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THE PHONOGRAMMARCHIV'S ROLE IN (EARLY) FOLKLORE RESEARCH

GERDA LECHLEITNER

Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

As custodian of the historical collections of the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, I'd like to discuss ethnological and folklore investigations as seen from a Central European perspective, with a focus on research history.

The Phonogrammarchiv was founded in 1899 as the first research sound archive worldwide. And it was at the end of the 19th century that various changes in technology, in thinking and research and, as a consequence, in the whole lifestyle took place. All these changes influenced each other. I would like to demonstrate such connections in respect of the research history of folklore studies or ethnography, together with collecting policies of the Phonogrammarchiv.

Introduction

Folklore research could well be looked upon as a European phenomenon. Just think of the interest of the Herderians in folk song as proof of national antiquity and originality, a fact not only stated in Germany, but also within other nations, to emphasise their uniqueness. Towards the end of the 19th century some kind of collecting boom can be observed: sources mapping our roots were of interest, including knowledge about our ancestors and their way of life (their cultural expressions), and such sources were thought to be found at the fringes or “outback zones”. Against the background of rapid industrialisation and modernisation, the urban-middle-class society was more and more paying attention to traditions of folk culture. The slogan “only the one who knows his people is able to govern them” – an opinion similar to that found in colonial politics – evoked the necessity or desire of studying rural societies and their culture, in the case of Germany in a more nationalistic, in the case of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in a more multi-cultural perspective. Along with such thoughts the foundation of ethnographic societies, of ethnographic museums and the rise of ethnographic journals can be observed. What was of interest? Mainly historical artefacts, but also the outcome of modern technologies, e.g. photographs or sound documents, in order to obtain historical information.

The Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences is perfectly in line with such considerations. Although its founders, Sigmund Exner, a famous physiologist at his time, and his colleagues from both the natural sciences and the humanities had a different approach to problems of ethnography or folklore research, they recognised the importance of making recordings not only in Europe, but all over the world. As they pointed out, languages, music and other cultural expressions were changing extremely fast, with some of them even vanishing or dying out; therefore it would be necessary to collect and preserve such sound documents. And these ideas correspond to those decisive for the rise of ethnographic research in general.

Research History: Ethnology – Folklore Research

But folklore and ethnographic research methods cannot be discussed without the more general theories coming from early ethnological considerations.

During the 19th century, folklore (research) and ethnology were of growing interest. Researchers from different disciplines, e.g. geography, prehistory, sociology, anthropology, and medical sciences, to mention just a few, followed up such thoughts. Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution shaped the research of the 19th century, but also provoked and established other theses or ideas. Adolf Bastian's¹ theory of "Elementargedanken" (elementary ideas) was based on steps of evolution, but included the psychological uniformity of human beings. He thought it possible to explain similar views or even parallel cultural developments of various peoples, even if they lived far away from each other. Another approach, the so-called cultural phenomenology, which argues that each cultural expression (phenomenon) is based on one's own mental and spiritual experience and thus includes a historicity of cultures, was used by Leo Frobenius². In contrast to those theories with a focus on independent development or evolution, also migration theories arose, ascertaining the interaction of cultures, the diffusion following distinct principles. Dealing with oral traditions, different cultural expressions were arranged in "Kulturkreise" (cultural circles) following specific criteria. These cultural circles were then divided into cultural layers according to the respective time sequences. Friedrich Ratzel³ and Fritz Graebner⁴ were the first to speak about the "Kulturkreislehre"; the so-called "Viennese school" with Father Wilhelm Schmidt⁵ and his pupils Wilhelm Koppers⁶ and Paul Schebesta⁷ seized and carried on those ideas, thus influencing the ethnological work (mainly in Vienna) till the years after WWII (cf. Grieshofer 2004: 21–22, Plankensteiner 2004: 25).

Within the humanities, comparative studies were also coming to the fore in the 19th century. First of all comparative linguistics have to be mentioned (just think of the important contributions made by Jakob Grimm), but also the comparison of tales, legends, impressions of faith (vision, imagination) and ritual acting. Comparative methods were also used in ethnology and ethno-psychology, e.g. by Wilhelm Wundt⁸. And also in the field of cultural migration and folklore research comparative methods were used to gain and rely on specific results (cf. Grieshofer 2004: 27). It

was Michael Haberlandt (1895) in Vienna who wrote in the first volume of the Austrian journal of ethnography: “Because of Austria’s rich ethnographic composition the comparative method in folklore research is for us a matter of course”⁹.

