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Finland Swedish Folklore Studies

Due to historical and political matters, what is, today, called Finland was a part of Sweden until 1809. Thereafter, the region was an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire. Beside Latin, for a long time, Swedish was the language of the authorities, of education, and partly of science and scholarship. Not until the Russian time Finnish played an important role as a language outside the private sphere. German and Russian, respectively, were used on special occasions. Finland certainly was a polyglot region.

Folklore plays a great role in the shaping of the identity not only of single individuals, but also of nations. The Finnish case demonstrates this very clearly. Even during the Middle Ages, the initial perspective was to prove that the Swedes were Gothic descendants. Already in the fourth century, Jordanes had placed the primordial home of the Goths in the island called Scandza, i.e. Scandinavia. The aim was to create a model for courageous behaviour in times of war and crisis. During the seventeenth century, Sweden was one of the most influential and expansive kingdoms of Europe. Again, efforts were made to prove the rich history of the country. In 1666, the Chancellor of Sweden (rikskanslern) founded the Antikvitetskollegium (The Collegium of Antiquities) the task of which was, in a systematic way, to collect reminiscences of historical events and to document historical sites. Due to the

contemporary understanding of historical sources, information valuable to the folklore students of today was stored. Only much later, historians started to question the value of certain historical sources, in order to improve the ability to discern so-called facts from fantasy. This was an advantage to the folklore students. Although neither the word 'folklore', nor the study of folklore existed until the middle of the nineteenth century, the folklore material was still gathered, although with the wrong preconditions as historically reliable sources.

The eighteenth century was the time of Enlightenment. Folklore was interesting for two different reasons. On the one hand, the authorities wanted to document the lives of the inhabitants of their country, in order to be able to improve economics. This happened by describing the customs and rites found in the countryside. They also strived to eradicate such cultural traits that they regarded as irrational, but before this was possible the beliefs had to be documented. Therefore, the priests and other representatives of the Enlightenment reported on what special kinds of non-Christian forms of religion they had seen in their parochial environment. These collections are extremely valuable. On the other hand, in Europe inspired by the ideas of Montesquieu and Rousseau, an interest grew for the Nordic countries as exotic countries. The people were supposed to live

near Nature, their lives were regarded as parts of a Paradisiac way of existing. Again, the old history was accepted as a model for human life.

To some extent these ideas also affected Finland. However, folklore as a target for studies for its own sake was not evoked until the end of the seventeenth century. Certainly, there had been some efforts earlier, too, to collect and discuss folklore texts, but the main achievement was that of Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739-1804), librarian and teacher at the university library in Åbo (Turku). He was inspired by the ideas of Enlightenment, but also by the new humanistic thoughts found in Europe that admired classical antiquity with its aesthetic and ethical values. Moreover, contemporary Finnish-minded political currents seem to have had some influence on him. This combination of ideas made Porthan aware of the Finnish folk poetry, which later on was the target of several students at the Åbo Akademi and which, during the first three to four decades of the nineteenth century, resulted in huge collections of folk poetry and the *Kalevala* editions of Elias Lönnrot.

The question, what language, Finnish or Swedish, was the main constituent in the identity of these young men is not quite easy to answer. Some of them had a Finnish background, others were from Swedish speaking families in Finland, but Swedish was the main language for educational purposes, which means that all of them were in command of the language. However, political reasons must also be considered. After Finland had become part of Russia in 1809, a growing awareness of language can be spotted. In fact, being the language of the losing part, Swedish could no longer be the official language, and Russian was the language of the conqueror and, therefore, not suitable. The only remaining possibility was to create Finnish as a valid means for any kind of communication, also

outside the nearest circle. Huge systematic work started to reach this goal. Many a university student, no matter what language he regarded his own one, felt responsible and helped in collecting folk poetry which was considered the best source to start with for this

During this period in Finland, i.e., the beginning of the nineteenth century, Swedish was still generally spoken. However, the eagerness to create the Finnish language made people take the existence of the Swedish language for granted. This circumstance made the Vice Rector of the school Vasa Lyceum, Johan Oskar Immanuel Rancken (1824-95), aware of the risk at losing the corresponding insight into the folk culture of the Swedish speaking population of Finland that the immense collecting work in the Finnish regions brought along. Therefore, he started to gather folklore items specifically in Swedish, but recorded in Finland. He had quite a lot of problems and disappointments before he saw that the most efficient way to reach his goal was to encourage his pupils to document their own environments. Anyhow, thanks to Rancken's efforts, the folklore archives in Finland contain quite a lot of records in Swedish from the 1860s onwards.

