

# THE HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF FOLKLORE COLLECTIONS IN BELARUS

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on the knowledge of the formation circumstances and development of folklore collections in Belarus in historical perspective. The history of collecting Belarusian folklore is explored, concentrating on the main ideas and the most influential collectors and groups of collectors. The research questions concern the main collection centers, gathering strategies, and their changes in accordance with the dominant state ideology and cultural policy.

The study reveals that the growing interest in collecting folklore was closely connected with the process of national revival and the creation of the Belarusian state. Initiated by the passion of individual amateur collectors and local historians, the collection of folklore gradually became an important national task and was concentrated in the main scientific centers.

Besides state ideology, the greatest influence on the formation of folklore collections, their form and content, is exerted by the goals and approaches of individuals. The personality, the level of education and age of the collector have a direct impact on the collection processes and, respectively, on the data obtained as a result.

**Keywords:** Belarus, folklore, history of folklore studies, archives, folklore collections, groups of collectors, preservation, the collection of folklore records

## THE BEGINNING OF THE COLLECTION ACTIVITY

The beginning of the collection activity in the field of folklore and ethnography on the territory of Belarus dates back to the late eighteenth–early nineteenth centuries. Interest in collecting folklore developed under the impact of the ideology of romanticism, according to which folklore was understood as an expression of the people's soul. The first collectors were educated noblemen. The main bulk of data during this early period was collected by Zaryjan Dalienha-Chadakoŭski (1784–1825) (Aksamitaŭ & Malaš 1991), Jan Čačot (1796–1847) (Czczot 1844, 1846),

Alexander Rypiński (1809–1886) (Rypiński 1840), the Tyszkiewicz brothers – Kanstancin (1806–1868) (Tyszkiewicz 1871) and Jaŭstach (1814–1873) (Tyszkiewicz 1847), Romuald Zienkiewicz (1811–1868) (Zienkiewicz 1851), and others.

At the turn of the 1850s, Russian officials took up the ethnographic study of the Belarusian territories, which was caused by the revolutionary situation that developed before the abolition of serfdom, as well as the desire to restore the Commonwealth within the borders of 1772<sup>1</sup> (Hilievič 1970: 34). At first, this task was entrusted to military officers. Folklore and ethnographic materials collected in the Belarusian territory, along with detailed statistical information, geographical descriptions, maps and plans, were collected and published in the multi-volume edition *Materialy dlia geografii i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami General'nogo shtaba* (Materials for Geography and Statistics of Russia, Collected by Officers of the General Staff) (Bobrovskiy 1863; Korevo 1861). The collected materials are of unequal scientific value, since they were collected, edited and commented on by people who differed in political views, worldview, and attitude to the Belarusian issue (Hilievič 1970: 35).

After the January Uprising of 1863–1864, led by K. Kalinoŭski,<sup>2</sup> the collecting activity began with renewed vigor and approach. This work was subordinated, above all, to the ideology of that time. During this period, there was an urgent need to study the region, collect items and sources proving the existence of a common historical past of the Russian Empire and the annexed territories. Visiting Russian officials took up this task (Komzolova 2004). One of the most characteristic publications of this period was P. Gil'tebrant's *Sbornik pamiatnikov narodnogo tvorchestva v Severo-Zapadnom krae* (Collection of Folk Art Records of the North-Western Territory) (1866). The publication contains 300 folk songs and a small number of riddles and proverbs without scientific classification. The author compared Belarusian songs with Russian ones and tried to prove their similarity. At the time, the collection was heavily criticized for being biased (Pypin 1891: 121).

A large collection of folklore and ethnographic material, documented in the second half of the nineteenth century, is contained in the publications of Pavel Shein (1826–1900) (Shein 1873, 1874), Zinaida Radchenko (1839–1916) (Radchenko 1888), Evdokim Romanov (1855–1922) (Romanov 1886), Vladimir Dobrovolsky (1856–1920) (Dobrovolsky 1903), and Dmitry Bulgakovsky (1843–1918) (Bulgakovsky 1890).