The growing interest in the sciences of the human being, in cultures worldwide and in one’s own culture (with a stress on nationality) resulted in the rise of ethnology, ethnography and folklore research. Different models, methods and ways of thinking with a focus on the genesis of human culture were used. The spectrum ranged from evolutionary thoughts to cultural circles and the concept of moving cultures influencing each other, and thus the interest in traditions concerning the material and intellectual culture constantly grew. As a result, various methods to deal with such research topics were possible. At the end of the 19th century there were fears that the variety of cultures might get lost because of worldwide cultural exchanges and the forthcoming Europeanisation.

Folklore research in general could be characterised by the interest in primal stages, primary layers which include the feeling of something far away or nearly gone, giving the object a primitive, exotic character (cf. Köstlin 1999). Such phenomena were not seen and searched for in distant places only, but also within one’s own culture, observable and experienced in so-called “Sprachinseln” and “Rückzugsgebiete”. The specific political and multiethnic situation in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (cf. Csáky 1996: 139–140, 167ff., 226ff.), provided for all these intentions. A special view was added: the search for the fundamental was of great, somewhat nostalgic interest and came from an evolutionistic perspective, the topic for comparative studies being the dichotomy of centre and periphery of the “higher” (more sophisticated) and the more primitive culture.

Prerequisites to deal with the subject just described are documents collected, for example, on the occasion of expeditions. At first the members of the expeditions took with them what seemed to be of interest. In the course of time it was necessary to collect more systematically. For an understanding of the present situation the view back into history was and is essential. Collecting artefacts not in use any longer gained importance as did noting down old stories, old-fashioned speech or nearly forgotten (old) music. All these documents are needed to compare past and present in order to find out about the development, changes and influences of culture.

The Foundation of Museums and Archives

The answer to such activities was foundation of museums, archives, scientific societies and their publications, mostly periodicals. Michael Haberlandt and Wilhelm Hein, the founders of the society of folklore in Vienna (Stachel 2002: 342), were employees at the prehistoric-ethnographic department of the Natural History Museum, who later established the Austrian museum of folklore, a fast growing institution. Museum, society and journal had been the institutional parameters for practical and theoretical scientific work, quite a long time before this discipline was established at the university.

Mute witnesses of culture are one side of the medal; while sound documents as important supplements is the other.

The academic world, quickly realising the potential of the invention of sound recording, was eager to use it for its own purposes. There was no doubt that only sound recordings, allowing repeatable and controlled evaluation of sound phenomena, could provide the necessary basis for a wide range of disciplines such as comparative musicology, ethnomusicology, linguistics, dialectology or phonetics. Sound archives were founded with the purpose of collecting recordings as scientific sources as well as documents representing cultural heritage. Sound archives would be the tools to keep the cultural memory alive and would allow diachronic questions, e.g. in respect of different influences or amalgamation.

The starting point for the establishment of the *Phonogrammarchiv* in Vienna was somehow different from elsewhere. The challenge to be solved was not the need to organize already existing sound collections in an archive (similar to libraries), but rather the philosophy of archiving itself with all its technical implications. One of the major ideas put forward was the “eternal” durability of the recordings and the invention of the appropriate technology. The interdisciplinary team of founders opted for a wider concept of what should be recorded, i.e. not only music (as e.g. in Berlin) but also languages, voice portraits, animal sounds, crying of children and other noises. From its beginnings, the *Phonogrammarchiv* has been a repository of sound documents as well as a research institute.

In the founding motion, the language collections were explained systematically, and at great length. The aim was to record all European languages typically spoken at the end of the 19th century in order to fix the rhythm, the accent and even the timbre of language; this was to be followed by all dialects of European languages, and ultimately all languages of the world. In order to create sources for comparative linguistic studies, the ingenious idea was to record standardized texts such as the Lord’s Prayer or – later on for German only – the so-called “Wencker-Sätze”, sentences without much meaning but including specific vocabulary to study expressions and pronunciation. The same speaker was also asked for a sample of free speech. Working with such a corpus would enable linguists to compare various languages and dialects, even “at home”; moreover, the same example could be repeated as often as necessary and was available as “objective” source. However, the spoken word recordings were not only thought of as parts of the collection, but also as sources for research on the physiology of speaking or the psychology of language (cf. Exner 1900: 1–2).

As for music, it was not intended to record classical music, which constituted the domain of the record industry and therefore not the aim of a research sound archive. Rather, it was the musical presentations of the so-called ‘primitive peoples’ that would be especially interesting, according to Sigmund Exner, one of the founders and first head of the *Phonogrammarchiv*. Such recordings, he even asserted, could form the basis for the beginnings of comparative musicology (cf. Exner 1900: 2–3). Previously, personal impressions resulted in descriptions that could not be verified

and were influenced by the “European” eye, whereas now, the invention of sound recording and the use of a phonograph in field research indicated a new period. Concentrating on musicology, Carl Stumpf argued that real sound, and not only musical notation, should be the subject of research (Blaukopf 1995: 35). Interestingly, there is no mention of the need to record folk music as well, as is state-of-the-art today.

