

A Life-story of a Professorship***Ulla Kallberg***

Nordisk etnologi 1921–2021: Ett ämne i rörelse [Nordic Ethnology 1921–2021: a University Subject in Motion]. Fredrik Nilsson & Anna-Maria Åström (Eds). Åbo: Åbo Akademi University 2021. 447 pp. ISBN 978-951-765-998-7 (print), ISBN 978-951-765-999-4 (digital).

In 2021, the Åbo Akademi University was celebrating a hundred-year-old university chair of the Nordic Ethnology, or the Kiseleff Professorship, after the donator Feodor Kiseleff, a wholesaler. This centennial publication is not an ordinary history of a university chair, but a life-story, writes Professor Fredrik Nilsson (435). It is to draw a picture of the birth, metamorphoses, and permanent traditions of the university subject. Like life-stories in general, it creates history, although, the picture of the past is selective and inaccurate. Instead, the features of continuity and constant forward movement in space and time emerge. The starting points for discussions are the available facts, memories and experiences of students, doctoral students, researchers, archive personnel and professors, as the editors, Fredrik Nilsson, and Professor Emerita Anna-Maria Åström write (8).

The book is divided into three sections, consisting of twenty-one articles including the preface and after-words. At the end of the book, fifteen authors are presented. The first section, 'Development and everyday life of the university subject,' covers the history of the university chair including the professors in successive order, establishing the archives and archival practises, the emergence of research specializations and transformations in education. Moreover, the connections to the general development of ethnology in Finland, to related institutions and associations, and to the colleagues in European and Nordic countries, explicit in Sweden, are discussed. Fredrik Nilsson, and Anna-Maria Åström, or both together, have drafted most articles in the chapter. Moreover, Professor Nils Storå discusses how ethnology in Finland developed along five paths; Ph. L. Katja Hellman and Docent Sanna Lillbroända-Annala are discussing the meaning of students first field work and Doctoral Student Ann-Helen Sund ethnological dissertations.

In the second section, 'Interfaces and collaborations,' development issues are discussed through the relationship between ethnology and related activities. Fredrik Nilsson writes about the Institute for Nordic Ethnology at the Åbo Akademi University, established 1927; Fredrik Nilsson and Docent Blanka

Henriksson write about the Nordic Folkloristic, and the joint candidate programme for folkloristic and ethnology in cultural analysis; Doctoral Student Bettina Westerholm discusses working with questionnaires at the Cultura, the Cultural History Archive at the Åbo Akademi University, established 1953. All these articles have explicit links to the development of the university subject. Instead, in Ph. L. Kasper Westerlund's article about the Institute of Maritime history at Åbo Akademi University, in Professor Helena Ruotsala's article about the European Ethnology at the University of Turku, likewise in the article concerning national sciences by historians Ann-Catrin Östman and Nils Erik Villstrand, common interfaces and development lines are in the foreground.

The third section of this book, 'Research topics,' such research directions with a prominent position for the university subject are discussed. Fredrik Nilsson discusses Gabriel Nikander's research related to society-oriented ethnography, Anna-Maria Åström ethnological research related to mansions, and urban research from the perspective of modern time; Ph.D. Anna-Liisa Kuczynski writes about cultural encounters and ethnicity, Ph.D. Ann-Charlotte Palmgren about gender and sex in ethnological master's theses, and Ph.D. Sonja Hagelstam about ethnological cultural history.

The structure of the book makes it possible to follow the development of the Nordic orientated ethnology nearly a hundred years, ever since cultural historian Gabriel Nikander (1884–1959) was appointed the first holder of the Kiseleff Professorship – officially the Nordic Cultural History and Folklife Research – until the year 2020. In his inaugural lecture, in 1922, Nikander discussed the tasks of the university subject and the professorship, in Swedish-speaking Finland. He stressed that both immaterial and material culture should be documented. Together these were supposed to reflect an archaic, authentic Swedish folk culture in Finland, and manifest a common collective understanding about the world. In this, the university subject was seen to serve the society. The collaboration with the museums formed the media, and the ethnographic fieldwork a method, which gave the research a scientific label and distance to non-scientific research on local history. To be able to avoid romantic descriptions of folk life, Nikander emphasized the critique on sources and plead for realism when cultural patterns were formed in economic or political conditions. He also stressed the importance of the historical perspectives, for understanding folk culture was not possible only by conducting the field work on the present. Reaching the past demanded field working with archived documents, which a collaboration with the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland could offer. (436)

