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Review

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A Tangled Tale: Karl Tirén's Yoik Collection as a Memory of the World by Dan Lundberg and Gunnar Ternhag was published by the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research in the series *Reports from Svenskt visarkiv*. The book chronicles the meticulous detective work that mirrors 100 years of field research, institutional histories, and personal attitudes. Moreover, this publication reveals a new prospect of historical recordings comprising cultural testimonies of indigenous people embedded in the efforts to recognize minority cultural expressions in UNESCO's Memory of the World program.

Karl Tirén (1869–1955) was employed as a railway official, had a broad field of interests and a bright vision for the economic and cultural future of Norrland, the northern part of Sweden. He, as many of his contemporaries, was passionate about old ways of life that seemed to change rapidly. The book details how Tirén became acquainted with the Sámi people and their culture and how such contacts were crucial for him to succeed as collector focused on *yoik*. The Sámi are the Indigenous people who inhabit the region known as Sápmi (formerly Lapland), which extends across the modern-day national borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Yoiking is a traditional form of Sámi vocal performance.

Influenced by the folk music movement, he made musical notations of what he heard during his first collection expedition in 1911. A clear map in the book shows the routes and places of his summer journeys from 1911–1913. In 1913, for the first time Tirén had a phonograph with him, a turning point in his collecting work, making him a

pioneer of Swedish ethnographic recordings. Especially noteworthy is his unusual approach to recording not only older people but also youths, hence documenting the contemporary tradition which is highly valued today.

Tirén's yoik collection is composed of his primary notations in his notebooks, fair notations and phonograph recordings. Due to Tirén's various connections with other folk music researchers, cultural activists and archivists, the documents were stored in completely different places and subjected to different treatments. Initially he cooperated with the Swedish Folk Music Commission, but when he shifted to making phonograph recordings he was in closer contact with the Ethnographic Department of the Swedish Museum of Natural History. Although all actors, including Tirén, were convinced of the need to deposit all the material in one place, they did not succeed. Moreover, Tirén himself worked with the material at his home as he had planned to publish *Die lappische Volksmusik*, which came out in 1942. Lundberg and Ternhag painstakingly investigated where, when, and under which circumstances the documents were stored or relocated.

The recordings were transferred from cylinders to tape in two parts, the first one in 1982, the second one from 1989 to 1991. The change in medium represented a turning point in the reception of Tirén's recordings – from merely being able to read the notation to listening to a specific yoik interpretation. This led to an increased interest in yoiks thanks to their (new) existence as sonic documents, not only as sheet music (as in Tirén's publication). Meanwhile, radio programs arranged by the musicologist Inger Stenman, just after the publication of the second transfer, aroused interest among relatives of the performers, Sámi with an interest in yoiking, researchers and others. The recordings were henceforth regarded as precious testimonies of yoik performances of the 1910s.

This tangled tale of Tirén's yoik collection, its varying fates, and contacts with several heritage institutions led to the final achievement, namely the collection's designation as a UNESCO Memory of the World. The long and arduous process characterized by setbacks and withdrawals ultimately yielded positive outcomes. Certainly, it was an instructive phase involving many people revising the application text several times according to changing specifications. The political dimension, namely the consultation with the Sámi Parliament, is a landmark shift especially concerning the management of Sámi cultural heritage as a sensitive area including issues of identity, historical oppression, rights, ethics, and respect. The authors critically note that UNESCO's state-centric structure forces minority cultures to be dealt with at a national level. Proposals regarding intangible heritage, for instance, also are made at the national level. Consequently, the nomination of Karl Tirén's yoik collection to UNESCO was made by the Swedish government via the Swedish UNESCO council, not by the Sámi themselves. Such a procedure in the case of cultural expressions of minorities can effect conflict and frustration. The authors stress that today, all recordings of Tirén's yoik collection are digitally available on the internet and digital copies are available in Ájtte – the Swedish Mountain and Sámi museum in Jokkmokk, the Institute for Language and Folklore, and

the Centre for Sámi Research (Várdduo) at Umeå University. The quintessence of arguments for the collection's approval as UNESCO Memory of the World was the following: a unique documentation of a marginalized ethnic group that constitutes one of the world's recognized Indigenous groups, a collection comprising performers with roughly the same number of women and men and of an age from young to old (9 to 77), one of Sweden's earliest collection of phonograph cylinders, and the great importance of the collection for the survival and development of the Sámi yoik.

This publication shows how thorough investigation leads to interesting and forward-looking results. Ordered chronologically, the very clear account traces a personally driven project ahead of its time, the various cultural institutions through the ages and their transformation, and discusses openly the process of inscription as a UNESCO Memory of the World. Parallels to European folk music research history can be detected, the ambivalent acceptance of new technologies in field research as well as the changing view on Indigenous cultures (as the former assumption that yoiking would be a form of "primitive music") are addressed and contribute to an open and discursive text. This undertaking needed perseverance, enthusiasm and a critical eye which led to a very impressive result of the tangled tale of Karl Tirén's yoik collection. Since the collection's inscription as a UNESCO Memory of the World in 2025, the authors perceived "a powerful recognition of Sámi culture, which raises its status, strengthens Sámi identity, promotes research and education, and counteracts the marginalization of the cultural heritage of an indigenous people" (82). In addition, the designation impacts UNESCO's work with archives and cultural heritage to support global tasks for democracy. In summary, this book is a well-balanced exploration of minority culture and really worth reading.

References

Tirén, Karl. 1942. *Die lappische Volksmusik: Aufzeichnungen von Juoikos-Melodien bei den schwedischen Lappen* [The Lappish Folk Music: Recordings of Juoikos Melodies Among the Swedish Lapps]. Stockholm: Hugo Gebers Förlag.

Author Biography

Gerda Lechleitner worked at the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and was curator of the Historical Collections, editor of the CD edition *The Complete Historical Collections 1899–1950* and the Phonogrammarchiv's Yearbook *International Forum on Audio-Visual Research*. She retired in 2020.