General ideas about collecting language and music recordings were created. But how to run such projects systematically? So, in reality, different projects with different goals were undertaken; and each researcher used the recording technology in another way, depending on his or her particular interest and, of course, the existing technical possibilities. The desired contents and technical possibilities were and are going hand in hand, and the technique influenced the recording (contents). From the very beginning wishes and facts were at odds. Just remember a recording situation 100 years ago – a scary huge machine, a horn for putting the head in and a very short recording time. All these factors shaped the research design and circumstances as well as theories, which interacted behind and affected the results of recording.

Examples

So how did collections mirror the diverse access and interests of the respective researcher? And how did research theories influence folklore research in the beginnings of sound recording?

I would like to concentrate on two different aspects: firstly the “own” culture, which is difficult to address in a multiethnic state like the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but German dialects as well as Slavic ones were of interest and were thought to have been preserved pure and authentic in “retreat zones”. These regions might be located within the same language region, as a remote culture, but also as an isolated region surrounded by another language, some kind of diaspora. Secondly I would like to present a collection showing the results of a search for the primitive, far away, at the fringes of Europe (the perspective from the centre to the periphery, if you remember).

View of the “own”

As German was the official language of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, various German dialects spoken in so-called *Sprachinseln*, linguistic enclaves outside the “mother country”, were of particular interest.

Dealing with “own” culture the Phonogrammarchiv had already gained experience in recording Austrian dialects, comprising one of the major collections in the archive: in 1902, Joseph Seemüller had begun the systematic collection of dialectological recordings (using strict guidelines of documentation and including transcriptions of the spoken texts, cf. Seemüller 1908), continued by his colleagues and pupils. The first speakers were students coming from different parts of Austria and versed in their own dialects. Such recordings were made in the studio; later on linguists made field recordings as well. Starting with recordings in the south and western federal states of Austria very soon, in 1909, recordings of German dialects spoken in German

“Sprachinseln” in Czech, Moravian or Italian regions¹⁰ were made. For comparative studies, standardized sentences were created, but when dealing with very old dialects scholars realized that the result of recording these standardized but incoherent sentences was poor. Therefore various stories and typical phrases and also some folk songs, sung or recited, were recorded. At that time these recordings only constituted the basis for phonetic transcriptions and for comparing pronunciations. The linguists of that time were interested in forms and expressions, but less in the context and in descriptions of customs, habits, the use of hand tools etc., although such information could also be found in some recordings. All these collections, though started from a purely linguistic interest, also show the historical background of the research theories, namely, the idea of discovering earlier stages of our life existing in a less changed and influenced shape in remote regions.

Yet at the same time there was a tendency of thought prevalent in the monarchy that embraced ideas of a contrary nature. The Imperial Academy of Sciences was of course closely linked with the beliefs of the Habsburgs and the ruling classes, who were convinced that such a multinational state would function. In order to obtain detailed information about the composition of peoples, their ways of life and coexistence with each other, several research projects were carried out.

The *Balkan-Kommission* of the Academy was concerned with analysing the Slavic elements first, but eventually studied all other linguistic and cultural elements on the Balkan peninsula, such as Romance (Judeo-Spanish, Istro-Romanian, Italian), Albanian and Turkish – but also Slavic elements outside that region, like Serbo-Croatian and Albanian in the south of Italy, or Croatian in Moravia (cf. Jagić 1908: 362, 1909: 337, 1911: 424).

Milan Rešetar was one of the first Slavic linguists to use the phonograph. He was mainly interested in finding isoglosses (or dialect boundaries), and in the shape of dialects as such. So it is hardly surprising that Rešetar travelled on behalf of and supported by the Balkan commission to the Serbo-Croatian colonies in Southern Italy. Rešetar realized that there did not exist any summarized description of the characteristic way of life, which the colonists had brought with them, about changes or persistence in culture or any Italian influences. He wanted to explore that interesting ethnographic oasis before its characteristics would have disappeared. His scientific approach mirrors different theories and methods of that time. He wanted to find something “original”, the beginning of distinct culture in its pure form on the one hand, and changes and influences in the course of years on the other. His thoughts were governed by both evolutionism and cultural particularism, and illustrated the idea of folklore research promoting the possibility of finding older layers in the diaspora, where people’s own cultural expressions were used as delimitations of the surrounding culture and were therefore far away from developments in the mother country (cf. Lechleitner 2004). In addition, another aspect – typical of Austrian scholarship or simply reflecting contemporary conditions – was not missing either: the interest in cultures apparently on the verge of extinction. In his publication, Rešetar gave a historical / ethnographic introduction including research done until 1907, when he had started his project (Rešetar 1911). He cited historical comments written by Ser-