At the end of the nineteenth century, Belarusian folklore came to the attention of foreign – Polish (Federowski 1897–1981; Kolberg 1968) and Czech (Kuba 1887) – researchers.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century collection activities became even more widespread, which was due to the increased activity of national forces;

first of all, with the newspaper *Naša Niva* (Our Field), which was published in Vilna from 1906 to 1915. This newspaper became the center of the formation of the national elite. The second incentive was the February Revolution and the fall of tsarism in Russia in 1917. Under the influence of romantic ideology, the collection of folklore was perceived as “the patriotic duty in the age of nation-building” (Bula 2017).

In the context of significant transformations and changes in the political and socio-economic situation, the idea of creating an independent Belarusian state was implemented in the form of the Belarusian People’s Republic, which was proclaimed on March 25, 1918. However, already in December 1918, the Red Army occupied Minsk, and on January 1, 1919, the formation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was proclaimed in Smolensk (Ioffe & Silitski 2018: 282).

### **COLLECTING FOLKLORE IN WESTERN BELARUS (1921–1939)**

The year 1921 brought a new historical turn for the Belarusian territory. According to the Riga Peace Treaty, the signing of which ended the Soviet-Polish War, part of the Belarusian territory was transferred to the Polish Republic (Ioffe & Silitski 2018: 282). In this territory, so-called Western Belarus,<sup>3</sup> the main center for collecting folklore and ethnographic data during the interwar period was the Vilna Belarusian Museum named after Ivan Luckievič, which was founded in Vilnius in 1921 and existed until 1944.

Many national figures of that time attributed folklore to the most important ethno-determining features, fully reflecting the identity and difference of Belarusians from other peoples. So, for example, in 1912, on the pages of the Belarusian calendar of *Naša Niva*, collector of folk songs Anton Hrynevič reasoned: “A human song reflects a person’s soul, their pain and grief, their needs, desires and life itself. As a person is recognized by their face, so the whole people, their character and soul are recognized by a song, especially a folk song” (Bielaruski kalendar 1912).

The idea of collecting folklore, which was understood as a treasure of the folk soul, was popularized through the media. Among various folklore genres, folk songs had a special place. Detailed instructions and calls for the collection of folklore were regularly published on the pages of periodicals and appealed primarily to people with musical education – organists in churches (e.g., *Bielaruski Trubadur* 1926: 5). The organist was both a bearer of tradition and a competent collector, and at the same time they were considered as potential creators who, based on folk songs, would compose authors’ works in the same style.

Interest in folk songs had several practical aspects. The first one is related to the inclusion of folk songs in the school educational program and their popularization through amateur choirs (Bielaruski Trubadur 1926: 5). The second one is related to the need for a Belarusian religious song, which would be created according to well-known folk patterns. The main idea was that “Belarusian songbook will introduce our language not only into the church, but also into the living mass of people, thereby bringing our people closer to a complete revival in everyday life and in church life” (Biełaruskaja Krynica 1926: 6).

Folklore and ethnographic materials, collected through newspapers and magazines, by students of gymnasiums and other amateurs interested in folklore, were accumulated in the archives of the Vilna Belarusian Museum. In 1944 its richest collections were divided between the museums and archives of Soviet Belarus and Lithuania. The folklore part of the manuscript section, miraculously surviving and preserved, was “rediscovered” by specialists from the archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore only at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Žičkienė 2006; Labačeuskaja 2012). This pointed to the existence of several diligent and indefatigable collectors of Belarusian folklore and ethnographic data in the 1910s–1940s. The geography of the rediscovered folklore records covers not only the entire territory of Western Belarus, but also the adjacent regions of modern Lithuania and Latvia, where compact groups of the Belarusian-speaking population historically lived.

## **THE CREATION OF A COORDINATING CENTER FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF BELARUS**

The creation of a new state – the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic – raised the question of determining the historical roots and the foundation on which it would be built, and included a preliminary full-scale collection of materials. Thus, ethnography and ethnographic knowledge, in the broad sense, acquired a special role in the newly created Soviet Union. By gathering ethnographic data that influenced ideas about territories and peoples, ethnographers and local collectors participated in the formation of the Soviet Union. The state used ethnographic knowledge in determining its policy (Hirsch 2022).

The center that set the direction and coordinated the work on the “scientific study of Belarus in all respects” (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 4, p. 1) was the Institute of Belarusian Culture, established in early 1922 on the basis of the Scientific and Terminological Commission under the People’s Commissariat for Education of the BSSR.



