New perspectives on archival shortcomings

A note on self-perception, history and methodology within folkloristics, ethnology and cultural studies

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The aim of this article is twofold: a) to draw attention to the research opportunities that will open up when or if the Scandinavian folklore archives are digitized; and b) to draw attention to the fact that quite simple digitizing has consequences for the arguments that led to the greatest reorientation in the history of folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies. The aim is not to discuss digitizing in general, or the technological or ethical challenges and opportunities linked to digitizing, by which I mean the way digitized material can or should be organized or made available. Others have dealt with this, see e.g. Kjus 2013 or Skott 2008 on making material accessible, or the references on the technological aspects under 'Digitizing: a game changer' below. Nor is the aim to criticize others for having digitized too little, nor, in fact, to lobby for digitization. Many others have done this (e.g. the two previous references and Tangherlini 2013a), and it should be obvious to everyone that digitizing is becoming more and more important.[1]

As we know, folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies have been less interested in pre-modern folk tradition since the 1970s, particularly in Scandinavia[2] (Gunnell 2013: 171–72; Skott 2008: 17–26, 2013: 197, 199; Koudal 2005: 18–20). The focus up until then had been on collecting the oldest traditions in rural communities, ones that were on the verge of being forgotten. The central concern of this research was to reconstruct even older traditions, asking questions such as how a certain tradition had developed, where it had originated and how widespread it was. In Scandinavia, von Sydow and his successors had prepared the ground for this development from the 1930s onward

(Nordberg 2013: 338–66.; Eriksen and Selberg 2006: 56–64.). But the factor that led directly to the new orientation in the 1970s was 'the New Perspectives' in American folkloristics in the 1960s and 1970s, which shifted the focus of folkloristics/ethnology in the direction of contemporary culture and modern mass culture (Gunnell 2013: 173–74, Eriksen and Selberg 2006: 26–29, Klein 2013: 181–84, Paredes and Bauman 1972). In the wake of this development, there was from the 1970s onwards, particularly in Sweden, harsh criticism both of the archiving system in the traditional folklore archives from the first half of the 1900s and of the ideas behind the collection work. People noted that after the paradigm shift it was difficult to get much out of the archives on topics that started to emerge as new areas of interests. Context, the role of the tradition bearer, the function of the tradition in society, what it meant to the tradition-bearers and materials related to conflicts and taboos (criminality and sex), among others (Frykman 1979; Honko 1989 [1979–80]: 33; Raudvere 1993: 27; Salomonsen 1999: 79–80; Lilja 1996, et. al.; Koudal 2005: 18–20). Such topics were under-represented in the collected material – because few questions had been asked about them, because some of the material that nonetheless made its way into collections was deleted by the archives on the grounds that it was inappropriate, and because when the material was being stored, the archiving system 'contributed to chopping integral material up into odd but totally harmless little pieces' that were then distributed in archive drawers dealing with entirely different topics (Frykman 1979: 238–39, 236, translated here).[3] What little material the archives held on the types of topics people were looking for was therefore hidden away in the catalogue system. Many took the view that the lack of contextual information alone was a decisive problem. This '[was] seen to open up only two possible ways to proceed in research: to move away from studying archival texts altogether, or to look for contextual information from other sources' (Anttonen 2013: 160). The archives were also criticized for overlooking class differences or for only conveying the culture of prosperous farmers and an impression that pre-modern society was an idyll (Hansen 1978: 29; Frykman 1979; Holbek 1979: 23; Alsmark 1982: 31). Some have claimed that the archives, through their selective choice of topics and standardization of the material in the archival system, do not first and foremost show pre-modern folk culture, but rather an

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2   This has been the case to a lesser extent in Finland, the Baltics, a number of Eastern European countries, Scotland, Ireland and some other countries.

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3   In addition, there probably was some self-censoring by the informants in their encounters with the representative of officialdom, among which folklore collectors often numbered, after all: they were often village teachers (Gustavsson 1982; Skott 2008: 212–20.).

idealized image constructed by the collectors and which therefore says more about them (Lilja 1996: 242–47).

