

DISCUSSION

THE ESTONIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVES AS A KNOWLEDGE HUB

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Abstract: The article focuses on matters both in Estonia and abroad that have influenced the establishment of the folklore archives in Estonia, ideological trends within the work of the archives, material coverage, and the development of the archives from an institution preserving collections into a research institution.

Keywords: Estonian Folklore Archives, disciplinary history, folklore archives, folklore collections, folkloric texts

The 90th anniversary of the Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA) once again brings to mind national romantic ideas and views of the spiritual awakening of eighteenth-century Europe. The forming of national identity is a powerful force that is always accompanied by the intellectuals' endeavour to treasure their nation's past and, by valuing its culture, helping to determine what their national identity really is. It is noteworthy that Herbert Tampere (1909–1975) considered it necessary to introduce Enlightenment era theorist Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744–1803) opinions about folklore in his speeches at the Estonian Folklore Archives in the climate of World War II, and at the Tallinn Conservatoire¹ in his lecture cycle "Research Methods and Problems of Musical Ethnology" in 1946–1947. Herbert Tampere's speeches for the 30th and 40th anniversaries of the EFA have been published, helping us understand the Archive's role and capacity as a knowledge hub from the second half of the twentieth century onward.

In nineteenth-century Estonia, folklore collections were owned by both scholars and amateurs and mainly served the interests of their owners. Tampere estimated that none of these collections was ever large enough to offer a satisfactory overview of all types of folklore, or to represent every region of Estonia. In

fact, what exactly to collect seems to be the main issue within folkloristics. The general term *vanavara* (old treasures, material heritage) was considered suitable by F. R. Kreutzwald, the compiler of the national epic *Kalevipoeg* (Kalev's Son). For a more systematic collection, mentors were needed who were found from both near and far: Jakob Hurt (1839–1906) in Estonia, Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923) in Latvia and Kaarle Krohn (1863–1933) in Finland.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Jakob Hurt, the main organiser of the Estonian folklore collection, gave a speech about the collection of old treasures at the Congress of the Ancient Times Researchers in Riga. The speech did not refer to the Herderian pre-Romantic approach but focused on the history of the collected material and on its historicity as a treasure in and of itself. Hurt also emphasised that people's collective memories were a "large and living chronicle" which taught us "to know the old times". Some of these attitudes from two centuries ago are still relevant today. Even though we can find a place to discuss the necessity of the archive in today's economic wealth-oriented society, the main function of a memory institution is still considered to be conservation of the past.

In 1891, Jakob Hurt notified Kaarle Krohn that he had created an organisation system for the folklore items (49 volumes) that had been sent to him thus far. He had organised the items topographically by parish and format. Items received from the same correspondent in one year were placed together. These principles of assembly are still valid today. What has turned out to be even more important, however, are Hurt's collection principles, which shaped and guided the discipline of folklore on a wider scale. Even though he was also planning to start with a compilation of folk songs in his book *The Chronicles of the Estonian Nation*, published in 1876, he was already carried away with the idea of covering the whole of Estonian oral tradition. In *The Chronicles*, Hurt suggested five divisions: I – The Old Harp, II – The Old Wisdom, III – The Old Beliefs, IV – The Old Tales, V – The Old Customs (runo songs, proverbs, beliefs, folktales, and descriptions of customs, respectively) (Hurt 1989: 33–34).

Hurt's appeal "Paar palvid eesti ärksamatele poegadele ja tütardele" (A Couple of Requests to Estonia's Most Active Sons and Daughters), sent from St. Petersburg in 1888, incorporates many topics under the sub-theme Old Customs and Observances, including surveys of the different phases of a man's life – birth, marriage, and funeral, folk calendar holidays, day-to-day life, folk medicine, games, professions, garments, buildings, supernatural beings, folk astronomy, meteorology, nature, many plant names with their Latin equivalents, minerals, and tools. So, what then has happened to the statement that folklore is the intangible oral **artistic** creation of a nation? It should be added that Hurt was not one of those office clerks who did not have any contact with other people;

he was rather the opposite – he knew life in the countryside well. He worked as a private teacher for the family of the nature explorer A. T. von Middendorff and was well versed in folklore collection and publishing practice. Thus, it is understandable that Hurt's 'chronicles' had to reflect the people's way of life.

