

**PRESERVATION AND USAGE:
WHOM DO WE HAVE IN MIND?**

ALDIS PŪTELIS

*Archives of Latvian Folklore, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art,
University of Latvia*

The current article deals with changes in archiving situation and tasks, especially in relation to folklore archives. Political influences on folklore collection are shortly described. Issues of digitization are also discussed, suggesting that though not being a panacea it would enable better solutions for both preservation and access.

Key words: archives, folklore, collection, *Dainu skapis*, Soviet folklore, digitization, web access.

Archiving as a human activity has a long history, most likely it is as long as the writing itself. In the course of this history archiving has undergone significant changes, not only because of the new opportunities opening up for organization of archiving work, but also because the items to be archived have taken on new forms. Sometimes we even have to deal with items that are completely intangible, though *archivable*.

The task of the first archives was seemingly easier, i.e. to preserve or just *keep* the documents created by some group of persons or an individual. The users were rather few, some officials or outstanding scholars, or just royal persons. An archive was an administrative and representational institution, from which the general public was excluded. But in the course of time the number of documents grew, new media in the form of printed books appeared, and the archivists – in order to cope with these larger amounts of information and the new requirements – had to be not just learned but specially trained people. Still the main aspects of their work were the same: knowing the location, and finding the item.

New social activities introduced new items. The attitude towards the phenomenon that was subsequently named *folklore* changed the archiving situation significantly, although it was not immediately apparent. Though there happened to be cases of *finding* folklore in an already written form (like the famous MacPherson's *Ossian*), archiving folklore essentially meant:

- 1) capturing something originally oral and intangible,
- 2) converting it into a customary document, and
- 3) then archiving it according to the certain principles.

Though this did not change the archiving itself, the process of creating the *archivable* document implied some quite specific activities. At first, in order to perform this task the only available recording means were paper and pen. Along with textual literacy being much more widespread than musical education sufficient for transcription of melodies, this led to prevalence of texts within the archived collections, as recording the sound pitch and length, i.e. the melody, required special skills and real talent. While the collection of folklore stayed in the framework of treating the material as literature, the traditional archiving practice also did not have to change. Paper documents were the archived items, arranged in folders, envelopes, or bound volumes, numbered and catalogued, splitting the original manuscript into *folklore items*. The particular attitude to these items somewhat differed from place to place and from society to society, depending on the scholarly principles used and the political situation, but the main idea was the same: i.e. folklore was regarded as the national heritage, connected to some territory and certain social political entity. The actual users of such archives were still rather few.

Let's turn to the example of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (ALF). It was established by a decree of Ministry of Education on December 2, 1924, though the work in full force was launched only in 1926. The person behind this decision was Anna Bērzkalne (1891–1956). As a representative of the so-called Finnish school, she not only was the main driving force in organizing the new institution, but also organized numerous matters in the new archives taking the archives of the Finnish Literary Society as the example, such *influences* ranging from choosing the same suppliers of paper and envelopes to Kaarle Krohn lecturing in Rīga on the archiving practices and principles.

One may also say that the actual cause of this institution's birth was the famous Latvian folksong text edition "Latvju Dainas" (1894–1915), compiled and edited by Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923). This publication in six volumes became the symbol of Latvian culture, similarly as "Kalevala" did for the Finns, and it has a particular history of its own. Because of the social and political situation on the territory of the modern Latvia in the 19th century, folklore was used by the emerging Latvian intelligentsia as the only possible basis for the claim of the Latvian nationhood. This led to the extensive collection of folklore, started by the German priests, then continued by the Latvian researchers and resulting in a number of publications, of which "Latvju Dainas" was the largest, the best organized and the most appraised.

Still the collection was not carried on systematically: the texts were collected by the local activists, while lack of which meant that the particular parish (or whatever territorial entity) would not be represented in the edition, making it appear that singing tradition was not to be found there. With the interest focused on the study of

all-Latvian tradition this was a serious drawback. Another aspect was related to the prevailing method. From the perspective of the so-called Finnish school, finding the original version of a folklore item and then tracing ways of its distribution along with the changes taking place in this course was considered of great importance. With geographical units missing from this distribution map it was impossible to perform such a research. It was still clear that the singing tradition was also present in the areas not represented in the “Latvju Dainas”, though by then it must have been much more deteriorated due to migration set in motion by the World War I as well as the general development of the modern culture. The collection, though again organized with the help of the local people, i.e. very much the same way as in the previous century, was focused on the so-called *mēmie pagasti* (‘mute parishes’). The main result of this work was again a vast collection of paper documents. To be honest, it was done in the same spirit as more than half a century earlier.