Others have objected that the criticism is, in part, exaggerated and unreasonable: the archives hold more material of interest to more recent cultural studies than has been claimed (cf. Klintberg 1979; Skott 2008, 2013; Kjus 2013; Gunnell 2013; Oring 2013; Klein 2013: 181, Lindow 2013; Tangherlini 2013b), the collection and archiving methods are less problematic than has been claimed (Skott 2008; Kjus 2013; Anttonen 2013), and archive materials do contain some information about context (ibid.). Many topics of interest to modern folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies may be examined without information about the situation of performance, e.g. through comparative questions (such as: 'the question of which groups get characterized as canny and stupid in contemporary ethnic jokes and why they are characterized in this way' Oring 2013: 178). Skott (2008) points out that the collection of traditions was dominated by people from the political left, meaning that most of what was collected related to the traditions of people of modest means, as well as a fair amount from industrial workers. This applies to Sweden, but the political tendency was probably the same in Norway and Denmark.

In any event, the overwhelming tendency in Scandinavian folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies is that, from the paradigm shift onwards, people have to a greater or lesser extent turned away from both archival material in particular and tradition collected before the paradigm shift in general (see, for example, Alzén 1996: 115–16; Lilja 1996; Salomonsen 1999: 79–80; Berglin 2000; Knuts 2006: 23). 'There is indeed a naive 'presentism' and lack of historical awareness on the part of many folklorists today, not least in North America and northern Europe,' says Klein (2013: 180). Gunnell says that an interest in folk legends and other pre-modern folk traditions in the dominant folkloristic/ethnological environment are perceived as 'a thing of the past', an 'old fashioned' thing that people should not engage with. In the universities, there is little room for such material outside history courses, particularly in Scandinavia, he says (Gunnell 2013: 171–72). Folklorists/ethnologists rarely visit folklore archives and if they do so, it is mainly to research how collectors thought rather than the material they gathered (Skott 2013: 199). Visitors to the archives are largely schoolchildren, local history groups or people with a general interest, and to an increasing extent, academics from disciplines other than folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies, such as comparative literature, religious history, and particularly general history, says Skott of the situation in Sweden (2013: 200).

Based on my own experiences and my conversations with many academics in the field of cultural studies, I have the impression that Norwegian folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies are dominated by similar attitudes to pre-modern folk culture – or have been until recently. When, in the mid-2000s, I was working with Old Norse religion and began to seek out supplementary material in the sources of Northern European folk traditions, it was difficult to find anyone who had a good enough overview to be able to help me with my questions (which were rather specific). In any case, a shift has occurred in the ensuing years, most notably at the University of Oslo, where there has been growing interest in the Norwegian Folklore Archives (NFS) and traditions collected before the paradigm shift. Landstad's writings about legends, customs and everyday traditions from the 1800s have been (re)published (Landstad 2012–16 [1830s] with commentary by Ørnulf Hodne, who was never part of the movement that turned away from pre-modern folk traditions) and a few anthologies have been released, as well as several MA theses that take the NFS as their starting point (Esborg et al. 2011; Esborg and Johannsen 2014; Hobbel 2007; Kristoffersen 2013, among others). Much of the work on pre-modern folk traditions deals with how previous folklorists examined such traditions (e.g. Amundsen 2008), and with learned tradition and the borderland between learned/popular tradition (e.g. Amundsen and Laugerud 2001; Ohrvik 2012) – in other words, it is orientated in the direction of the history of ideas. But there are also a number of scholars who are looking at pre-modern *folk* traditions in the proper sense (e.g. Ohrvik 2012; Bø and Kjøk 2008: 15; Telste 2014; Johannsen 2014).

Digitizing: a game changer

In the past decades, a factor has emerged from the side-lines that nobody envisaged when many in the field of folkloristics/ethnology turned their backs on the archives, but which has the potential to have a considerable impact on the questions and issues discussed above: digitization and information technology, which have laid the foundations for data mining or text mining – that is to say, electronic (text) searches in large corpuses to find thematic data that can then be assessed on a qualitative basis (see e.g. Williford and Henry 2012 or Berry 2012). In language research, this is an important trend (e.g., University of Oslo's Tekstlaboratoriet, 'The Text Laboratory', http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/om/organisasjon/tekstlab/, or University of Gothenburg's Språkbanken, 'The Language Bank', http://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/), and it is also gaining ground in folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies. Tangherlini, the best-known representative of this trend in the field of folkloristics, takes this view of the archives question:

