

**Terminal Archive? Taking and Returning Sound Recordings:
Two Examples from the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv**

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An overall assumption might express that music in general and songs in particular belong to the performers; researchers interested in any music, however, ‘take’ songs or instrumental music with them – as recordings, and subsequently often hand over those sound recordings to an archive. Metaphorically speaking, the sounds of a region – ‘captured’ by interested persons, enthusiasts or researchers – leave their original place, later to be studied, listened to and stored elsewhere. Are they coming back and if so, in which form? Based on that intellectual game some considerations about the role of a research sound archive as a place of preservation, like the Phonogrammarchiv, the role of the researchers and their field work, their scientific interests and gained results, and the role of the performers, as well as some general thoughts about taking and returning sounds will be examined.

The Phonogrammarchiv: Reflections on the institution and its effect outwards

A research sound archive, like the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna, is reliant on researchers interested in music in various aspects; the researchers are reliant on performers who fulfill the researchers’ expectations in gaining knowledge of the respective music, the performing skills and the ‘meaning’ of the music for the performers and the communities themselves, i.e. the social aspect. Sound recordings made in the course of field research for a long time have represented the growing of the collections deposited in the archive, as long as the researcher borrowed a recording equipment in the Phonogrammarchiv and at the same time committed to hand over the recordings afterwards. Since the foundation of the Phonogrammarchiv the idea was to preserve the recordings for providing sound examples available for

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further research and, at the same time, to keep proofs of expressions of a distinct time. The change from an analogue to a digital world and its advantages in respect of easy access forced archives to digitize their stocks and make them usable anywhere at any time. Therefore, besides local, i.e. real storage places, Internet platforms and the like where audio-visual recordings are also deposited emerged rapidly since the digital technique offered such possibilities.

For safety reasons and preservation purposes the archive made working copies for the scholars (most important in the analogue era). As well known, sound recordings only count as valuable and trustable, as long as they are documented concerning their content, the performer, the recording place and date and technical data.

Although researchers and performers today are working together more closely than before, and archives take over the instruction of preparing researchers for the field and of maintaining their equipment to achieve good recordings, the relationship to the recorded, the performers, could be more intensive. Archives feel obliged to the communities when they preserve their cultural testimonies and think that the communities are the most important ‘visitors’ as this material has a profound meaning for them (Seeger and Chaudhuri 2004, 72). Officially, archives are not closed and do not lock away their holdings, but for performers from remote regions it is often not easy to visit those institutions far away from them. On the one hand, the archivists praise their activities as these recordings are preserved for posterity, for the communities’ children and grandchildren (Seeger and Chaudhuri 2004, 77), but on the other hand social barriers (e.g. between academics and performers) are existent. Therefore, it is much easier instead of visiting archives physically to search websites and online catalogues.

The Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna is an exception in its construction in many respects: it is a research sound (and video) archive and since its beginnings in 1899 with regard to contents it is open to regions and disciplines, as long as the sound recordings made function as prerequisite for the respective study. In its long history, undergoing technical developments which allowed for changes in field recording methods, it is also the political history which left footprints on the recordings in regard of the research interest, the recording situation or the contact between researcher and performer. War times, for instance, caused ‘exceptional’ recording situations in contrast to ‘standard’ situations.

‘Standard’ recording situation and the archive as ‘terminal’ in question

What I would call a ‘standard’ recording situation is a field research in the respective place and the direct contact between researcher and the people around etc. Such studies were driven by an interest in countries and the people living there in their cultural (musical) acting and environment. The interest in music manifested different aspects: the (social) role of music in the community, the meaning of the presented music for the performer and the audience but also the analysis and description of a music or

its comparison with other music, such as influences of any kind. Since the very beginning expeditions were conducted to places all over the world due to find new, unknown music. Having a recording device in the luggage the pieces of music with not yet known melodies, harmonies or rhythm, the sound of unknown music instruments and unheard timbres were collected and then – like cans – brought back to the researchers' home or to an archive.

Looking back, it seems evident that the captured sounds literally were taken away. In case of the Phonogrammarchiv it took 100 years to give back, i.e. to repatriate, sounds from the far end of the world, to the communities once recorded.² This was possible in form of the CD-edition, providing the historical sounds from wax discs in digital format, amended with a booklet with information concerning the genesis of the recordings, giving information about the performers as far as possible, about the researchers, their approaches and results as well as the meaning of those historical expressions today, their possible disappearance, their changes or even constancy.

We must not forget the hierarchical colonial thinking which posed the researcher in the position of the owner of knowledge and the performer of providing it. In that context it sounds today a little bit strange (although well-intentioned) when “performers should cooperate with researchers to achieve the highest quality of recording and documentation possible” (Seeger and Chaudhuri 2004, 76). Such workflow favors the archives when Seeger and Chaudhuri moreover write that “this contributes to a high-quality technical product for the archives” (ibid.). Discussions about ownership and rights are directed to establish mutual understanding, to regulate the different interests and to share benefits between all parties. Most of all the accessibility has to be improved. But as pointed out above the digital era allowed for changes and progress seems to be reached in accessibility and availability.