In addition to Hurt it is worth mentioning the other initiator of folklore collection in the nineteenth century, Matthias Johann Eisen (1857–1934). Eisen played a remarkable role in shaping and completing the treasury of Estonian folklore. Both Hurt and Eisen had completed studies in theology, although neither let his education influence his research and collection principles. Compared to Hurt, Eisen's collection initiatives were nevertheless more inclined towards folk belief and were more motivated by his will to publish rather than his desire simply to archive the collected material. He preferred to collect such genres as riddles, folktales, proverbs, anecdotes, representations of supernatural beings and folk calendar holidays. The fact that some local folklore correspondents had sent the same texts to Hurt and Eisen was revealed in the 1960s when a workgroup was putting together an academic publication of the Estonian proverb corpus. This was a good lesson in the methodology of archive work, in the application of statistical methods in research, for example. Eisen's numerous popular editions clearly demonstrate the effect that publications had on the material that was later submitted to the archives. Eisen's collection – which was at that time used as a practical tool by the folklore students of Tartu University – remained an exemplary teaching tool for subsequent folklorists. It should also be added that folklore collection, which was known by the code EVR (Estonian Republic Folklore Collection) received a new code during the Soviet era that did not contain the name of the Estonian Republic; it was renamed E, St K, which stands for the Collection of Eisen's Scholars.

The Herderian understanding of folklore as something that is the result of an artistic creation (see Jaago 1999) is slow to recede, especially since it outlasted the Soviet era definitions of folklore, which always refer to an *oral poetic creation* or *traditional intangible artistic creation*. In fact, the everyday research material collected through Hurt's initiative was considered to belong to the research field of ethnographers during the Soviet period. Even though in the 1980s new aspects of the concept of folklore were emphasised in its international definitions, reports on customs still consider so-called classical folklore to be more valuable than anything else. The collection (125,000 pages, the result of the work of approximately 1,400 correspondents) that was handed over to the Finnish Literature Society for deposition after Hurt's death in 1907 was actually planned as a donation to the Estonian National Museum, an institution that was supposed to have both intangible and tangible material (Tampere 2009 [1957]: 212 ff). Since the EFA did not have a proper depository room,

they did not become part of the museum. The Estonian National Museum's fireproof depository, however, was well suited and so the material rests there; to this day it is called Hurt's Room or Hurt's Cellar. The very same room hosts M. J. Eisen's collection, amongst others. (At the end of summer 2017, collections were transferred to a new repository, and a folklore collecting exhibition has remained in this room.) In parallel with the development of various archives, the specifics of the institutions managing the archives evolved: the Estonian National Museum, with its tangible culture collections, became the State Ethnographic Museum of Estonia, while intangible culture was preserved at the Estonian Literary Museum. The idea of combining the two and establishing one institution, called the Estonian Culture Institute, was thoroughly discussed at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s.

By the time the EFA was founded in 1927, Antti Aarne had already put together a tale type index in Finland (based on Hurt's collection), which remains important in international folkloristics. Hella Wuolijoki's runo song typology, which was given to the Estonian Folklore Archives as a gift in 1927, also remains usable today. A general organisation system for text copies of the entire corpus had to be created quickly. Among the research base's collections compiled 90 years ago, Hurt's collection is the most extensive one, having influenced the development of Estonian folkloristics as well as research preferences.

Herbert Tampere stated that he considered the start of Estonian folkloristics as a scientific discipline to have been in the 1920s, when Professor Walter Anderson, who had visited several folklore archives in other countries, started teaching archive work at Tartu University. Study under Anderson included the practical work of copying and organising Professor Eisen's collection. However, the 27-year-old innovative archive head Oskar Loorits had probably more influence on methodology than Professor Anderson, who followed the historic-geographic approach. The creation of organisation systems for the collected material also helped determine the general research directions for the archive workers. Card indexes were organised according to the principle that everyone did everything, and everyone developed their own personal fields of research: Herbert Tampere studied the different layers of folk music, Richard Viidalepp customs and storytelling traditions, Selma Lätt family customs, professions and the folk calendar. Gaps in previous collection activities were discovered and efforts were made to fill them on field trips. A network of local correspondents was created, collection expeditions were guided and children's participation in the collection of bogeyman tales, folk games and local lore was organised. The archives also initiated the collection of the folklore of other nationalities living in Estonia, volumes of which were organised by nationality (Russian, Latvian, German, Jewish, etc.).

The main objective of the research conducted by the archives was participation in international folkloristics – the historic-geographic method was smoothly replaced by the comparative-historical method. According to the guestbook of the Estonian Folklore Archives, over 350 people visited the archives between 1927 and 1940, mainly from Austria, Bulgaria, China, Holland, Ireland, the UK, Israel, Lithuania, Latvia, Norway, Poland, France, Sweden, Romania, Germany, Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, the USA, and Russia (Tampere 2009 [1957]: 227). The Estonian Folklore Archives declared their principles at the first folktale researcher's congress, held in Lund in 1935, which were adopted in the final session of the congress. Three principles are particularly noteworthy: 1) every nation should have one central all-inclusive folklore archive; 2) the accessibility of material has to be ensured for both national and international users; 3) copies rather than originals should be used for research purposes. Before the war, materials were exchanged internationally via typewriter copies and the archives were mainly visited by folklore specialists. The staff of the knowledge hub, which dealt with a wide range of subjects, started conducting independent research and issuing publications only at the beginning of the 1930s. Before World War II, the archives as a service institution had been oriented towards international contacts – the institution had evolved into an institute.