**Figure 1.** *The staff of the Scientific and Terminological Commission, 1922. The Central Scientific Archive of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Unknown author (Žylunovič 1991: 88).*

The 1920s are the time of the Belarusization policy, the aim of which was an increase in the use of the Belarusian language in culture, education and science. This policy largely determined the paths of cultural development of the BSSR at an early stage. A. Čvikievič, scientific secretary of the Institute, noted that “the needs of life and the energy of the national revival of Belarus required the establishment of a much larger-scale institution” (1926: 10). The Institute was founded “as a scientific research institution on the state budget and, at the same time, as a cultural and social institution, providing through its bodies a direct link with the broad laboring class” (ibid.: 11). From the moment of its foundation, despite the significant centralization of the management of economic and cultural life, “the Institute was the executor, and often the initiator of many undertakings in solving cultural and scientific problems” (Kasciuk & Pietrykaŭ & Tokaraŭ 1993: 3).

Not only theoretical research, but also practical solutions were expected from the Institute. “The Institute was a methodological center in the implementation of many areas of work, actively participated in the implementation of government tasks, helped to develop policies not only in cultural and scientific, but also in other areas” (ibid.: 4).

The structure of the Institute initially included two sections – the humanities and natural sciences. Much attention was paid to the study of Belarusian literature, art, history, ethnography and folklore, as well as the development of a whole range of practical problems of Belarusian linguistics. However, during its activity, the structure of the Institute changed more than once. In March 1924, a large-scale reorganization took place: separate sections of ethnography and geography, art, law, pedagogy, medicine and veterinary medicine, as well as a socio-economic section were created. The activities of all the humanities sections, to one degree or another, related to the study of folk culture. The Institute became a center that united the national scientific elite, created a wide network of local correspondents and set the main directions in the study of folklore and ethnography.

## THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF LOCAL HISTORY

Since 1924, activities in folklore studies have been concentrated in the newly formed Central Bureau of Local History.<sup>4</sup> Through the Bureau, the Institute managed local history work and coordinated the process of documenting various kinds of scientific material. For this the Bureau carried out active work on the establishing of links with local lore societies and the creation of new ones and was responsible for the general management of their activities (consulted and provided them with methodological instructions and programs), as well as organized local lore congresses (Ćvikievič 1926: 23). For the members of local history societies to be aware of current approaches to the collection and folklore studies and ethnographic materials, the Bureau sent out protocols of meetings, reports and resolutions of the relevant sections of the Institute. The Bureau maintained regular correspondence and exchange of publications both with the parent organization and with local societies. The exchange of experience took place within the framework of various scientific events.

The local lore societies had educated members – teachers and their children, pupils and students, agronomists, composers (VOKM, fund 37, inventory 1; 4; 5), who collected the materials. For the members of local lore societies, the most effective collection method was considered *stationary*, when collectors worked in the area of their residence; in addition, the *expeditionary method* could be used (GAVO, fund 1947, inventory 1, file 10). Members of local history societies were taught that the documented materials should be stored in four copies, and the most valuable ones should be published in newspapers, and “this will be a big task for Soviet local historians in the cultural revolution” (VOKM, fund 40, inventory 2, p. 120).

Until the end of 1926, the Central Bureau of Local Lore financed the activities of local lore societies and sent out the journal *Naš kraj* (Our Land)<sup>5</sup> free of charge.

The results of collecting and research work were available to the general public in the journal *Naš kraj*. In the first issues of the periodical, the program-guide for the collectors of the Belarusian musical and ethnographic art (Hrynievič 1925: 45–48) was published. The author aimed to record rural folklore (calendar and family songs), everyday songs, children's folklore, songs for dances, and folk religion with full information about the informant. The program for collecting oral folk art, compiled by the Literary Commission of the Institute of Belarusian Culture (Prohrama 1925: 43–47), was created under the influence of the new Soviet ideology. The program explained in detail that it was necessary to write down also the new folklore items – the Red Army, political, revolutionary, and insurgent songs, tales of riots, insurrections, and revolutions, fantastic, animal and social tales, etc. It also published comments on typical mistakes made in previously documented materials.