Largely at the same time in Helsingfors, where the university had moved from Åbo after the great fire in 1827 and changed its name, there was a separate awakening for the Swedish folk tradition through one of the teachers at the Imperial Alexander University, namely Axel Olof Freudenthal (1836-1911). He supported a liberal perspective on being an inhabitant of Finland as he maintained that the Swedish population should function as a link between the Finns and the Scandinavians. The Swedish dialects in Finland were his special field of interest and, therefore, he urged his students to collect and discuss dialect items, such as legends, superstition

and other folklore. He was the founder of the Svenska Landsmålsföreningen in Finland (The Swedish Dialect Society in Finland) and he inspired a great number of young men to become aware of the conditions of living in Finland, but speaking Swedish.

Rancken was a historian who regarded his folklore collections as a means to the understanding of the Swedish culture in Finland, and Freudenthal was a historically educated philologist. Each of them had a political motive for their folklore interest. Freudenthal succeeded better than Rancken to realise his ideas, perhaps because he stayed in the capital of the country. In 1885, the Swedish Literature Society of Finland was founded by Freudenthal, among others. One of the aims of the Society was to collect and record folklore items. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, a system was created for how to do this work. The Society engaged the teacher Ernst Lagus (1859-1923) to plan this work, but he also gave the collectors instructions for how to conduct their work and criticised the result after they had handed over their collections to the Folklore Commission of the Society. Eventually, the collections grew, but soon the Commission realised that they gave an uneven image of the Swedish folk culture in Finland. Therefore, specially educated experts were engaged in order to collect completing recordings, which they also did. This work was accomplished during the first decade of the twentieth century. This is the explanation for the exceptionally big collection abounding in variants of Swedish folklore from Finland that, today, is kept in the archives of the Swedish Literature Society in Finland and which is also, to a great extent, published in eighteen volumes in *Finlands svenska folkdiktning*, 1917-. The publication work started when comparative research methods prevailed and therefore a great amount of variants were regarded necessary because they

constituted a sign of high quality folklore collections. Later on, in accordance with a growing interest in performance and in the process of folklore, this way of presenting the material and this kind of publishing and editing work were questioned. Therefore, the series has not yet been finished, but the recordings are available at the Archives of the Literature Society in Helsingfors.

During the nineteenth century, the collecting and recording of folklore items was a scholarly task *per se*. On the one hand, the aim was from an evolutionist-devolutionist perspective, to gather all kinds of items along the contemporary principles for how to define folklore. Folklore was needed for political reasons, i.e., to demonstrate the identity of the nation. This identity was not one and the same to all inhabitants. The two language groups wanted to profit in different ways from their folklore, correspondingly. The Finns, and their sympathisers wanted to demonstrate the value of the Finnish language as a means of literary, cultural, administrative, and scholarly activities. The Swedes wanted to show their connection to the Scandinavian culture and the Scandinavian peoples.

One of the preconditions for this twofold aim was the evolutionist theory with its historical perspective. In 1858, although he had a strong Swedish identity, Carl Gustaf Estlander, called upon the necessity to compare all the variants of the *Kalevala*. He also emphasised the importance of relating the *Kalevala* to other epics and he referred to what had been done with *The Songs of Ossian* when the debate on their authenticity raged. Other scholars worth mentioning here are, for instance, Carl Collan, who investigated Serbian folk songs, and O.A. Toppelius, who was inspired by the Danish folklore student Svend Grundtvig in his study of the songs on Marsk Stig.