The general interest in paper document as the main source still prevailed even when phonograph was first used to record the song melodies. The sound recordings themselves were not considered as archival items in their own right; on the contrary, they were regarded just as an intermediary stage on the way to the transcribed notation. The archivists recorded samples of songs – one stanza being the usual length – and brought the recordings back to the archives where some musically educated person did the transcription, thus providing the paper document – score – to be archived under a particular number. This also quite well served the users, who were both the Archives and the individual scholars. In all cases the material searched for was to be included into some printed matter (like books), so the paper document was exactly the right thing to look for. Also phonograph was not such a widespread technology (in fact, it was already on decline) and could not be readily used by general public, so the score was the best result of this process.

The situation changed after the World War II, though the change first affected mostly the attitude towards the material and not the archiving practice itself. The ideological approach to this field of research generated a phenomenon initially entitled the *new folklore*, later renamed less ambiguously as the *Soviet folklore*. The first term established the notion of both socially oriented and ideologically applicable folklore, speaking of *struggle for social freedom and equality*. This could include not only recently composed or *invented* items, but also folklore that had been around for quite some time, including the songs of the Fifth Year (*Piektais gads*) – the uprising of the 1905 – and all the folklore items reflecting the relationship between the poor and the rich, masters and servants, landlords and peasants. The second term was already more oriented towards the recent phenomena. Joy and satisfaction of the people of the united republics with the *new life* they experienced had to be expressed both in the traditional forms and in the new ways. The diagrams published in accounts of the institution showed the number of the new folklore items growing much faster than those of the “pre-Soviet” or “bourgeois” one. The archive indices testify the same: for some period of time, the number of the folklore items representing the type *in*

demand really did exceed that of the traditional ones. By the accounts of the former staff members it was a requirement to be obeyed...

The first great change brought about by the period was use of the magnetic tape for recording. Then also came use of the cinematic film, mainly in order to capture the movements of some dancers, though sometimes also the process of fieldwork was filmed. These films still are of greater value for choreography researchers, as they feature no sound. Rather late, in 1986, also video recording of informants (singers and narrators) started. The first use of the magnetic tape in 1951 is a recording of the performance of informants met during a fieldwork session at its summarizing concert. It is also one of the first audio documentations of the above-mentioned *Soviet folklore*. Whatever its particular contents, this recording started the life of the new archival items in the ALF. Unlike the phonograph recordings, most of which were transcribed into scores being subsequently used as the main resulting document, these tape recordings were much longer and could not be so easily transcribed in full (the recording time of a phonograph cylinder was about 3–5 minutes, while a tape holds at least 30 minutes). In many cases this also seemed not necessary as the same material had been written down by hand previously: because recording an informant was a technically sophisticated task, the particular people and their repertoire had to be checked beforehand, therefore folklorists had to visit them and then choose the ones worthy of recording. In any case, these recordings received their own archive number and could be quoted as research material.

Folklore was still felt to be the backbone of Latvian culture even in the mid-twentieth century. This attitude even strengthened in the second half of the 1970s. Though everything labeled “national” was considered nearly illegal and deemed dangerous by the authorities, interest in folklore was high, scholarly books and material publications were among the books that disappeared from the bookstore shelves first, the audiences at folklore related events were large. The number of folklore groups grew, as participation in them seemed to be a way of fostering and expressing Latvianness, which was endangered in most of the other social aspects. Just like a century ago, folklore was the main bearer of the national identity, which no one could banish, at the same time being reliable and regarded as very valuable. Study of folklore was considered socially important, many local people filed requests to search for material from their neighborhood, groups of interested people wanted to see the archives and also *Dainu skapis* – the cabinet designed in 1880 that became the editor’s tool of Krišjānis Barons that was turned into a national symbol decades earlier. The main shift was now taking place not in the archive holdings, but in terms of the archive users, as the circle of users had grown significantly.

But everything in this world comes to the end some day; so did the Soviet times. The mission of folklore as keeper of the national identity was fulfilled, and it had to return into the domain of the specialized research. This was signaled by the attitude of the general public to the different folklore-related events. *Barona diena* (‘Barons’ day’, an event held on Krišjānis Barons’ birthday and comprising some

scholarly presentations and performances of informants met and interviewed during the previous summer's fieldwork sessions) kept going, until in 1999 it became completely clear that it has become somewhat pointless. The folklore festival *Baltica* has never again been so well attended as in 1988, when the political driving force turned it into a manifestation of nationalism as opposed to the idea of *Soviet people* driven mainly by class distinctions. The socio-political overtones have died down since. What we were left with could be termed as the regular archive work and the regular archive users: e. g. scholars and students looking for material to use in their research, as well as *practical folklorists*, i.e. leaders and members of folklore groups looking for songs and other material to complement their respective repertoire. Computers, data bases, digitization and websites – these terms have entered the archiving life for good, step by step widening the possibilities of catering for the users' needs.