Rather than abandon the field altogether – a logical step if we truly want to reject the legitimacy of the fieldwork endeavour and its product the archive – it is far more rational, and certainly more productive, to ask how we might work with existing archives, accepting that there are irregularities, biases, and lacunae in these resources. Essentially what we have in the folklore archives, both public and private, is multilingual, heterogeneous, noisy data or, in other words, exactly the type of data that information specialists have been focusing on with increasing intensity in recent years. Consequently, I believe that the field of folklore will be best served if we look at the archive with all its shortcomings as a research challenge rather than an impediment to folklore study. Framing the question as an information challenge brings us to the realm of computation and big data. This, in turn, delineates a clear path forward for the exploration of these archives. Computational approaches to folklore data (read the archive) can allow us to address in a rigorous fashion complex questions related to the folkloric process. (Tangherlini 2013b: 194)

Tangherlini advocates building a 'Folklore Macroscope' by digitizing 'many of the archival resources' and tagging data to 'connect them together into a dense, networked representation of the collection', 'a rich, navigable representation of the archive'. In this kind of 'macroscope', the researcher may not only carry out text searches, but also:

> work with the material at many different scales of resolution and reorder the material to facilitate research questions that were not considered at the time the collection was created. […] Rather than being limited by the classification systems and organisational or collection principles that informed the creation of a collection, a multimodal representation of the data allows for shifting perspectives on the archive. Consequently, the questions we can ask – and answer – are different from those of the past. (ibid: 195–96, c.f. ibid 2013a; Abello et.al. 2012)

This way of working has much in common with the way, for example, Google or the U.S. intelligence agency, the NSA, structure their enormous volumes of data. (Tangherlini has, indeed, also been sponsored by Google.) The 'macroscope' builds on advanced statistics and is 'algorithmically driven' (Tangherlini 2013b: 195, 197). Tangherlini emphasizes that what he is advocating is not science fiction, but is already fully operational at the Danish Folklore Data Nexus (ibid: 197, see http://etkspace.scandinavian.ucla.edu/danishfolklore/#).

Digitizing in Scandinavia

I side with those who believe that the criticism of the old school of folkloristics/ethnology, and the folklore archives in particular, is excessive and, to some extent, unreasonable. Nonetheless, a fair amount of the criticism is obviously valid. There *is* little to be found about things such as the situation of performance, function, meaning, conflicts, criminality, and sex, and such topics *are* hidden away through the 'chopping to pieces' of the material in the archival system. What's more, the problem has grown since the shift in the 1970s, because there are now few people who know the archives well, meaning that the under-represented or hidden material is now even more deeply hidden. An additional problem is that the archives worked with different filing systems and each therefore squeezed the material into its own structure through the entire process from the formulation of questionnaires to the 'chopping to pieces' and storage. Consequently, on many topics (e.g. creatures associated with the farm such as the *tomten* [goblin], *vättarna* [fairies], etc.) the archives give the impression of very large regional differences, even within an area as small as Southern Sweden (as I noticed when I was gathering material at the archives in Uppsala, Lund and Gothenburg in 2009).

The approach that Tangherlini and company are advocating invalidates some of the objections about archival material, and, fortunately, several similar projects are (in the process of being) developed throughout Scandinavia. In Iceland, Terry Gunnell, Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir and Trausti Dagsson have created a 'macroscope' of Icelandic legends – the Sagnagrunnur – while Tangherlini's 'macroscope' covers legends collected by Evald Tang Kristensen in Jutland (see http://sagnagrunnur.com/en/ and Gunnell 2010). In Finland, the Finnish Literature Society (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) has a searchable internet database containing around two million lines of Kalevala metre and a fair number of search options based on tagging (http://dbgw.finlit.fi/skvr/). In Sweden, a project led by Fredrik Skott at Gothenburg's branch of the Swedish Institute for Language and Folklore in 2017 put a database of Swedish legends online with options for a keyword search and map location.[4] This is going to be developed into a 'macroscope', with additional contributions from the Norwegian Folklore Archives at the University of Oslo. In Norway, Bjørn Bjørlykke and Nils Tore Økland are leading the way with a similar database

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4   In the 1990s, Bodil Nildin-Wall lobbied for a similar, less comprehensive project, which unfortunately failed to come to fruition. Information from Fredrik Skott 29 January 2016.

of legends from western Norway (http://segner.no/). Their field is teacher training, and this database is aimed at schools and kindergartens.