The Bureau received all materials from local history societies, among which data for the dictionary of the living Belarusian language, folklore items, descriptions of ancient monuments, arts and nature, etc. prevailed (Čvikievič 1926: 88). On journal pages the results of the collecting work of the local lore societies were summed up: according to ethnographer A. Šliubski's calculations, 8,565 folklore items were sent to the Bureau in 1925–1926, 13,459 the next year, and 12,776 in 1927–1928 (Šliubski 1927a: 22–35, Šliubski 1927b: 12–23).

However, not only the task of collecting material, but searching for a connection with the historical past was entrusted to local history. The first issue of the academic local history journal *Naš kraj* wrote:

*Our past has not been studied to the necessary extent, and if it has been studied, then in those directions that were useful to the past authorities in our region. Due to this, views that have already become a scientific tradition have been formed, although they do not correspond to reality at all. Studying the old corners of our past in a new way and searching for new ones is one of the important tasks of modern local history in Belarus.*  
(Ad redakcyi 1925: 3–4)

At the same time, the emphasis was placed on the applied nature of research, since “modern local history is interested not only in purely historical, ethnographic or natural science issues; it focuses on building in all its forms, is based on the present and uses the past as material for the future” (ibid.: 3).



*Figure 2. The Central Bureau of Local History, 1926 (Ćvikievič 1926: 85).*

The work of the Bureau became more and more active. At the beginning of February 1926, Minsk hosted the First All-Belarusian Local History Congress, the focus of which was the activation of collecting and studying scientific materials. The speech of the outstanding Belarusian writer and folklorist Maksim Harecki was devoted to the importance of timely documentation of folklore. After the report, a discussion took place with the participation of Anton Hrynievič, the secretary of the Song Commission, in which the emphasis was placed on the practical significance of collecting activities. It was assumed that it was necessary to collect materials for children and use them in the educational process to create songbooks (Smolič 1926).

This led to a significant intensification of local history activities: new societies were formed, local history activities acquired a scientific content. From the moment of the Congress to September 1926, the Bureau received 5,007 folklore items from local history societies (Ćvikievič 1926: 88).

In 1927, the Second All-Belarusian Local History Congress was held and the results of local history work were summed up. During the congress, a significant expansion of the local history movement on the territory of Belarus was noted (founding of new local museums and libraries, the appearance of local history



descriptions of some regions of the BSSR, the growth of collecting activities, training personnel of local history societies). At the congress, the structure of local history organizations in the republic was approved, with the Central Bureau of Local History leading and coordinating this work (Smolič 1927).

## **THE ROLE OF ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BSSR**

The role of ethnographic science in the development of the BSSR became the subject of discussion at the festive meeting of the Ethnographic Section of the Institute of Belarusian Culture, which took place on June 3, 1925. The meeting was preceded by serious preparatory work: announcements were made in the media, representatives of other sections and commissions of the Institute and local scientific institutions were invited (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, p. 108). The meeting brought together the scientific elite (15 members of the section and 30 invited guests).

The protocol of the meeting describes the main contradictions in detail. After S. Katzenbogen's report, "The role of ethnography as an independent research science", a discussion on the status, subject of study, main goals and objectives of ethnography took place. The prevailing opinion was that it was wrong to understand ethnography as a descriptive science or part of any other discipline, since it is an independent science that is engaged in "a comprehensive study of the people, their physical nature, way of life and culture, spiritual and material" (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, p. 109).

In the report "Ethnography in the cultural and Soviet construction of Belarus", read by the historian and ethnographer Michail Mialieška, the emphasis was placed on the applied nature of ethnography, and its fundamental role in the development of national culture was postulated (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, pp. 110–113). The author emphasized the need to search for national features and differences that were necessary for the development of Belarusian culture:

*We see how our state institutions – the theater, musical college, art college –, our artists and poets seek out Belarusian folk characteristics, how they build all their work almost completely on those artistic patterns and manifestations that our people have been compiling and shaping for centuries. (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, pp. 110–111)*

M. Mialieška identified the urgent tasks related to folk songs: “The rich Belarusian folk melody still remains in the midst of the people and a number of ethnographers-musicians are needed to record this song and arrange it” (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, p. 111).