Estlander's thoughts preceded Julius and Kaarle Krohn's research. In the 1860s,

Julius Krohn pondered over the age and descent of *Kalevala*. His son, Kaarle Krohn, refined his method for the purpose of folklore studies. The method relies on different kinds of comparison over time and space and it has, therefore, been called the historic-geographic method, or the Finnish method. Its concentration on the will to find out primordial facts on folklore items was a good tool when it came to demonstrate where and when an item had come to be and how it had changed and spread since. To the Swedish folklore students in Finland, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it became more and more important to prove a western influence to their folklore, due to the above mentioned fennophil ambitions.

The Swedish Literature Society certainly supported the scholarly ventures. The above mentioned Ernst Lagus planned the publication of the monumental collection called *Finlands svenska folkdiktning*, for he saw the need to make the collections available to comparative scholarly investigations. In their dissertations on charms and the Polypheme legend, respectively, his colleagues O.J. Brummer and O. Hackman regarded the Swedish folklore as a reflection of the Swedish parts of Finland, mostly situated along the western coast, as a bridge for folk culture to reach the country. However, around the turn of the twentieth century, at the Literature Society, mainly collecting work was conducted, whereas the folklore research was carried out at the university.

In this connection it is also important to mention the Brage society. The founder was Otto Andersson, who had been working with the Literature Society. In this connection his main contribution was on the area of folk music and folk song. The participants at Brage paid tribute to Swedishness, and the aim of the society was to revive folk culture, but also to influence on the gathering of folklore and the

documentation of folk culture. However, this organisation was not very important for the investigation of folklore.

Otto Andersson (1879-1969) is a prominent figure in Finnish folklore studies. He started as a collector of folk music with the Swedish Literature Society in Finland, but in due course, in 1926, he was appointed professor of musicology and folklore studies at the recently founded Swedish university in Finland, the Åbo Akademi in Åbo (Turku). The chair was a counterpart both to chairs of the kind in Sweden, and to the folklore chair founded in Helsingfors in 1898, which was one of the very first in the world, and which was held by Kaarle Krohn. Andersson combined his interest in folk music and folklore, he worked eagerly for the Swedish culture in Finland, and eventually, he became the Vice Rector of his university. He continued to collect folk music items, he introduced the phonograph, he built up a huge archive on folk music recordings, he analysed, edited, and published his material, and he wrote a lot of scholarly articles. He had the most important support from Greta Dahlström and Alfild Forslin, two ladies who were able to record songs and plays just by ear. Alfild Forslin also published a lot of articles and monographs on Swedish folklore in Finland.

Since the middle of the 1920s Swedish folklore in Finland has been of interest to the persons connected to the Swedish Literature Society in Finland situated in Helsingfors and to the university people at the Åbo Akademi University in Åbo. The collecting work went on in the capital, the editions of *Finlands svenska folkdiktning* were published at the instigation of the Society, but by the work of scholars who were situated both in Helsingfors, at the Society, and in Åbo, at the university. The Archives of Folk Tradition expanded. In Åbo, at the university, Otto Andersson mainly collected folk music and published

his collections. A great amount of scholarly articles and monographs were published, too.

In the middle of the 1930s an idea came up within the Swedish Literature Society that an institute should be founded in order to prepare for an atlas on Swedish Finn folk culture and for an ethnographic dictionary. The model was brought from the Finnish Sanakirjasäätiö (the Dictionary Fund). In 1937 the Folk Culture Archives (Folkkultursarkivet) was founded within the Literature Society. Its aims were defined as collecting folklore, ethnographical material, dialect recordings, and place names. Moreover, at this time the collections of folklore gathered at the archives of the Swedish Literature Society had grown so voluminous that they needed an organisation of their own. In 1939 Valter W. Forsblom, who was in charge of the collections, quit his work and his tasks were taken over by the two employees at the new archive, Ragna and Olav Ahlbäck. They made inventories of the existing material, they collected new recordings, and they created questionnaires. However, "pure" folklore material, i.e. folk poetry, folk belief, and folk music was not at their focus, Ragna Ahlbäck being an ethnologist and Olav Ahlbäck a scholar of dialects. Their perspective was inspired by corresponding archives in Uppsala and Stockholm and comprised all kinds of folk culture. 1939-44 during the wars, everyday work was made difficult, but soon thereafter it took more or less normal forms again.