We are members of a union again. This time the Baltic countries did much to enter it and seem content with being there, unlike in the case of the former USSR. The borders are fading and there is no strongly felt need to keep and defend one's identity and heritage, though migration is still equally possible. The very field of folkloristics is changing, turning more towards social and cultural anthropology, and preferring narratives of personal experience to folksongs and folk tales.

Still this is not the end of folkloristics and tradition, as we know it. There is an extremely demonstrative example of an ingenious editor's tool becoming a national symbol. In 1878, Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923) was chosen as an editor of a prospective collection of the best Latvian folksong texts. This was a serious task, because folklore was expected to prove that Latvians had developed their own original culture in the ancient times. The response of the contributors was immense, so in 1880 Barons designed and ordered a specific cabinet to hold the paper slips with song texts he was arranging. As the edition* received great acclaim, this cabinet in popular interpretation was turned into a shrine of national culture. In 2001 *Dainu skapis* – that same Krišjānis Barons' tool in editing "Latvju Dainas" – was included into the register of UNESCO's Memory of the World. Yet it created nothing else but new responsibilities for the Latvian archivists in the eyes of the archive users around the world. A year later the texts of the edition along with the scanned manuscripts were prepared for digital access via a website (<http://www.dainuskapis.lv>). Still, this proved to be a very good move, as it became national news then, and the site keeps being frequently visited, especially in the time of the traditional festivals, when a good quote to be used in some greeting or whatever activity could come in handy. Nevertheless, this also indicates a rather unfavorable change in the human minds. In the age of the Internet, what is not found there might not be found at all.

As mentioned earlier, not only text documents are stored in ALF. The first photograph found in the collection was taken in 1921. During the first years of its work,

* *Krišjānis Barons, Henrijs Vissendorff*. Latvju Dainas, Vol. I–VI. Jelgava–St. Peterburg, 1894–1915.

the archives did not even expect them to be many, as the same identification (code V) was given both to the drawings and photos. Towards the end of the 1930s there were about 70 photographs. After the World War II with the ALF staff members starting to take pictures, the number of them increased dramatically and now reaches several thousands.

But the still image was not enough. As already mentioned, in the early 1960s filming of the fieldwork process began. Mostly different dancing events became the main focus of these films, as dance is difficult to describe by any other means, yet other topics were not excluded. The films were shot using a 16 mm amateur camera; they were edited afterwards and even titles added, giving the material the appearance of some documentary. Though being of real interest and giving some insight into the life of the middle of the last century, these films are unfortunately not a complete documentation. It is difficult for a modern person to imagine, but they do not have any sound recording with them!

Only in 1986 the first video recording of the Latvian folklore was made, greatly resembling that first audio recording, as the folklore concert during *Barona diena* was recorded. Video recording as such brought up another serious issue. It is undoubtedly the best possible way of documentation, storing both audio and visual information. But with the change in both the approach and the technical facilities, the recordings have changed from one stanza samples on the phonograph cylinders, through exclusive recording of folklore items alone, to full documentation of the researcher's visit and interview. Because of that, the amount of material grows substantially, posing another problem, as the idea of archives is not just storage, but also (and in fact mainly) retrieval of information. Still the latter is impossible without cataloguing, which in turn is impossible without thorough transcription of the recording. Have we returned to the beginning? Does this form a vicious circle? It is difficult to tell, as full transcription is not always provided, but it is nevertheless possible to catalogue the main items notable in the recording.

Still new perspectives are added by the digital recording and storage: e.g., this creates virtual archive items, that (unlike manuscripts) demand specific technical means of reading, at the same time remaining just some variations in magnetic field values on a physical item, and not actual, tangible items themselves. Thus from a collection of valuable paper documents, prepared by and meant for the outstanding researchers, folklore archives has turned into a collection of different (both physically tangible and virtual) items, available to the general public not only at its letterhead address, but all over the world via Internet. This appears to be the only right practice for the modern archives. In the era when much of *everyday research* is done entering some keywords into a search engine's window, archives and their holdings must ensure their presence on the Web. Otherwise some high school or college student may get an impression that the item searched for simply does not exist.