The protocol showed what steps it was decided to take to implement the urgent tasks facing Belarusian ethnography. Among them was the establishment of links with local history organizations, the creation of a network of correspondents to collect materials “in the field” and study them, and the publication of the works of the Ethnographic Section. The participants decided to publish, in the near future, a collection for affiliated local historians who begin their fieldwork, to draw up a program, a plan and route for an ethnographic expedition the next summer to collect material on anthropology, folk life, culture, language, folklore, etc. The question about the creation of ethnographic departments at state museums was raised (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, p. 109).

The Ethnographic Section began active work. It was replenished with freelance correspondents, among whom were mainly students of the Belarusian State University and local historians (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, pp. 118–119). The driving motive was joining the community “which determines the ways in which Belarus needs to be studied” (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, p. 120). Members of the section established contacts with local history societies, conducted written and oral consultations, sent methodological instructions and recommendations upon request. In addition, the Institute sent its specialists to assist in organizing the activities of societies and preparing reports (CNA NANB, fund 67, inventory 1, file 6, p. 28).

In 1925–1926 members of the section conducted several expeditions to the Mahilioŭ district, the Bychaŭ district, to the Sebezh, Nevel, and Velizh districts (I. Sierbaŭ), to the Sluck district, to the Homiel and Rečyca districts (A. Sieržputoŭski) (Ćvikievič 1926: 49–50). During the expeditions, valuable materials related to the life of the population, folklore and the language of the Belarusians were documented. As a result, *Ethnographic Materials* (tales of the inhabitants of Polesie) by A. Sieržputoŭski were published.

## TURNING POINT OF THE 1930S

In 1929, the Academy of Sciences was established, based on the Institute of Belarusian Culture. The Ethnography and Folklore Sector was formed at the Institute of History, which became the center for studies for the next three decades.

However, in the late 1920s – early 1930s the situation changed significantly. This period is characterized by massive repressions that seriously affected the

scientific sphere (Tokarev & Makhnach 1992). The changes concerned research topics and strategies. Studies of traditional folklore were declared outdated and irrelevant to the new Soviet reality. The journal *Savetskaja kraina* (Soviet Country)<sup>6</sup> published an article by Maisej Hrynbliat, entitled “For the Study of Folklore of the Era of the Proletariat Dictatorship”. The author declared all previous approaches to be relics of the past, “national democratism”:

*Questions of folklore, in general, were one of the central issues that were “developed” by a company of “ethnographers” – Lastoŭski, Šliubski, Kaspiarovič, Mialieška, and others, and it is no coincidence. In folklore, they diligently searched for “scientific justification” for counter-revolutionary “scientific theories”. ... On the basis of all that has been said, it is quite clear why the national democrats so ardently “studied” and collected ancient folklore and brushed aside modern folklore in every way. (Hrynbliat 1931: 124)*

The attention of ethnographers and folklorists should have been focused on the new folklore of the revolution and socialist construction, which glorified the new Soviet way of life and stigmatized its enemies (ibid.: 123–124).

These “modern folklore” trends were reflected in the publications *Lenin and Stalin in Belarusian Folk Art* (Butelin 1937), *The Red Army and Defense of the Homeland in Belarusian Folk Art* (Čyrvonaja 1938), etc. In general, folklore collections published in the Soviet period usually began with sections “Modern songs” or “Songs about oppression and serfdom”.

Compared to the 1920s, archival materials of this period indicate a decrease in collecting activity in the field of folklore and ethnography. The increase in the number of local history organizations at factories, museums, and schools took place according to the top-down directions and did not lead to notable results.

During the Second World War, most part of the collected folklore and ethnographic materials stored at the Academy of Sciences were lost.

## **THE INSTITUTE OF ART, ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORE NAMED AFTER K. KRAPIVA**

In 1957 a new story began with the founding of the Institute of Art, Ethnography and Folklore named after K. Krapiva of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. The creation of the institute was an important step towards coordinating the scientific research of Belarusian culture. Previously, groups of scientists in different institutions had been studying the different aspects of Belarusian culture.