There is also quite a bit of digitized material organized in simpler ways. The Norwegian Folklore Archives (http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/tjenester/kunnskap/samlinger/norsk-folkeminnesamling/) have a considerable amount of material online, including 700 folk tales and more than 1,300 legends[5], with an option for free searches within each genre (with options to download using the copy function in the browser), as well as some autobiographical life stories offering the same search options. There are also a number of facsimiles (i.e. photographs) of notes from folklore collectors and documents from witchcraft trials in early modern times, as well as books of magic spells. It is not possible to search in these texts, so they have no relevance to the topic I am dealing with here. Beyond the material available on the internet, there seems to be little digital material at the NFS. The other archive in Oslo, Norwegian Ethnological Research (NEG, Norsk etnologisk gransking), has digitized a great deal, particularly material gathered in the past few decades. However, due to considerations of privacy, this material is not available on the internet (http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/no/Forskning/Norsk-etnologisk-gransking/). In addition, the layman Knut Egil Kvarving has built up a database of all kinds of stories from popular Norwegian tradition (http://historier.no/).

In Sweden, some of the folklore archives have considerable amounts of digitized material in addition to the legend database mentioned above. A great deal has been digitized in Lund, and quite a lot has been digitized in Gothenburg, too. At the Nordic Museum (Nordiska Museet) a fair amount of the older questionnaire answers have been digitized. But, as I understand it, little of this material is available on the internet (http://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/, http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/samlingar/om-samlingarna/sok-i-samlingarna) – although researchers can make great use of it if they visit the archive in person. At the Danish folklore archives, only little snippets of digitized material are available on the net and, to the best of my knowledge, little has been digitized at all (http://www.kb.dk/da/ml/materialer/index.html).

It should be noted that the folklore archive material digitized in Scandinavia represents only a fraction of the total body of existing materials. We are seeing a very positive trend, but so far, relatively limited efforts have been made in digitization, compared to how many scholars there are in the field of folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies. The work has depended on a handful

of dedicated individuals, several of whom have backgrounds in other fields. Thus, one might say that, although this may be changing now, 'the digital solution to the folklore archive problem' has so far found limited echo in Scandinavian folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies.

Why is this? One reason is probably that the main issue with the archive material today is not the way it was gathered or stored, but that many perceive it as less interesting or simply peripheral, owing to the change in attitude implicit in the paradigm shift. Although a number of people in certain circles are now researching this material again, there is a clear contrast to the situation before the paradigm shift, when ethnology and folkloristics were built up around archival work (more on this below.) Because of this, it makes little difference whether new technology is in the process of making this material less problematic than it was believed to be.

Another reason may be that people are not entirely clear about how to proceed. If one accesses the Danish Folklore Data Nexus and the Sagnagrunnur, which are research tools, one has to cross a relatively high threshold before one can master it well enough to extract new knowledge that is sufficiently interesting to merit publication. If one wishes to create a 'macroscope', it is easy to be deterred by the fact that considerable financial resources and IT skills are needed for scanning, tagging and the development of algorithms to make it happen.[6]

Simple research opportunities opening up with digitizing

However, making use of digitization need not involve doing anything either costly or difficult; there is no need for IT skills beyond those required to carry out a simple text search (the way we do using the search function in word processing software). Before I became aware of the ideas that Tangherlini formulates above, I had already independently had similar ideas, although in a much simpler format. From 2007 to 2011, I collected material in twelve folklore archives (and some dialect archives as well) throughout Northern Europe.[7] Few of them had very large amounts of digitized material, so it was easy to see how much greater the opportunities were when a good amount of

5   There are an unspecified number of legends of witchcraft in addition to the 1,300 legends of other types, see http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/tjenester/kunnskap/samlinger/norsk-folkeminnesamling/trolldom/trolldomssagn/.