bian and Russian ethnographers mentioning Greek, Albanian and Croatian colonies in that region, which were not known elsewhere. He also presented an overview of Croatian settlements all over Italy, focusing on the Serbo-Croatian colonies in Molise, where he had done his research. Apart from geographic information there is one chapter about the countryside, its inhabitants and their economic, social and personal characteristics, their customs, holidays, folksongs and music, folk tales and proverbs, superstition, play and dance, language use and names. The publication ends with a linguistic section – detailed chapters on grammar, followed by typical texts. Rešetar did not mention that he also had done some recordings of music, songs, and folk tales, a total of eight recordings. It is often said, albeit wrongly, that some recordings in the Phonogrammarchiv were made only by chance. His recordings could also suggest that idea, but given their history and circumstances they appear in a new light. As a linguist, Rešetar was affected by different theories in ethnology, and his is a typically “Austrian” approach of that time: the interest in history of a culture cut off from the motherland, the influences and changes caused by the surroundings, the wish to preserve a culture which might disappear as a result of total assimilation. His studies were seen as an outstanding contribution to the issues of “language mixture” and “language death,” as was reported in the almanac of the Academy (Jagić 1912: 384).

View from the centre to the periphery

As an example of interest in primitive cultures on the fringes of Europe, Rudolf Trebitsch’s collections from Greenland, the Celtic regions and the Basque country must also be mentioned. He was driven by the concept of a European ethnology, first observed from a national perspective, but then studied comparatively including European history and people. He searched for primitive, then unknown cultures, for the ancestors of European culture in the respective countries.

Trebitsch came from a wealthy Jewish family; his father was a prosperous silk manufacturer. Rudolf studied medicine but never practised this profession. In fact he was rather interested in anthropology and ethnology, i.e. the field in which he got his second doctorate (Trebitsch 1911). Trebitsch was influenced by Michael Haberlandt, who was the first and – at that time – the only private scholar to hold lectures in *Ethnographie* at the University of Vienna. Trebitsch decided to devote his research to European folklore. Besides his field work in Ireland, Brittany, Scotland, Wales, and on the Isle of Man (1907–1909) he undertook expeditions to Greenland in 1906 and the Basque country in 1913. He also collected various *ethnographica* and was especially interested in models of “primitive ships” (the topic of his subsequent thesis, Trebitsch 1911), in some musical instruments such as the harp and bagpipe, various toys, seen as typical artefacts collected as primal sources, and even wood carvings. Trebitsch donated all these *ethnographica* to the *Volkskundemuseum*, and it was on the basis of these holdings that comparative ethnology came to be established as a field of research. Yet Trebitsch did not only collect – on various occasions he donated large amounts of money to promote the institutionalisation of ethnology in Austria. Although Trebitsch recorded mostly language, he did so in an unsystematic way and is today criticised by linguists for not having produced a

proper corpus (Hurch 2003: 15). His approach, however, was ethnological one and, being an anthropologist, he was bound to be more interested in stories than in language and grammar. On the basis of these considerations Trebitsch should thus be seen as one of the first ethnographers or folklore researchers in Europe in the beginnings of that discipline; and he was a modern researcher, using modern technology, such as camera and phonograph.

Conclusion

Although the Phonogrammarchiv cannot be called a folklore archive proper, its importance as the first and therefore stimulating sound archive has to be seen from the archival, technical and content-related perspectives. The collections of the Phonogrammarchiv have never been limited to Austrian or German topics (such as those of the Österreichische Volksliedwerk with its holdings of Austrian folklore); rather, they have always mirrored research undertaken worldwide by Austrian scholars¹¹.

¹ Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), founder of the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin, together with Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902).

² Leo Frobenius (1873–1938), was one of the outstanding, but controversial ethnologists of his time, founded the *Afrika-Archiv* in Berlin, finally established in Frankfurt / Main.

³ Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), had a call to the university of Leipzig (geography) and is known as the founder of *Anthropogeographie*.

⁴ Fritz Graebner (1877–1934), a German ethnologist working in museums of Berlin and Cologne; he used the theory of cultural circles in his research.

⁵ Pater Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954), worked in religious studies, linguistics and ethnology, was member of the religious order *Societas Verbi Divini*.

