinguished from the other Slavs, with no special name, usually poorly identified as Slavoni, Slavi, by Adam of Bremen, which he recorded back in 1072, and also by Helmold and Sasca Grammaticus. Only a little later than Adam von Bremen, there lived the oldest historian of Slavic descent, the Russian Monk Nestor, who handed down a classification of the entire Slavic people of that time. Nestor mentions that a Slavic people from the lower Danube country emigrated and settled on the Vistula River and were called Lechen, "some of these Lechen were called *Polen*, others *Lutizier*, others *Masouier*, and others *Pommern*". Here, for the first time, we meet up with the name Pomerania (*Pommern*); it was the name that the residents by the sea, between the Oder River and the Vistula River, were to be identified as, formed from the preposition *po*=meaning "on" and the noun *more* or *morze*=meaning "sea".

Kudlubek, the oldest historian of Polish origin, lived one hundred years after Nestor. He wrote his Chronicle around 1200, at a time when Western Pomerania had already become a German feudal Duchy, and East Pomerania, subjugated already before 997 by the Poles, recognized only to some degree as under Polish supreme sovereignty. Kudlubek called Western Pomerania from the Oder River up to Lebasluss always only as Pommerania; and East Pomerania, whose controller he improperly viewed as being the Polish State holder, *Pomorze* or also *Maritima*.

Only a few decades after Kadulubek had written his Polish Chronicle, a new name surfaced for Western Pomerania; "Cassubia", first in documents of Sauntopolts, the East Pomeranian princes, which was completely independent of Poland and even called *dux totius Pommeraniae*. This name *Cassubia* was adopted by the Poles. The Polish historian Boguphal, whose Chronicle stopped at the year 1250, called the residents of West Pomerania *Casubitae* and, at one point, also *Caszubae fen Slavi...*

At about the same time, the name "Kassuben" was already being used in West Pomerania. The Dukes of this country had similarly called the Polish vassals in the East *duces Pommeraniae*, later *Slaviae*, but already since the middle of the thirteenth century, documents used the title of *duces Slavorum et Cassubiae*. It is uncertain whether this close association of Slavian and Kassubian, West Pomeranian, also the land between the Oder River and Leba, disintegrated into two districts, Kassubian and Slavian. Anyway, the title *de Slavia* came into use after a while, as already the greater part of the present day Western Pomerania (*Vorpommern*), the country of the Lutizier, had been conquered by the West Pomeranian princes. With the division of western Pomeranian territory among these princes, the title of *de Slaviae* was used at first for the newly acquired tracts of land on the left bank of the Oder River.

Until the 17th century. West Pomeranian authors never used the name "Kassuben" for that part of the Slavic population. They were always only spoken of as *slavi*, if they wrote in Latin, as "Wends" when they wrote in German. Kantzow, who wrote the first Pomeranian history in High German around 1540, had a chapter titled: "Of the origin of the people and land of Pomerania, Kassuben, Wenden, Stettin and Rügen" and said: "These folks, up until Christianity and a few years after that, were Wends; and even at this time there is a whole area in Eastern Pomerania (*Hinterpommern*) where there are still only Wends"; and in another place: "Now the name Wend or Slav, which are one and the same thing, is despised". Of all the Slavic tribes, the Wends, including the Kassuben, were the last to accept Christianity. Two generations after Kantzow's death, in 1612, traveler and geographer Lubin produced a map of the Duchy, all of West Pomeranian. He wrote in his diary, as he made his way from Pollnow to Rhein River Treblin, "Here we gradually encountered the Wends". Then he did not speak again of the nationality of the inhabitants of the country until, on the return journey to Stettin in the region of Stolp, after the village of Grossendorf, when he reported: "There is no German man in this place".

In the same way, the area around Stolp is called "Kassubei" by the inhabitants of western neighboring districts. Even in Stolp, the district, below Lupow and Leba, is still designated as Kassubian, where there are actually Slavic-speaking residents in the church parishes of Gross-Garde, Charbrow, Zezenow, Schmolsin and Glowitz.

The title of Duke of Kassubia and Wend was maintained by the Pomeranian royal line and died out in 1637 with the Brandenburg=Prussian regency. As for Eastern Pomerania, the Latin name of *Pommerania* was retained by all the country gentry. Around 1380, we still find the designation "Land by Pomerania" in documents, but towards the end of the reign of gentry orders (*Ordensherrschaft*), the name "*Pommerellen*", not yet completely forgotten even today, was successfully adopted.

Much later, as the name Pommerellen came to be known for the district of the Teutonic Knights (*Deutschen Ordens*) on the left banks of the Vistula River, those from the south, where the advancing Polish language, which had not supplanted the indigenous, Old Pomeranian dialect, called it Kassubian.

So little as we are able to prove at what time the name "Kassuben" was used to identify all descendants of the Old Pomerania who did not adopt the use of the German or Polish languages, so little are we able to demonstrate the limits of today's Kassubian language.

By and large, you may consider the old military road from Konitz to Dirschau as the boundary line where the Polish language completely supplanted the Kassubian dialect. North of this line, Kassubian was preserved as the vernacular. If that be the case, the Kassuben would ultimately have to call to mind that they are the descendants of Old Pomeranians and not of the Poles. The German understanding of their home landscape accommodates them nicely.

It is no longer the case that any derogatory reference to being "Kassubian" is made any more in these educated circles. Quite the opposite is the case, as it is shown, also on the German side, that there is a certain pride in the Kassubian homeland, as can be seen by societies which either have only German members, or where Germans make up the majority of members which have incorporated "Kassubian" in their name.

Fortunately, it is to the credit of these societies that they endeavor to collect all the related folklore material in the widest extent, and have set the goal especially for the preservation and encouragement of the Kassubian language.

Times have changed. In November of 1813, Goethe, without provoking his contemporaries, spoke these sharp words: "I no longer see French, it is true, but instead Cossacks, Bashkirs, Croats and Kassuben."

As it is known, the Low Germans (*Plattdeutschen*) in Bessarabia emigrated largely from the czar's Poland; but they came to Poland 50 to 100 years earlier from various regions (*Gauen*), provinces and lands of northern Germany, a few also from Pomerania, and these few can well be the actual *Kassuben* in whose veins some Slavic blood still flows.

[Translation Ends]