6   It should be mentioned that if you have digitized texts, there is also the option of using free textmining software (see for example http://www.themacroscope.org/2.0/, http://www.voyant-tools.org/).

7   Reykjavík, Edinburgh, Bergen, Bonn, Oslo (NFS and NEG), Copenhagen, Lund, Gothenburg, Uppsala, Tartu and Helsinki. I have used some of the information in Heide 2012; other information will appear in later articles.

the material was digitized. This was primarily the case at the Folk Life Archive in Lund (Folklivsarkivet): there I could access the material from many angles and search back and forth, irrespective of the structure that the collectors and the archive had used to store the material. With a few keystrokes (using word searches or text string searches), I could retrieve material that was filed under all sorts of keywords. I could therefore access the data using a short cut or a 'back door', instead of having to work my way through shelf after shelf of filing cards, notebooks and printed books, or having to rely on the interpretations and syntheses of older researchers, which are useful, but can also stand like a wall between us and the raw data. Much of what Tangherlini mentions (see 'work with the material …' above) therefore becomes possible for anybody as soon as the material is available for the simplest possible searches, without having to expend resources on tagging and algorithms (which are necessary in order to be able to talk about a 'folklore macroscope'; only then can it be called 'computational folkloristics, cf. Tangherlini 2013b: 196–97 and Abello, et al., 2012). And this situation has already been reached (in part) at segner.no and the NFS (when it comes to narratives, not other types of tradition) as well as several of the Swedish archives, which are constantly digitizing ever more material. It is simply a matter of making use of the digitized material and thereby sidestepping many of the objections that were raised in the 1970s.

Digitizing does not provide any information about the situation of performance, function, sex or those kinds of things about which little was asked. But digitizing does make it easier to collect what little of such items is to be found, and the accumulated end result can be extensive, as the critic Frykman himself showed in his book *Horan i bondesamhället*, 'The whore in peasant society', in 1977. In this book, he dealt with the status of women who had had children outside of wedlock in the traditional rural community, the social sanctions they encountered, superstitions connected to their marginal status, etc. – primarily based on information from tradition archives. 'Frykman's researches have shown that the folklore archives contain a surprisingly large amount of material even on such hard-to-come-by issues as prohibited sexual congress and unwanted children', comments Hansen (1978: 29). In those days, Frykman had to know the archival material inside out in order to find this material. With digitized archives, even fledgling students can rapidly collect a great deal of such material. Digitizing can therefore invalidate a fair number of the objections to the archive material, and that should have consequences for the attitudes to this type of material among those who remain critical of it.

When it comes to the type of information that was in abundance because it formed part of the focus of collection, digitization opens up great opportunities to be able to rapidly combine it in new ways and gain an overview of new parts of it. Here are just *some* topics (random examples) that it would be interesting for someone to research using these new opportunities:

- The typology of folk beliefs set up by the old school researchers (e.g. Feilberg 1904, 1910, 1918; Lid 1933; Olrik and Ellekilde 1926–51; Solheim 1952) – subjecting it to critical review and using digitized material from many archives, among other sources, to find information that complicates, adds nuance to or invalidates it. The standard presentations from the first half of the 1900s are impressive, but they are of course coloured by the horizon of the researchers, which is now out-dated (e.g. the idea that 'self-contradiction' in the material comes from a decline in more recent times, whereas everything was orderly in the old days). Among other things, there is reason to believe that researchers of the past made folk beliefs neater and more consistent than was justified by the sources, by under-communicating variation and overlaps. For example, variation that is based on differing natural environments – which is a kind of context – should probably be emphasized more: coast, forest areas, mountain areas, etc.

- Folk beliefs about insects, rats and mice (and other small creatures) and, among others, how *tomten* [brownies] and similar beings can appear in the form of such animals. There is little of this to be found in the presentations of the old researchers, but there is a great deal of material about it in the archives.

- Traditions about supernatural forces that reveal themselves at Christmas. Here, too, it would be very interesting to gain a better insight into local variations and those that diverge from the standard presentations.

- Traditions about the firmament.

