

Estonian Folklore Archives

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The Estonian Folklore Archives was established as the central folklore archives of Estonia in 1927.¹ The original collections of the archives were built upon manuscript reports and accounts of Estonian folklore, consisting of over 115,000 pages of material contributed primarily by the noted Estonian folklore collector Jakob Hurt (1839-1907) and his more than 1,400 informants in the late nineteenth century. Today the Estonian Folklore Archives holds nearly 1.5 million manuscript pages as well as a collection of photographs, videos, and audio recordings.

After the death of Jakob Hurt in 1906, the tomes of manuscripts collected and systematized by him were transferred to the repository of the Finnish Literature Society (*Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura*) in Finland. One reason for the move was the lack of appropriate preservation conditions for such valuable material in Estonia; another was the Finnish folklore researcher Kaarle Krohn's long-term interest in the materials. Following this transfer, a large-scale copying of Hurt's collections was initiated in Finland (see further Järvinen 2008:57-58). Negotiations about the return of the collections were started in 1924 with an aim of establishing folklore archives in Estonia. Folklorist Oskar Loorits (1900-1961) was largely the brain behind the idea, and he was assigned the task of managing the retransfer of the collections. The central archives were to be established on the example of the Finnish Literature Society in Finland and were directly inspired by the establishment of the Latvian Folklore Archives in 1924 as the first of its kind in the Baltic region. Following lengthy discussions about which institution would control the central archives, the collections were successfully retransferred to Estonia in 1927. The archives started operations at the beginning of September, but on September 24, 1927, at the first meeting of the governing committee, the Estonian Folklore Archives was officially established as an independent institution under the Estonian National Museum.

The archives were housed in 1927 at a former residence on Aia (now Vanemuise) Street in Tartu. The Archival Library of the Estonian National Museum, which had been established in 1909 and originally intended as an Estonian national library, was also brought there at that time. Two years later in 1929 the Estonian Cultural History Archives was founded in the same building.

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The main objective of the newly-founded archives was to bring previously existing folklore collections together into one place in order to facilitate research, to organize extensive fieldwork throughout Estonia, and to begin broad research on the folklore collected. Institution-initiated collecting of folklore in Estonia was started in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, resulting in a total of over 8,000 pages housed in the collection of the Learned Estonian Society and in the folklore collection of the Estländische Literärische Gesellschaft literary union, both located in Tallinn. These collections were incorporated into the Estonian Folklore Archives, as were many others (for instance, Hurt's collection and the Estonian Students' Society's Collection), including the voluminous collection of the folklorist Matthias Johann Eisen (1857-1934) from the University of Tartu.

Archival Work

The archives' primary purpose has always been to make the manuscript materials as easily available to researchers as possible. Thus, on the initiative of Oskar Loorits, who was at that time head of the archives, an appropriate system of registers and card files was developed to enable researchers to find and gain access to every single folklore piece in the handwritten volumes. In order to preserve the volumes for the sake of better analysis, copies of folklore texts were typed and organized in folders, and shorter texts were copied and organized into thematic card files. Folklore material was also copied from the collections of other institutions, where it was sometimes found among other material (for example, language corpora).

Ever since the founding of the archives, special emphasis has been placed on the idea that the archives' workers must be involved not only in facilitating access to the materials but also in researching the material from one perspective or another. Oskar Loorits focused on Livonian folklore and particularly on Livonian religion, Herbert Tampere explored folk songs and tunes, and Rudolf Põldmäe studied folk dance. Paul Ariste investigated the folklore of other ethnic groups in Estonia, Erna Normann studied riddles and legends, and Professor Walter Anderson from the University of Tartu explored children's songs.

To ensure the growth of new collections, folkloric field expeditions were carried out in the 1930s within regions where little folklore material had previously been collected. In addition to the work of the archives' employees, special stipend support also led to an increase in the collections but, just as when Jakob Hurt organized such folklore collection, the majority of contributions were still sent in by voluntary correspondents. For this specific reason several larger campaigns for collecting folklore were organized: for collecting bugbears (1932/1933), folk games (1934/1935), and local legends (1938/1939) (see Hiimäe 1996:245-47). From the very beginning considerable attention was paid to written lore—the collection of song books, memory albums, “oracles” (notebooks containing prophecies), and so forth was undertaken. Next to the collections of Estonian material, the folklore collections of other ethnic groups, especially minorities in Estonia (Russian, German, Swedish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Jewish, and so on), were established.

