

NEWS IN BRIEF

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COLLECTING ORAL HERITAGE ON FIELDWORK AMONG SIBERIAN ESTONIANS AND FACTS INFLUENCING THE RESULTS

In 1991-2000, Anu Korb collected oral heritage of Siberian Estonians from a relatively wide area stretching from the Omsk Oblast to the District of Krasnoiarsk, Russia, as a member of the Estonian Folklore Archives' (EFA) fieldwork team. In her work, she focused on the issues of modern folkloristic fieldwork.

Siberian Estonians are the descendants of native Estonians, who were deported in the 18th–19th centuries or voluntarily emigrated later. The Siberia project of EFA, entitled “Native Culture in Estonian Settlements”, was initially planned as a modest salvage collection, which in the course of years has developed into a multifaceted research project.



Anu Korb (right) in active field-work among Siberian Estonians.

In the 5 chapters of her MA thesis ***Encounters in Siberia, Collection Situations in a Siberian Settlement, Questioning and Collection Methods, Factors Influencing the Results, The Significance of Fieldwork and Consequences***, A. Korb provides an overview of the current situation in the Estonian villages of Siberia and problems connected with fieldwork outside one's homeland.

In the village community of Siberian Estonians a folklore collector from Estonia is welcomed as one of “our own kind”, an Estonian whom one can talk to in the mother tongue; on the other hand, the collector still remains a stranger, whose historical, social and cultural background, usage of language, etc. differs considerably from that of a local. In order to establish a dialogue, it is necessary to

bridge the gap in the different worldviews of the researcher and the upholder of local culture. Different recording situations produce different material.

Methods used in folkloristic collection work are the following: questionnaire, interview, conversation, observation and participatory observation. Folkloristic fieldwork often begins with an opening interview, which focuses on the biography and background of the informant. Folkloristic questioning tends to mostly concern the subject, being a thematic interview. The shift in folklore research from a narrative text to the process itself has increased the use of participatory observation as a collection method.

Collection results always depend on people participating in the situation. Factors conditioned by the researcher (his/her knowledge, background, personal characteristics, competence in the communication system of a given heritage group, use of recording technology, etc.) are as important as factors conditioned by members of the heritage group (informant's self-control, domination of the village community, influence of the community leader, rivalry between informants, influence of the informant's family, etc.). Factors that influence the results cannot be viewed as distinct and independent factors, as they originate from the researcher-informant interrelation in a specific collection situation.

Methods applied to collecting oral narrative history in Estonian settlements in Siberia were elaborated during the first expeditions. It became evident that working techniques, even if based on a long-term fieldwork experience in homeland, cannot be mechanically applied to the heritage community in Siberia. Earlier fieldwork experience and working among a certain heritage group helps the researcher understand better the moral standards of the studied community and widens his or her perspective on what heritage is worth recording. A collector will probably never be able to describe a Siberian Estonian community in a truthful and authentic manner, but with the help of modern recording technology he or she may bring along a piece of the informant's reality.

ESTONIAN RUNO-SONG FORMULAE

Liina Saarlo received on June 8, 2000, her MA in Tartu University. The thesis discusses concepts of stereotyped line stratum phenomena (formula) of two different schools of folkloristics - the oral-formulaic theory and the Finish-Estonian folkloristics - where different grounds have given essentially similar results.

Different views on folklore (esp. oral song tradition) are examined, discussing also production methods. The observations of oral theory on differences between literary and oral culture partly coincide with the characteristics of Estonian newer folk-songs. However, the transition from runo-song to newer, rhymed folk-songs did not take place all at once and could not be explained by the general spread of literacy only.

A classification of Estonian runo-song formulae is presented, based on the runo-songs from the Kodavere parish, and the problems arising in defining, classifying and specifying the formulae are elaborated. The formulae are defined as line stratum phenomena, which are (1) phrases or line structures occurring noticeably often in different contexts based either on semantic associations or simple alliterative and rhythmic associations; (2) phraseological units not occurring so often but having independent meaning. Formulae can have wider or narrower (geographical) spread and be more or less connected to certain song motifs, types and themes.