This brings up still more issues. The most sophisticated of them is copyrights that seem to hinder archiving work everywhere. This is another matter of the new

era, i.e. what was once considered national heritage belonging to all and to no one in particular, now is a collection of somebody's performance recorded by somebody. Nevertheless, this must not stop the work. *A few learned men* will surely find the right item in the traditional archives, using the outstanding opportunity of working with the originals. But this is not enough. If we agree that our heritage is of value for us all, it must be made publicly available. A demonstrative example is that of the previously mentioned *Dainu skapis*. But it is not the only one that could be of interest. Just think of the *Soviet folklore*. There is a general *tradition* to ridicule it, but no phenomenon is that simple. With the political aspects having died down, it should now be studied from an impartial scholarly perspective. Fortunately, there are not only rather impersonal transcriptions, but also recordings. And thus it is not yet too late to get the work started.

Digital format provides scholars with an excellent research opportunity, as it allows for frequent use of the material by anybody with no harm to the original. At the same time it is not a panacea for all the archiving problems. Although mythically believed by the modern people to be capable of solving all the problems, the computers cannot digitize the material on their own. It takes human work and specific knowledge, making choice of the suitable format, technical facilities and particular management solutions to digitize a collection of material. Afterwards there is even no tangible form of the material left that an archivist could check. At the same time the mainly consumer-oriented technological industry creates problems to archivists by rather frequently changing the formats of both hardware and software. There is no stable form(-at) that the digital archives can use, and probably there will never be. The archives must be prepared for that.

The old days with paper and pen (or even quill) were much easier for the archivists, as little could change in principle. But then only those few learned men or royal persons could access the documents stored. Probably the rest of the people did not even feel the necessity. In order to avoid the return of such a situation it is worth the trouble to deal with all the new problems, because thus the archives can provide better services for all their current users and arouse interest in the new potential ones. Having the whole world as the archive users – isn't that an exhilarating feeling?

SAUGOJIMAS IR NAUDOJIMAS: KĄ TURIME OMENYJE?

ALDIS PŪTELIS

Santrauka

Nuo tada, kai buvo įkurti pirmieji archyvai, smarkiai pakito pati archyvo samprata. Taip nutiko tiek dėl labai pasikeitusio archyvuose saugomų dokumentų kiekio ir prigimties, tiek dėl pakitusio vartotojo, kurio poreikius archyvai tenkina.

Pirmieji dokumentai, kuriuos imta kaupti, kad prireikus būtų galima ištraukti į dienos šviesą, buvo rankraščiai. Kadangi prieinamos technologijos daugelį šimtmečių išliko beveik nepakitusios, žmonių sąmonėje įsigalėjo bendras archyvų, kuriuose daugiausia saugomi rankraščiai, įvaizdis. Iš pat pradžių,

kai latvių folkloristikoje dar tik imta naudoti pirmuosius garso įrašus, techninis dokumentas tebuvo tarsi pereinamoji grandis tarp paties kūrinio atlikimo ir jį atspindinčio rankraščinio aprašo.

Laikui bėgant, techninių dokumentų kiekis augo ir darėsi vis reikšmingesnis. Greta nuotraukų, kurių peržiūrai ir panaudojimui iš esmės nereikia jokių papildomų techninių priemonių, prisikaupė magnetofono juostų bei vaizdo įrašų, kurių saugojimas reikalauja ne tik atitinkamos įrangos, bet ir tam tikrų naudojimo apribojimų. Susidaro savotiškas prieštaravimas: viena vertus, įrašai yra pati vertingiausia ir visa apimanti medžiagos dokumentavimo rūšis, kurią reikėtų padaryti prieinamą kuo didesniai vartotojų skaičiui, o antra vertus, jų vartojimą įrangos ir informacijos apsaugos tikslais reikia gerokai riboti.

Daugelį šių problemų galima išspręsti, skaitmeninant turimą medžiagą ir padarant ją prieinamą pasauliniame kompiuterių tinkle. Įgyvendinant tokį tikslą, savo ruožtu iškyla nemaža sunkiai įveikiamų užduočių, kaip antai tinkamos įrangos iš nuolatos kintančio formatų srauto pasirinkimas bei įsigijimas, taip pat teisingų praktinių duomenų skaitmeninimo būdų sukūrimas. Vis dėlto šio darbo imtis tikrai verta, nes tai leidžia pagausinti archyvo duomenų vartotojų: nuo tų keleto išskirtinių asmenybių, galėjusių naudotis archyvine medžiaga pačiais pirmaisiais archyvų gyvavimo metais iki visos tuo besidominčių interneto naršytojų bendruomenės. O kadangi mūsų dienomis informacijos šaltinių paieška (pvz., rengiant mokyklinį ar studijų darbą) dažniausiai ir apsiriboja panaršymu internete, tai autentiškos medžiagos pasirodymas kompiuterių tinkle yra nepaprastai svarbus – jis tiesiogiai veikia bendrą supratimą apie tam tikrą mokslo sritį.

Gauta 2006-04-19