If there is something positive to say about World War II, it could be the fact that the collections that were saved from the war were not damaged and were returned to Tartu in the spring of 1945. Professional international relations, however, were hindered by the Iron Curtain. All archive materials were inspected by the authorities. While in Latvia and Lithuania the folklore archives retained their right to conduct research, in Estonia the institutes were transferred to Tallinn, although their research base (folklore collections) remained in Tartu. The statutes of the Literary Museum stated that the folklore department's main tasks were to collect, organise and copy folklore, assist researchers and publish folklore texts. The question of how the archive material reflected societal processes could be answered by using such ideological key phrases as class struggle, social conflict, exploitation, revolution, and opposition to religion, as preferred by the Soviet regime. All of these subjects were represented at the archives – from slave songs to reminiscences of the revolution in 1905. The archives worked in a flexible way – publications suitable for the regime were compiled following the principle of the Estonian proverb “wolves are fed and sheep are safe”. The archives did not, however, include any material related to contemporary ideology, such as dekulakisation, formation of collective farms, the accomplishments of communism, etc. Despite the fact that the inclusion of these subjects was required by the authorities, informants would have refused

to reveal what people were really saying about these subjects. The time for gathering this material through field trips and collection appeals came much later.

Herbert Tampere, who had been working at the EFA since 1928 (as head of the folklore department in 1952–1966), continued the previous work ethos following the ethnological direction of research. The future of the EFA was close to his heart until his death in 1975. Tampere recalls that “they were able to increase the number of staff in the folklore department in 1955, which is when they started taking up more extensive research projects. Many of the main issues of our folkloristics have been researched thanks to the material collection and organisation activities and the scientific publications that were prepared at that time” (Tampere 1971: 185). This was the argument, or rather even the excuse, for the folklore department not following the statutes and working on theoretical issues. Some problems had arisen regarding the collected material of the archives. In the process of recording folklore texts, for example, folklore carriers had not received sufficient attention. As a result, the need to research transmission as a vital component of the folklore process arose. According to archive records, ‘tracing’ local storytellers, singers and musicians was part of all annual collection expeditions in which direct questioning methods were used.

The old customs and observances that were recorded on Jakob Hurt’s initiative became increasingly popular among the public during the Soviet era. At that time, this knowledge was not needed so much for its artistic value or the need to be memorised, but rather it was an effort to retain the national identity and to feel united with the cultural heritage of one’s ancestors. In the 1960s the folk calendar card indexes were widely used, and the first volume of a folk calendar anthology based on the archive material was in the making. The folkloric movement gained momentum in the 1970s with the main focus being on folk music. The archives had prepared audio tapes with examples and these were introduced to museum excursion groups during their visits to the archives. Even though the archives did not have sufficient equipment or audio tapes, recording songs and tunes was still considered a priority during fieldwork.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the folklore archives found more interdisciplinary uses, for example, to determine species names as part of entomological research or find traces of ancient human activity in archaeology. Many scientists, including botanist Gustav Vilbaste, psychiatrist Ilmar Soomere and sign language researcher Liina Paales, handed their collected material over to the archives. Several artists, such as graphic artist Ott Kangilaski and composer Veljo Tormis, to name just two, have used archive materials in their creative work. The fact that folklore archive materials have been collected in the most part by amateurs has both positive and negative sides. The collection of the Estonian Students Society (1895–1917), for example, is a representative

collection of older folk songs, while there is only one detailed paper regarding the names of the constellations, written by an astronomy-educated correspondent. Tens of different diseases have been described by the same symptoms and tens of different names attributed to the same plants. On the other hand, local collectors have contributed lots of stories about their community, people, places, and events, which together make up a valuable collection of reference material in the cultural-anthropological direction of research.

In earlier times all records were written down in the impersonal mode, whereas in the 1960s, when fear of repressions receded, more writing in the first person started to appear. The change in religious worldview in the second half of the nineteenth century – when some still believed in witchcraft and magic and others did not – marked the beginning of a delicate personal data era for folklorists. Many narratives from this period contain people's real names. It is an unwritten law that folkloric texts in which people are recognisable are not introduced to the public. The cultural-anthropological direction of research, which is topical today, requires a more active communication with the individual. Even though, depending on the subject, I consider it necessary to discuss this topic with my informants, it seems to me that the current practice of confirming usage restrictions with the informant's signature inculcates a sense of danger in them and indicates that they are now responsible for the further fate of the collected material.

NOTES

¹ Today the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

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