**Figure 3.** *The staff of the Institute of Art, Ethnography and Folklore. Unknown author, 1980s (AIMEF, photographic collection).*

Initially the Institute was comprised of four sectors (history of theater, cinema and music, history of fine arts, ethnography, and folklore) and an archive. Folklore materials were separated into an independent part of the archive, which was named *Kaliekyja fałklornych zapisaŭ* (The Collection of Folklore Records). This collection is the largest and oldest folklore archive in Belarus.<sup>7</sup>

Now the collection belongs to the Department of Folklore and Culture of the Slavic Peoples and is a part of the Center for the Belarusian Culture, Language, and Literature Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. In 2001, the collection obtained heritage status for its contribution to national sciences (Decree 2001). The collection includes audio and video records, photographs, manuscripts, and musical note transcriptions. The main body of the collection consists of Belarusian folklore, but there are also collections of Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Jewish and Romany folklore. It contains more than 70,000 sound recordings and 400,000 folklore texts of ethnic folklore, which were made in field expeditions throughout Belarus and neighboring countries from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day. The oldest manuscripts in the collection date from the years 1910–1912. This is Jewish folklore documented by Yakov Sheynin in Viciebsk (AIMEF, fund 9, inventory 5, file 21). Materials are obtained from different sources: from field expeditions, from personal and university archives. Collectors are professional researchers, amateurs, and university students.

Fieldwork at the Institute of Art, Ethnography and Folklore began in the 1960s and is continuing to the present day. From the early days of the Institute, researchers were faced with an important task to collect folklore from all over the territory of the BSSR because almost all the collected materials had been destroyed or evacuated during the Second World War. Also, the director of the Institute, P. Hliebka, formulated a task of republican significance – the preparation of a multi-volume edition<sup>8</sup> dedicated to Belarusian folklore. The years 1970–1980 was the period of the most intensive fieldwork for the preparation of this publication. Although the first volume of *Pesni sovetskogo vremeni* (Songs of the Soviet Era) from the series *Belarusian Folk Art* (Kabašnikaŭ 1970) became a tribute to the times, collectors focused on different types and genres of traditional folklore.<sup>9</sup> Religious folklore, spells, and anti-Soviet folklore (ideologically unsuitable jokes and anecdotes) were often ignored.

Basic amounts of folklore material were gathered in the Soviet period by professional researchers – Michail Hrynblat (1905–1983), Arsień Lis (1934–2018), Anatoł Fiadosik (1926–2005), Kanstancin Kabašnikaŭ (1927–2012), Halina Bartaševič (1932–2021), Larysa Barabanava (1951–1989), Anton Hurski (1936–2016), Uladzimir Sysoŭ (1951–1997), Lieanila Malaš (1927–2012), etc. Since the 1990s Uladzimir Vasilievič, Tacciana Valodzina, Alena Bohanieva, Iryna Vasiľjeva, Iryna Smirnova, and others continue collecting work.

In Soviet times, the most common form of conducting fieldwork was complex expeditions. This means that the expedition group included specialists of various profiles – folklorists, ethnographers, musicologists, artists, and photographers –, and each of them performed a corresponding task. Expeditions were organized with the help of local administration. Working with local residents, representatives of local administration pointed out cultural mediators (the oldest and most knowledgeable villagers). Complex expeditions made in every region of the BSSR and border areas often involved foreign experts (Chernihiv region, Ukraine; Bryansk, Pskov, Smolensk regions, Russia; Vilnius region, Lithuania).

Also at that time, joint Belarusian-Ukrainian and Belarusian-Russian expeditions were organized. For example, in 1980, Kanstancin Kabašnikaŭ and Halina Bartaševič organized Svietlahorska-Loeyskaja expedition in cooperation with Russian folklorist Viktor Gusev, and Belarusian-Ukrainian expedition together with composer and folklorist Mihailo Hajdaj. In both cases, the attention of researchers was mostly focused on songs; also charms and ethnographic descriptions were collected. The materials collected during such expeditions were not preserved as a whole but were sorted out by individual institutions and specialized archives, which subsequently affected their preservation.



**Figure 4.** A complex expedition of the sector of folklore, 1970s. From the personal archive of Arsien Lis.



**Figure 5.** M. Hajdaj in the joint Belarusian-Ukrainian expedition in the village of Kamyanka in Chernihiv region in 1980. Photograph by K. Kabašnikaŭ (AIMEF, photographic collection).