Nowadays, such research will be greatly eased by access to the digitized material available (especially in Lund and Gothenburg, and the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm), as well as the digitized legend and folk-tale collections (which contain a wealth of material about encounters with supernatural beings), both simple material and the material that is 'algorithmically driven'. But the greater part of the archives consists of non-narrative information about customs and usage, beliefs and traditions about everyday work throughout the year, weather lore, (simple) rituals connected to holidays, special days, illness, the loss of teeth, etc. No one has yet set up a 'macroscope' of this kind of data and it is, unfortunately, still a long way off. What they are working at in Gothenburg and Lund is to get their

whole card catalogue digitized. But once optical character recognition technology (OCR) and handwritten text recognition (HTR) are available that can handle handwriting without too many mistakes,[8] it will, in principle, become possible to digitize whole archives. Then it will be possible to really push forward with tagging, and with the lemmatization (the grammatical tagging of word types) of sentences and algorithms. Then, for example, we will be able to extract all the notations from a given area (or municipality or district, such as Skåne or Dalsland), making it easier to write about a subject from a local point of view, or gain an overview of geographical variation. We will also be able to sort the material decade by decade, making it possible to research changes: changes in the material collected on a topic, or changes in attitudes towards the topic (e.g. sexual topics). Or we can extract everything that was provided by a given informant, so that we can better understand the work of collection. Or we can retrieve ready-made statistics from the combined corpus without having to work our way through it manually – and a great deal else besides. The Norwegian archives will probably have most to gain from full digitization because they do not have catalogues with cards that explain the essence of the notations. In my view, it would be especially valuable to have the NFS's Kristian Bugge collection made available because it contains information that is otherwise in short supply. The problem is, of course, finances, but if more research is done on the material, it will also be easier to get money to digitize more. Would it perhaps be possible to make use of the technology and infrastructure developed at Norway's National Library, in connection with the ongoing digitization of its entire collection? (See http://www.nb.no/Om-NB/Fakta/Strategi/Digitaliseringspolitikk.)

It will, of course, be an advantage if as much of the material as possible becomes available on the internet (c.f. Skott 2014), but my point is that digitizing in itself (to a text-searchable format) will be an enormous help, even if one has to visit each archive to search its material.

Paradoxes caused by the paradigm shift

As I understand it, the arguments that led to the paradigm shift in folkloristics/ethnology boil down to these three:

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8   The technology already exists but is not yet fully developed, which means that there are many mistakes in the scanned texts, mistakes that have to be corrected through comprehensive and expensive proofreading. That said, the great progress I have seen in standard OCR technology over just the past two to three years makes me optimistic.

1. Social processes, function and meaning in living situations are more interesting than the historical background to these things.
2. The old school of researchers had not understood 1., therefore the material they gathered contains little information about the situation of performance, and is therefore ill-suited to casting light on the aspects favoured in 1.[9]
3. The system of documentation developed by the older school did violence to the material that was collected, and thereby gave a distorted image of what it was supposed to document.

For these three reasons, scholars chose to collect new material in new ways, so that it would be possible to focus on the aspects favoured in 1, while the traditional material became less interesting to them.

I can vividly imagine the inner turmoil many must have felt when they realized that the collectors hadn't thought about the social function of the cultural phenomena they were researching, and the excitement they must have experienced when the new perspectives opened up. I therefore well understand the shift that occurred, and do not find it remarkable that the criticism could be harsh. However, I am a little surprised by the attitudes that continue to hold sway in folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies today. When one research approach replaces another, it is quite normal for the pendulum to swing further away from the old approach than is objectively justified. But it is also normal for it to swing back after a while (not to the old position, which would simply leave the pendulum swinging to and fro, but in such a way that, over the long term, the pendulum describes a zigzag movement that slowly advances). This is in the process of happening now, after more than three decades. But the inclusive 'both … and' view that is gaining acceptance is still far from dominant in Scandinavian folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies, and research into pre-modern folk traditions still accounts for only a small share of the total.

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9   The old researchers were not stupid. Their collection method resulted from the following: 1) many of the collectors were living in the social context, so it was a given for them and not worth wasting paper on. 2) Because the researchers perceived collection as the documentation of survivals from much earlier periods, and it was these much older periods in which they were interested, the contemporary social context was less interesting to them. They were aware that such survivals had a different function at the time of their collection than they had probably had in much older times, and they were aware of what the function was now, but then that was not what they were interested in, unfortunately for us.