In 1967, the first officer specialised in "pure" folklore was appointed. Since then, folk music, folk songs, folk dances, oral traditional narratives and belief recordings have been gathered in great amounts. During Ann-Mari Häggman's era collecting and publishing work was in the center of the activities. Later on a balance was found between the main fields of purposes, i.e. collecting and registering, public service,

and research. During the last decades of the twentieth century the number of folklorists increased again. Among other things is worth mentioning the archives specialised in Ostrobothnian folk culture in Vasa. The Folk Culture Archives conducted several field expeditions along the Swedish areas in Finland and Estonia. A fair amount of questionnaires and competitions was administered and arranged. Regularly, several hundreds of informants corresponded with the archives on specific topics. A catalog of the collections was published and a lot of interesting books on folklore issues are, nowadays, part of the series published by the Swedish Literature Society in Finland. Cooperation with other folklorists in Finland and the other Nordic countries goes without saying.

In Åbo the successor of the retired Otto Andersson was John Rosas. He was in charge of the folklore studies at the university, but he was himself more interested in the other part of his chair, i.e. music, than of folklore studies. Still, he managed to find money to pay part time teachers to give lessons on folklore. It is worth mentioning, among others, Alfild Forslin and Ann-Mari Häggman from Finland, Iørn Piø from Denmark, and Britt-Marie Insulander and Jan-Öjvind Swahn from Sweden as inspiring teachers coming for some weeks to give courses on general and special folklore topics. Gradually, a growing interest in folklore studies came to the fore with the students at Åbo Akademi University and Jan-Öjvind Swahn was appointed a permanent visiting teacher from the 1970s. During that decade, the organisation of the university changed so that folklore studies were administered within the department of ethnology. Swahn spread the knowledge of folklore among the students to such an extent that the Foundation of the Åbo Akademi University decided to appoint at half time lecturer of folklore studies from the beginning of the

1980s. Since 1985 this lecturership was a full time appointment held by Ulrika Wolf-Knuts. Since 1987 Lena Marander-Eklund is her working partner, today she is an academic lecturer of folklore studies.

The last two decades of the twentieth century were characterised by international cooperation. The Nordic Institute of Folklore, followed by the Nordic Network of Folklore, may be mentioned beside the Coimbra Group of Universities' Culture Task Force which arranges international conferences on various topics of folklore. *Arv, Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* was published at the Åbo Akademi University from 1993 to 2002

During the last twenty years nearly forty students have received their master's degrees and four doctors have defended their dissertations. Although working conditions for folklorists are not very good, the young people have still found their ways of earning their living. In the future there will be more research conducted on Swedish Finn folklore from various aspects adjusted to relevant politically correct currents, but there will also be studies on individual fields of interest, historical and contemporary themes. A number of new doctoral dissertations will be published to complete the existing ones on folk belief, migration, women's narratives, and contemporary popular culture.

Characteristic for Swedish Finn folklore work have been matters of identity. The first decades were marked by a desire to rescue Swedish Finn folklore from being forgotten when Finnish folklore was put in the core of collecting and publishing. The national eagerness to popularize folklore and spread the knowledge of Kalevala had no counterpart in the Swedish population. Instead, scholarly critical editions of folklore were published. To some extent, the Finnish Literature Society and the Swedish Literature Society in Finland were each others' equals, although the Finnish

Society is more far-reaching, due to the greater number of individuals in the Finnish population. Today, the two organisations work parallelly within their language areas, and in a corresponding way the universities share the students and young researchers along their command of Finnish or Swedish, respectively. Rescuing the folklore is no longer an issue within archives or universities, instead contemporary folk tradition and ways of living and narrating are documented and analysed according to the interests of the scholars.

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