*Figure 6. An individual expedition in Hlybokaje, Viciebsk region, in 2017. Photograph by I. Vasilyeva (AIMEF, photographic collection).*

For documenting folklore researchers used professional technical equipment which provided high-quality records. However, the main problem was the limited number of reels or tapes that were given for an expedition. In the years 1960–1990 the institute’s staff solved this problem by increasing the recording speed to save space. This method was applied when recording folk prose (tales, legends, etc.). Another solution was to record only a part of the folklore item (as a rule, one stanza), which mainly concerned songs, ballads, and romances. The records of the period are characterized by a lack of context: researchers documented mainly folklore items or their parts, but not the whole conversation with the informant. The interlocution was described in field diaries and today cannot be reconstructed in detail. Another problem is that in most recordings the informants were identified, but more information was gathered only on the informants who offered the greatest number of recordings.

Since the early 1990s, the approach to the organization of fieldwork changed. Researchers preferred individual expeditions instead of complex ones. Nevertheless, the main trend “to collect pieces of the “oldest” folklore genres and melodies” remains relevant. In the 1990s–2000s there were also some unspoken ideological limitations: researchers did not collect and preserve

political folklore. Only a few fieldwork tours in Belarus were devoted to topical/popular topics – internet, political, urban, etc. folklore. In modern conditions, when documenting folklore occurs with the help of digital Dictaphones, photo and video cameras, the researchers were able to record a conversation with informants without restrictions.

A significant contribution to the development of the collection was made by amateurs, as a rule, local people without special educational background. They documented data that was considered old and therefore valuable and important for preservation and transfer to future generations. The main difference is that amateurs have an opportunity to document folklore in natural conditions. While the researcher is alien to the local community, the amateur has the ability to document folklore without any restrictions. They document folklore in the daily routine and on the days of calendar or family holidays and their attention is devoted to texts and melodies. This observation is also confirmed by the fact that in almost every amateur collection there are re-sung songs from memory. They recollect the songs that were heard in childhood or youth from the older generation and which cannot be recorded today. Another reason is the loss of records. In this situation, the recording quality is not the main problem.

The data collected by amateurs are not limited to audio and video recordings, manuscripts and photographs. They may include herbarium, correspondence, and list of villagers, family trees, sketches, and information from the media. Data are accompanied by the comments of the collectors, which explain important aspects of the existence of certain items.

A distinctive feature of amateur records is the lack of information about the collectors and their motivation. As a rule, amateurs consider this information not to be important, although personal interests are always reflected in the collected material.

An integral part of the collection of folklore records is students' collections. A part of them was transferred from the Belarusian State Pedagogical University and Mahileu and Hrodna state universities in 2012–2014. These holdings consist of data that were collected by students of the philological faculty within the framework of folklore practice in 1960–2009. The general strategy was to document folklore in native villages and towns during the summer holidays. Another part included records made by students under the scientific guidance of academic researchers (e.g., AIMEF, fund 8, inventory 91, file 301; AIMEF, fund 8, inventory 90, file 252).





*Figure 7. University students process folklore materials during practice in 2015. Photograph by Yu. Vnukovich (personal archive).*

Students' collections, as a rule, include audio records, fieldwork diaries, cards and notebooks with texts covering all aspects of rural folklore. In general, student records are of low technical quality, since they use personal technical equipment (tape and voice recorders, mobile phones).

In spite of students' appropriate educational background and use of special questionnaires, the reliability of these materials was questioned by researchers. These data could not be the only basis of academic research. With all the drawbacks of student materials, they were digitized and systematized; however, they must be verified before integration into the academic sphere.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The collection of folklore materials from different historical periods was influenced by changing ideologies and cultural policies. The beginning of the collection activity in the late eighteenth–early nineteenth centuries was associated with the era of romanticism. Documentation of folklore in the 1850s–1860s was

connected with the policy of Russification of Belarusian territories before and after the uprising of 1863. The rise of collecting activity in the early twentieth century was associated with national identity growth and development. Two scientific centers in the BSSR and Western Belarus, which coordinated the collection of folklore and ethnographic materials, were headed by representatives of the national elite. The national elite – writers, composers, artists, teachers, museum workers, etc. – was widely involved in the collecting work. Folklore and ethnography (in the broadest sense) were understood as one of the main tools for constructing Belarusian identity in the BSSR in the 1920s. The late 1920s – early 1930s were the turning point in research topics and approaches, as the main part of the national scientific elite was repressed. In the 1930s–1970s, research attention was mainly concentrated on “modern folklore” and “Soviet folklore” (Red Army, political, revolutionary, insurgent songs, etc.). The period since the 1970s is characterized by the interest in traditional folklore types and genres. Despite the publication of Soviet folklore, they greatly predominate.