After the Russian occupation in 1940, the Folklore Archives, Cultural History Archives, and Archival Library were segregated from the Estonian National Museum, and the State

Literary Museum was established as an independent institution. The Estonian Folklore Archives was derogated as the Department of Folklore of the State Literary Museum. Wide activity as a main folklore archive continued despite the folklore collections in the archives being checked and censored, as also happened elsewhere in Estonia's memory institutions at this time (see, for example, Kulasalu 2013). Separate fieldwork collections were established at the Department of Literature and Folklore at the University of Tartu and the Tallinn Institute of Language and Literature of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Later, after Estonian re-independence and institutional reorganization of the Estonian Folklore Archives, these collections were incorporated into the Estonian Folklore Archives as well. Thus, by the year 2000, all of the larger folklore collections formerly held by different institutions had been concentrated within the Folklore Archives.

While its name suggests it might act primarily as a museum, the Estonian Literary Museum is mainly a research institution—its exposition is very limited and the institution's main objective is to provide researchers with access to the archival material and to prepare archive-based academic and source publications. The advantage of this system is that the Folklore Archives has the research competence for this type of work, which is highly useful for analyzing or interpreting different folklore genres or phenomena—thus reducing the danger of having usable databases without the capability to analyze the material. As a scientific collection, the archived material is primarily intended for researchers and (degree) students in the field of folklore studies—in Tartu these include, in addition to the researchers of the Estonian Folklore Archives, folklorists from the Department of Folkloristics at the Estonian Literary Museum and employees and students of the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu.

The archives' employees offer assistance and consultations to ethnologists, cultural anthropologists, and researchers of other disciplines in Estonia and elsewhere in the world. In addition to such researchers, the target user group of the archives could consist more generally of everyone interested in Estonian folklore: folk musicians in search of traditional song material for musical arrangements, people interested in local history and wanting to expand historical information about a locality by collecting oral history, guides needing further information for entertaining tourists, and so on.

Archival Collections

The archival material in the Estonian Folklore Archives is distributed among the following collections:

The **manuscript collection** consists (as of November 2013) of 1,480,462 pages of material on bound and partly unbound sheets. According to the original principle of incorporating different collections into the central archives, the original collection's name is preserved and never renamed—for example, the code “E” in an archival reference indicates Matthias Johann Eisen's manuscript collection; “H” refers to Jakob Hurt's manuscript collection. Since 2000, the manuscript collection has also included digital manuscripts.

The **collection of sound recordings** contains both folk music and non-musical folklore (10,310 units, 182,000 pieces of music). The earliest material consists of recordings on wax cylinders (575 units, 2,151 pieces of music). A significant part of the earlier material is on shellac discs, recorded from 1936 to 1938 at the state broadcasting company (131 discs, including 746 pieces of music; see Tamm 2002). The largest portion of the audio-recorded material is the collection of audio tapes and cassettes. The most recent material has been recorded on a series of data carriers: DATs and MiniDiscs since 1995, and memory cards beginning in 2000.

The **photograph collection** contains photos of collectors, performers, scenes depicting folklore collecting in general, and images related to various folkloric material. The earliest units are glass and photographic negatives. Although there were photos in the archives from the beginning, with new ones being added regularly, the systematization of the photo collection did not commence until 1936, by which time the collection held 585 photographs. Today the collection consists of images on various data carriers including black-and-white as well as color photographs, photographic prints (positives), diapositives, and digital photographs. Altogether, the series includes 17,747 black-and-white photographs and 7,822 color photographs. The digital series contained 16,842 photographs in 2013 and is, of course, the fastest growing type of photograph in the archives.

The **film and video collection** (1,377 items) contains audiovisual material from the traditions of the Estonians and other nationalities on various data carriers: film strips since 1959, videotapes from the 1980s, and more recent digital material on MiniDVs and memory cards. Particularly for the digitization of audio- and video-recordings of folkloric material, an independent audio-visual studio was created at the Folklore Archive in the Estonian Literary Museum. In the future, this studio will likely serve the needs of the entire Estonian Literary Museum and will be responsible for the digitization of the audio- and video-recorded material of the Estonian Cultural Historical Archives as well.