Audiovisual archiving began as a culturally motivated movement, preserving material because of its intrinsic worth (Edmundson 2004, 29). Thus, archives assume high responsibilities. As in its original meaning the word “*archive* derives from the Latin *archivum*, denoting a ‘public building’ and ‘record’” (Edmundson 2004, 15) and therefore, ‘archived’ records should be accessible – not only theoretically but really. The word *arche* enclosed in the term *archive* also means ‘origin,’ ‘power’ and ‘beginning’ (ibid.). These meanings lead directly to the position of research sound archives like the Phonogrammarchiv: they preserve original, unique recordings (very often from the beginning/starting point of the studies in remote regions), and as institutions they possess power (in terms of knowledge – technically or content

² Repatriation projects have been taking place for some years now, partly instigated by institutions, but also by the researchers themselves. Within the community of (research) sound and video archives the responsibilities towards the performers are recognized, and archives are aware of their moral and ethical obligations (Seeger and Chaudhuri 2004, 71). However, a general ‘workflow’ does not yet exist, therefore personal ways of giving back sounds and moving pictures are chosen. Probably this kind of reflection was initiated by restitution processes (mostly of works of art) and thus mirrors the position and attitude of those who are in power towards those who are not.

related). Are archives then ‘terminals’ or ‘transit’? These two perspectives will be reflected on the example of recordings made in ‘exceptional’ situation.

Recordings made in prisoner-of-war camps during WWI: “Exceptional” recording situation

WWI ‘offered’ a special occasion for field research. It was not necessary to travel far away to visit the performers at home but to find them in prisoner-of-war camps. Many different ethnic communities stayed there together. If treating expeditions as experiments in a heuristic sense, an expedition can be seen as a variation on the laboratory in which different practices are conducted and methods for knowledge production could be tested (Klemun and Spring 2016). Scholarly examinations functioned in prisoner-of-war camps like in a laboratory. During World War I, several groups of scholars were active in prisoner-of-war camps throughout the Habsburg monarchy in order to collect sound documents for the Phonogrammarchiv. The camps served them as privileged places of research, where they had access to representatives of numerous different groups of peoples from the Tsarist army (Lange 2018, 44).

Based on the fact, that in many Austro-Hungarian prisoner-of-war camps representatives of nearly all ethnic groups from European and Asian Russia (Pöch 1915, 248) were imprisoned, a large-scale project was initiated by the Anthropological Society in Vienna and its president Carl Toldt from 1915 to 1918. The project mainly focused on measuring people, comparing the collected data and thus creating a taxonomy of racial characteristics. One of the key figures in this undertaking was Rudolf Pöch, who recognized this ‘advantageous’ situation to make additionally sound recordings of musics and languages not collected before. Therefore, he asked for financial support by the former Imperial Academy of sciences. On the condition of making sound recordings the application was accepted (Pöch 1915, 249) and Robert Lach was asked to conduct the project of recording the singing of Russian prisoners of war (Lach 1917, 3). Under these circumstances, prisoners of war were asked to sing or play traditional music or speak in their language or dialect, and the scholars did not need to travel to countries far away but only had to ‘visit’ the prisoners nearby.

From today’s point of view there is hardly an undertaking better suited to illustrate the surreal nature of war than the initiative of several researchers in military service who collected musical and linguistic samples among prisoners of war. We only can speculate about motives: was it the longing for the familiar surroundings or well-known beloved song melodies which moved soldiers to have their singing, speaking and playing an instrument fixed by the phonograph? Or was it sheer boredom – better, to spend one day with a phonetician than alone with uncertain thoughts (Baldauf 2018, 46)?

Instrumental recordings are rather rare in the whole collection of Tsarist prisoner-of-war recordings. But there are five Crimean-Tatar recordings comprising wedding dances and songs, played on the flugelhorn by Simon Perell. In the protocol, the performer is referred to as an “Israelite”; it is

rather improbable, though, that he was a Crimean Jew, since his parents came from Pogrebišče, then in the district of Berdichev, Kiev Governorate, today in the region of Vinnitsa, Ukraine. It is further stated that the informant was resident in Odessa until 1914, having travelled in Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece and Egypt (cf. Lechleitner 2018). Without mentioning his name, Lach (1918, 9) describes Perell as a prisoner-of-war of Crimean Tatar origin, a member of the intelligence class and a musician by profession, praising his musical contributions as particularly valuable and successful.