From the 1960s the Institute of Art, Ethnography and Folklore named after K. Krapiva became the main center for folklore and ethnography studies where the archive – the collection of folklore records – was created. Materials reach the archive from different sources: from field expeditions of professional researchers, from personal and university archives.

Folklore materials collected by professional researchers are characterized by high quality, which makes it possible to use them not only for research, but also for popularization. Specialists generally describe the folklore of a certain locality and then focus on the subject of their own scientific research. The interest of researchers focuses mainly on folklore units, and not on the history of a particular locality.

Amateurs do not use questionnaires and instructions, but write down everything that is considered old, traditional, and local. Thus, these materials require structuring, systematization, additional conversation with the collector and processing due to the low quality of audio recordings. A significant part of the materials requires verification and identification of their place in the structure of the folklore archive.

Student holdings are considered only a result of university practice, and not valuable sources for studying the traditional culture of Belarus. For introduction into scientific sphere, they need verification. Despite the fact that fieldwork of professional researchers, amateurs and students focuses on traditional culture, materials collected by researchers cover the greatest diversity of topics.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The division of the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the Kingdom of Prussia, the Russian Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy towards the end of the eighteenth century, in 1772, 1793 and 1795 respectively. As a result, the Belarusian territories were included in the Russian Empire.
- <sup>2</sup> An uprising of national revolutionary forces in part of the lands of the former Commonwealth against the Russian rule and for the restoration of the Commonwealth within the borders of 1772.
- <sup>3</sup> This territory of Belarus was part of the Polish Republic in the period from 1921 to 1939.
- <sup>4</sup> The Bureau was created at the Institute of Belarusian Culture, on the model of the Russian one, which had branches in Moscow and St. Petersburg and coordinated local history work in the USSR and was also subordinate to it.
- <sup>5</sup> In 1925, the monthly journal *Naš kraj* began to be published, which marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of local history and Belarusian ethnography in general. "From that moment on, all those materials that were previously stored in the archives of the Central Bureau of Local History, all those instructions, questionnaires, methodological references, etc., which were previously difficult to access for an outsider, appeared on the pages of the new journal, acquired a new significance, turned into life," emphasized the scientific secretary of the Institute of Belarusian Culture A. Čvikievič (1926: 86). Thanks to the publication of the journal *Naš kraj*, relations with the provinces have significantly intensified and reached a new level, and the number of correspondents of the Bureau has increased.
- <sup>6</sup> At the end of 1930, the journal of the Central Bureau of Local Lore, *Naš kraj*, was renamed as *Savetskaja kraina* (Soviet Country).
- <sup>7</sup> Today in Belarus there are also folklore and ethnographic archives of the Students' Ethnographic Association (1998), the Free Archive (2007), as well as archives at the Belarusian State University and local ones in Polack, Homiel, and Brest.
- <sup>8</sup> Similar series were published in all Soviet republics.
- <sup>9</sup> The edition *Belarusian Folk Art* was awarded the State Prize of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (1986) and currently has 47 volumes in total.

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[Archive of the Institute of Art History, Ethnography and Folklore of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.] Fund 9, inventory 5, file 21; Fund 8, inventory 90, file 252; Fund 8, inventory 91, file 301.
- CNA NANB – Centralny navukovy archiū Nacyjanalnaj akademii navuk Bielarusi.  
[Central Scientific Archive of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.] Fund 67, inventory 1, files 3, 4, 6.

GAVO – Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Vitebskoi oblasti. [State Archive of Vitebsk Region.] Fund 1947, inventory 1, file 10.

VOKM – Vitebskii oblastnoi kraevedcheskii muzei. [Vitebsk Regional Museum of Local Lore.] Fund 40, inventory 2, p. 120; Fund 37, inventories 1, 4, 5.

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