In addition to the four existing sub-archives, an experimental **multimedia collection** was established in 2008. This collection holds digital materials that do not fit within any of the traditional collections—for instance, combinations of sound and images, and so on; the collection also contains HTML resources, PowerPoint presentations, emails, and the like. The archiving of files has often proved problematic because their original formats usually do not favor long-term preservation and their conversion into the preservation format can cause some of the material's function or contents to be lost. The multimedia collection was created because there was no suitable repository for such materials; presently, the acquired materials have been registered but not completely archived. An attempt is being made to determine the appropriate archiving solutions and preservation formats for these materials, and then their archiving in the newly completed file repository can be carried out.

The availability of the means to conserve digital material has also introduced specific problems; for example, some collecting campaigns may result in the acquisition of a disproportionately large amount of a certain type of material, possibly causing diminished research interest in this type of material. In 2011, the countrywide campaign *Teatetants* (“Relay Dance”) was held in Estonia to collect traditions of folk dance groups. In response to the appeal, 189 memory sticks, containing more than 3,000 pages of text and 13,600 photos—in addition to audio and video files—were sent to the archives. This unprecedented large corpus consisting of

an array of different media files was so unusual in the history of the Folklore Archives that after preliminary description, more radical steps had to be taken. Due to the limited human resources and storage conditions, only a quarter of the huge number of photos have been previewed; photos depicting recurring motifs have been grouped and the lists of captions compiled. It was decided that the rest of the material will be left unprocessed; for the time being it is currently waiting to be archived.

Databases

Since 1997, more than 20 folklore databases of different folklore genres primarily based on the Estonian Folklore Archives' collections have been compiled and listed on the webpage of the Estonian Literary Museum at <http://www.folklore.ee/ebaas/>. The advent of the digital age in the 1990s at the Estonian Literary Museum was the time of great discoveries. The selection of the material and the solutions applied were slightly varied, depending on the specific needs of each working group with respect to organizing their data and archiving their research objectives. This variation is the reason why there were a number of genre-specific databases in the early period. An additional reason for the divergence of the material was the initially small number of files.

Many of the databases have been compiled by folklorists of the Department of Folkloristics at the Literary Museum—for example, those dedicated to web jokes and ethnobotany. There are also portals based on databases, such as the portal of South-Estonian Folklore (see Kõiva and Vesik 2004). At the present moment, the material of only one folklore database—Estonian Droodles (<http://folklore.ee/Droodles/>)—is fully translated into English. But for international users, many of the databases also have an interface in English.

The workers and research groups of the Estonian Folklore Archives is responsible for three databases: the database of runic songs (<http://www.folklore.ee/regilaul>), the database of place-lore (<http://galerii.kirmus.ee/koobas>), and the database of folktales (with a web-version that will become accessible within the year 2014).

Runic song may be considered the most archaic and unique form of Estonian folklore. This database was constructed on the example of the Old Poems of the Finnish People database of the Finnish Literary Society and follows the same structure. The aim of the compilers was to create a relatively simple search for the most readily available information; the search can be carried out, for example, by county and parish, by the collector, and so forth. Presently the database contains over 75,000 texts, which constitute more than half of all runic song texts collected in Estonia. In the course of preparatory work, all runic song texts recorded up until the year 1966 (approximately 128,000 texts) have been digitized and made available through the internal server of the Estonian Literary Museum.

In terms of genre-based databases, I personally have been most directly involved in the compilation of the database of Estonian folk tales. Among the folk tales collected in Estonia and stored in the archives, tales of magic (more than 6,000) form the largest group, followed by animal tales (3,000). Together with other subcategories, the database currently includes 10,000 fairy tales, and work toward uploading the tales from manuscript files and toward

systematization of the material continues. An overview of the typology of Estonian folk tales is available at the homepage of the folk tale project (<http://www.folklore.ee/muinasjutt>). In addition to the tale texts and archival metadata, it provides data on the performer and the narrator's gender. The database has proved useful, for example, in identifying the relations among the genders of tellers, collectors, and protagonists associated with tales of magic (see Järv 2005). In the late nineteenth century, the recordings of tales of magic were collected primarily from men; those collected after the 1920s were collected mostly from women. Estonian tales of magic also exhibit the tendency noted by many other researchers that men told above all masculine tales, whereas the tales told by women do not show remarkable correspondence between the narrator's gender and that of the protagonist.