The explanation for this, and for why it took so long for the paradigm shift to become more nuanced is, I believe, that the negative attitude towards the old school attached itself to the *material* with which the old school was working. If we take a closer look at arguments 1. to 3., we can see that they are of two types. Arguments 2. and 3. are, in principle, applicable or inapplicable irrespective of the person, and hardly anybody today would think that the claims on which they are based are untrue. Even if many feel that the claims are exaggerated and that the problem in argument 3. can be greatly reduced through digitization, there is nonetheless widespread agreement that the principle was correct. However, argument 1. is quite different in nature: whether X is more interesting than Y is purely a matter of taste, along the same lines as whether crème caramel is better than steak. People may state that they themselves are most interested in researching social processes, function and meaning, and if such topics are the subject of little research, they can point that out and argue that they should be given due space. But that does not imply that research into the historical background to these same phenomena is outdated or dubious in other ways. (Based on my own tastes, both function and historical background are exciting as two sides of the same coin.) In any event, this is how it has been expressed, and that has led to at least two paradoxes.

The first is that the problem mentioned in argument 3. can be reduced (considerably?) with digitization, but that it is difficult to get financing for it, partly because the concerns outlined in argument 3 (together with argument 1 and 2) has led to there being limited interest in the material within the academic field. (If we imagine the opposite of today's situation – i.e. a combined field of folkloristics/ethnology/cultural studies working exclusively with pre-modern folk tradition, primarily from the archives, obviously greater efforts would be made to get the material digitized than is now the case.) A lack in the material has therefore contributed to creating an attitude within the field that makes it more difficult to remedy that lack.

The other paradox concerns what the paradigm shift has done to the research results of the old school. The image we have today of pre-modern Nordic folk beliefs (references above) is built largely upon basic research that was done before the paradigm shift, many generations ago and based on a thoroughly outdated world view, in particular with respect to evolutionism (see research overview in Nordberg 2013). This leaves us without any overview built upon basic research that uses the theoretical and methodological insights that emerged after the first half of the 1900s. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that there is any research project on the horizon that could (with the help of digitized archival material, among other things) remedy this lack, even though the results (involving the redefinition of goblins, brownies, forest sprites such

as *huldra* and *skotsrået*, the sea-creature *draugen*, trolls, etc.) could awaken enormous interest in society (thereby attracting droves of students). This is because strong factions within the field that have done the most work on the topic and continue to be closest to it largely perceive the topic itself as outdated (and not just the school of research that devoted itself to it). Accordingly, the reaction against the old school implies that the research it produced remains unchallenged. Maybe it is time to do something about this now?

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'Who told that story?'

Archiving supernatural encounter narratives and the voices of
the documents

Laura Jiga Iliescu

Three preambles

One

Paraphrasing Barbro Klein's statement, archives of folklore are tangible monu-
ments of intangible culture.[1] How are these depositories of memory created,
how do they work and for whom and for what purposes, and how do they
interrelate with society and with the past and present? These are still pertinent
questions whose nuances and terms change in accordance with the theoret-
ical, ethical and epistemological frames of our discipline.

An archive of oral culture may be described through a series of keywords
such as: fragmentation and de-contextualization and re-contextualization;
alive phenomenon vs. dead, even 'fossil' samples (Toelken 2003: 9); original
immaterial consistence vs. second material support. The selection of the items
that deserve to be recorded and archived, together with the techniques and
methods of preserving, systematizing and describing the documents inside
an archive, create an analytic reflection of a hypostasis of everyday life outside
the archive. In this regard, we may say that each archive of folklore has its own
intrinsic meta-cultural, meta-historical and meta-traditional discourses.

It is almost a truism to assert that each folklore item (variant) is simulta-
neously created and transmitted during a performance event and that each
performance event is part of a flowing chain of performances, which cannot
be duplicated by any archive. At the same time, the entire contextual net to
which a certain performance event belongs, remains outside the archive walls

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1   'Archives of folklore are tangible monuments of history'(Klein 2007: 117)

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