In 1953, Nordic Cultural History and Folklife Research got a new professor, Helmer Tegengren (1904–1974). He built his program on the basis of his

predecessor by stating that the university subject was on the service of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, and continually collaborating in the surrounding society. Documenting the folk culture was necessary because of the existing, but scarce and one-sided material. Collected material was to be organized, archived, and made available to scientists. His Swedish colleagues had assured him that without archive neither ethnological nor folkloristic research would be possible. In the same year, Tegengren established a new archive, the Cultural History Institute at Åbo Akademi University. The collecting method, postal questionnaires, elaborated complementary to traditional field working. A network of local informants was recruited the Swedish-speaking coastal areas of the Baltic Sea. The collected material composed oral tradition, drawings, and photos. Expeditions were arranged for students who learned the field working and collecting materials. Tegengren was also widening the research area to arctic and subarctic cultures. In this respect, the difference between Tegengren and his predecessor was evident, but also in the cultural theory: Nikander had concentrated on cultural spreading, and Tegengren had diffusionism as the premise. He discussed the meaning of cartography, and main roads, along which both materials and other cultural features could be transmitted. In his memorandum concerning the university chair of Nordic Cultural History and Folklife Research, likewise the Cultural History Institute, he stated that Folklife Research, as a branch of science was a historical discipline working with a comparative method and with fluctuating materials, such as historical documents, literature, folk tradition, and artefacts. As a central problem, he mentioned the way cultural elements were created, flourishing, and moving as loans and in acculturation processes, and how the elements also faded and disappeared.

The university subject was influenced by ethnological perspectives, and increasingly shifted towards the study of social challenges, such as the class and urban cultures of industrial society. Because of this development, the next professor, Nils Storå (1933–2023) requested a conversion of the Kiseleff professorship to the Nordic Ethnology and Folkloristic in 1974. (47–49). In 1972, when he was nominated as a professor, ethnology in Sweden was turning towards social anthropological perspectives and more hermeneutical approaches, likewise reflections on the role of the researcher. Everyday life and urban culture were taken as research subjects as a part of modernization, in both local universities. (78) Cultural history was still a part of studies, likewise the anchorage to agricultural and maritime cultures. This meant new theoretical orientation which understood people as active creators of culture rather than passive culture carriers. Culture was seen as a process. This perspective was taken to teaching ethnology, and later on, it also permeated the research.

In late 1990s theoretical premises were semiotics, historical-anthropological and constructionist perspectives on ethnic identity, and modern way of life, likewise in towns and countryside. Also, relations between nature and culture were studied in the archipelago from the point of view of pollution. To an extent, this shift foreshadowed the postmodern, norm-critical approach that now shapes ethnology in Turku, as well as in the Nordic countries and in Europe. Anna-Maria Åström, a professor since 1999, was developing the university subject by building on her predecessor's work. The discursive turn, likewise, bodily, spatial, and affective turns, have been notable in this context as well as the latest, post humanist or material turn, which should be highlighted as principally important for a university subject, oriented from the beginning towards the material culture. At the end of the book (442–443) the latest directions, like medical humaniora, performative border studies, and critical animal studies are mentioned in the context of ongoing projects.

In conclusion, this life-story of the Nordic ethnology, is clearly bringing forth continuities and constant forward movement in space and time. The changes since the 1950s, and especially the 1970s, suggest potential shifts in the paradigm, but the gradual progress of transformation seems likely. In spite of that expressed uncertainty, the otherwise rich contents of the book with the multiple perspectives make the reading enjoyable. Despite concentrating on one university chair, the book gives a wide perspective to Finnish ethnology.

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