Kivike

Perhaps the most extensive project related to the collections was the digitization in 2011-12 of Jakob Hurt's folklore collection. The project involved the assessment and description of the condition of the bound volumes; the formulation of worksheets; restoration of the volumes; and the revising of the scanned files, which were then supplied with archival references and stored in *Kivike*, the new file repository and archival infosystem of the Estonian Literary Museum. *Kivike* (available at <http://kivike.kirmus.ee>) is an acronym of the phrase *Kirjandusmuuseumi Virtuaalne Kelder* ("the virtual cellar of the Literary Museum"). This monumental project—involving the two archives and the Archival Library of the Estonian Literary Museum in order to digitize the total of 240,000 pages of material—and the funding it received provided an opportunity to create a repository for the safe storage of the acquired digital files (which previously had been stored on computers) and a system for accessing the material. The file repository *Kivike* stores two types of information: first, digitizations of the existing archive materials, manuscripts, and photographs (in the future it will also include audio- and video-recordings) as well as the digital material sent to the archives, and second, metadata about the materials, including data about the materials that have not yet been stored in the repository as files.

The *Kivike* repository also entails a field entitled "textualization," which allows the system to display a pure text or its different versions (for example, texts edited to different degrees) decoded either from a manuscript or a recording. A traditional categorization of collections according to the type of media (manuscript, sound, film, or photographic collection) might render a search across different types of material rather complicated, especially if the cross-references between different collections happen to be inadequately described or are unlinked in registers/files. Fortunately this is not the case in the *Kivike* repository; its structural system was carefully developed with an aim toward maintaining coherence across collections, thus making it possible to link materials of different types for the purpose of drawing parallels.

It is characteristic of earlier material that the entirety of the collected information is represented solely by a manuscript (and a collector's fieldwork notes), while more recent material includes additional information in the form of a sound recording complete with a collector's written notes or accompanying photographs. While genre-based systematization of

data is often practical for the study of a specific genre, it may result in a loss of contextually significant information about what a collector has recorded or what an informant said or singer sang before or after the piece was collected. As a consequence, a researcher may find it difficult to encompass fully all the possible semantic fields of the actual material. Thus we hope that the full corpus, in bringing together all these different genre-specific databases in the single *Kivike* repository, will offer us new and spectacular opportunities for future research.

In September 2013 the collecting module *Kratt* (<http://kratt.folklore.ee>; “*kratt*” in Estonian is a mythological creature, a demonic treasure hauler) was created. The module is linked to the *Kivike* repository system to facilitate the collecting of information and the insertion of new material into the archival system. Collection module users can fill out online collection questionnaires as well as add photos and other image files, videos, and sound material—all with the aim of making usage of the archives as comfortable for modern users as possible. Receiving materials through the collection module has made archivization in the information system faster than ever: an accurate archive reference of the material is automatically created, based on the type of information added in the information system and, if needed, an archivist who acquires the material can modify or update metadata.

Alternative solutions are constantly sought for the databases. In 2013 the e-publication *1001 Children’s Games Since 1935* (available at <http://folklore.ee/ukauka/arhiiv/1001>) was compiled with the use of free Omeka software (<http://omeka.org/>), which has been designed specially for memory institutions to be used in online publication of various types of collections. Omeka enables users to modify structured data into a website quite easily, and to add introductions or other required information to the material. The website also functions as a database of games. In 2014 a monumental publication on the Estonian folk calendar will be completed on the same platform.

Scientific Work and Text Collections

While the primary role of the archives, a physical repository of material, may now be diminishing in importance, as many databases are already available online, the Estonian Folklore Archives still holds a huge number of other collections and have maintained their central position largely because of specialized research. Just as in the beginning, there is still an endeavor to cover by and large all the subjects and genres of the materials in the archives through the efforts of researchers or archivists competent within each field—from classical runic song to the contemporary games tradition. The research results of the archive’s workers are published mainly as articles and monographs, but academic source publications are also produced. In 1935 the publication of the series *Proceedings of the Estonian Folklore Archives* (*Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiivi Toimetused*) was started. The publication was discontinued under the Soviet regime but was restored anew in 2000. Finally, the Archives is also responsible for preparing and publishing the collections of runic songs (such as *Vana Kannel* [“Old Harp”]) by parishes of Estonia and academic anthologies of folk tales in the edited series *Monumenta Estoniae antiquae*.

Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.

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