⁶ Pater Wilhelm Koppers (1886–1961), expedition to the Fireland Indians together with Martin Gusinde (1886–1969), first head of the *Institut für Völkerkunde* at the university of Vienna, pupil and close colleague of Wilhelm Schmidt, also member of the religious order *Societas Verbi Divini*.

⁷ Paul Schebesta (1887–1967), ethnologist and missionary in Africa.

⁸ Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), physiologist, philosopher, and psychologist.

⁹ “Durch die bunte ethnographische Zusammensetzung Österreichs ist uns die vergleichende Richtung des Volksstudiums geradezu selbstverständlich gegeben” (Haberlandt 1895: 1).

¹⁰ E.g. recordings made by Joseph Seemüller in the Phonogrammarchiv in 1906, or in Lower Austria by Walter Steinhauser.

¹¹ E.g., there are Lithuanian recordings stored in the Phonogrammarchiv as well:

1911: Ph 1486–88; rec. in Fribourg by A. Pfalz und W. Steinhauser: tales and poems;

1912: Ph 1836–39; rec. in Kairo by R. A. Péter: Lithuanian Jews;

1915: Ph 2649–52, 2656; rec. in Theresienstadt by R. Pösch: tales, poems and songs;

1935: Ph 3481–82; rec. in the Phonogrammarchiv by L. Hajek: fairy story;

1944: G 3762–84; rec. in the Phonogrammarchiv by W. Ruth: stories, fairy tales, poems, songs and texts from the Bible;

1962: B 6291; rec. in the Phonogrammarchiv by M. Hornung: Yiddish from Lithuania: days of the week, Shabbat, marriage.

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FONOGRAMŲ ARCHYVO VAIDMUO (ANKSTYVUOSIUOSE) FOLKLORO TYRIMUOSE

GERDA LECHLEITNER

Santrauka

Vienos Fonogramų archyvo (*Phonogrammarchiv*) – seniausio pasaulyje mokslinio garso archyvo – įkūrėjai 1899 metais apibrėžė tris jiems rūpimas sritis: tai esančios kalba, muzika ir vadinamieji balso portretai; kaip tik šių sričių duomenis buvo numatoma kaupti ir saugoti. Apie 1900 metus, išaugus domėjimuisi neuropietišku šalių kultūra, mokslininkai karštai puolėsi taikyti naujas garso įrašymo technologijas, siekdami išplėsti metodologines bei pažinimo ribas ir sukurti naujų etnomuzikologijos, kalbotyros ir kitokių tyrimų šaltinių. Baiminantis, kad „primityviosios“ kultūros gali netrukus išnykti, ir

vis labiau išgalint pasaulinės europeizacijos idėjai, atsirado lig tol nematytas dėmesys anksčiau netirtoms, už Europos ribų esančioms kultūroms.

O kaipgi domėjimasis Europos folkloru? Daugiatautėje Austrijos-Vengrijos monarchijoje buvo puikiai suvokiamas skirtingų tautų kultūrinis potencialas ir būtinybė tirti bei dokumentuoti įvairiausių kultūros aspektus. Pirmųjų etnografinių apžvalgų radimosi laikais buvo įprasta iš centro (sostinės) žvelgti į pakraščius ir manyti, neva „aukštoji“ kultūra menksta einant iš vidurio periferijos link. Visiškai tokie pat vertinimai gyvavo ir visos Europos mastu, t. y. tolimiausi vakariniai bei šiauriniai žemyno pakraščiai buvo laikomi tipiškais „egzotiškos“ kultūros regionais. Viena vertus, tokius vaizdinius formavo patys mokslininkai, bet, antra vertus, specifinius jų interesus irgi stengtasi nukreipti atitinkama vaga. Istoriniai Fonogramų archyvo rinkiniai kaip tikrai ir atspindi šias idėjas. Ankstyviausiųjų lauko tyrimų, vykdytų Balkanuose, Grenlandijoje, keltų ir baskų gyvenamose srityse, metu daryti garso įrašai šiandien kelia didžiulį susidomėjimą. Tačiau esama ir archyve darytų (vadinamųjų studijinių) įrašų, kuriuose sukaupti pavyzdžiai atspindi kone visos Europos panoramą.

Remiantis istorine patirtimi, Europos etnologijos mokslo raida ir istoriniais Fonogramų archyvo rinkiniais, privalu žvelgti į dabartinę folkloro tyrimų padėtį. Nors Fonogramų archyvo ir negalima laikyti vien folkloro archyvu, jo, kaip seniausiojo bei kitiems įtaką darančio garso archyvo, svarbą reikėtų vertinti archyvinio, techninio ir turinio aspektais.

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