Simon Perell played the melody of the well-known song *Üsküdar'a gider iken* ("On the way to Üsküdar") on the flugelhorn. This song has been performed from as early as 1700 (and later recorded in many versions, many times) as an Armenian, Ottoman, Sephardic Jewish and even Persian song (Elefterias-Kostakidis 2016, 39). The musicologist Robert Lach working on his project "Songs of Russian prisoners-of-war" probably asked the musician Perell to play typical Crimean Tatar music – and Perell, amongst other melodies, played this widespread and popular melody. It is a fact, as shown in Adela Peeva's film *Whose is this song*, that this song is known and acknowledged by various ethnic groups on the Balkans, sung in their languages and claiming the origin for their respective communities. *Whose is this song* is a film about a song and the transformations it underwent on its travels along the roads of the Balkans: in the different countries it has different faces and exists as a love song, a military march meant to scare the enemy off, a Muslim religious song, a revolutionary song, an anthem of the right nationalists, etc. (Adela Media 2003, 4).³ And Elefterias-Kostakidis concluded that this song with no particular cultural ownership should belong to all (Elefterias-Kostakidis 2016, 39). Probably, until now it was not known that this version of the song was recorded on 7 October 1917 in the prisoner-of-war camp in Hart (Lower Austria) by Leo Hajek, at that time assistant in the Phonogrammarchiv. Robert Lach only mentioned these recordings as very well done, complimented the musician, not mentioning his name (Perell) and characterized these recordings as especially valuable for the archive, also as addition to recordings he had done the year before (Lach 1918, 9).

In respect of rethinking "taking and returning" sound recordings on their way from the performer to the archive this song especially mirrors its travelling along in the region and in the run of time. *Üsküdar'a gider iken* – in its content also related to a travel – is related to this fact. But just this recording was made in the 'exceptional' recording situation and was then preserved in the Phonogrammarchiv; although made in course of the big and rather famous research project (because of Lach's publications

³ A scholarly discussion about the diffusion of this song started already in 1976 (Katsarova and Djenev 1976) and was then reflected by Klebe (2004), who followed the song from its earliest documentation by Luschan in 1902. Another project illustrates the set of problems in the course of the discussion about 'hymns.' The musician Sabri Tuluğ Tırpan realized that this song causes problems between the peoples of the Balkans (Hammerer 2006, 89). In his music arrangement, he tried to show the common and divisive characteristics. Finally, Martha Hammerer concluded that the song offered the chance to overcome the traumata of the Balkan peoples and to give them an idea of being aware of some common ground (Hammerer 2006, 103).

1917–1952), this recording was not known until we started the CD edition. As it was not explicitly mentioned with its title (only as Crimean Tatar folk song), it therefore has been considered as ‘hidden.’

Another couple of recordings mirror an ‘exceptional’ recording situation as well; they were made in the prisoner-of-war camps in Mauthausen and Marchtrenk (both in Upper Austria) and came into existence because of linguistic interests. Karl Ettmayer, an Austrian scholar in Romance languages, must have known that in those camps Italian soldiers were imprisoned. It was known that Ettmayer studied the dialect of Val Gardena (Ettmayer 1920) where he made field research in August 1918, four months after he worked in Mauthausen and Marchtrenk. In dealing with the material created in the prisoner-of-war camps it turned out that this work could have been a kind of ‘exercise’ for his following activities. One could suppose that the recording procedure was the same or very similar in the prisoner-of-war camps as in the villages in Val Gardena. Ettmayer delivered meticulous transcriptions from both activities, showing his deep knowledge in Romance languages. Specifically his phonetic transcriptions seem amazing when considering the rather poor sound quality of the time. Thus, Ettmayer filled in the protocol sheets at great length, he made a phonetic transcription (first column), a simplified transcription (second column), and a German translation (third column). To reach such results, he had to ‘work’ hard with the performers; probably they had to repeat the spoken phrases very often or just spoke once and then explained the specific features. What was common at that time was the method of comparative research and the use of standard texts to make comparisons constructive. Maybe, Ettmayer did not choose the texts to be recorded but let the performers (prisoners) decide. It was extremely necessary to keep the recording time which was limited with one to two minutes, to speak clearly and with all dialectological accuracy. In the already mentioned prisoner-of-war camps Ettmayer could find all in all 12 Italian prisoners, 8 from South Italy (Apulia, Calabria, and from Sicily and Sardinia), two from Middle Italy (Tuscany), and two from North Italy (Lombardy and Liguria). The stories Ettmayer recorded mostly comprise short stories. Three types can be distinguished, all of them come from the peasant milieu and comprise episodes about deception. These stories were not well known among other scholars of Romance language, they were not used in other studies (Goebel 2019, 50–51). Therefore, it can be supposed that those stories were very popular at that time (around 1918) and were proposed by the performers to be spoken into the horn. One example showing the dissemination of one story (in Calabrian *fattarielli*) is taken from the comments of Maddalon and Trumper (2019). It is the story about the barber whose wife was ill, well known in the 1920s. Following Maddalon and Trumper, this sample is included in a dialect anthology for Class 5 of Sicilian primary schools, *Li cosi nuvelli*, where it can be found in the second section entitled *Cunti di viddani e di mastri* (Giacomo and Nicastro 1924). It is also included in the principal collections of Sicilian dialect tales. But, as the authors note, this is not the case in Calabria – it is not to be found in either Pasquale Rossi’s *Le Rumanze e il Folklore in Calabria* (Rossi 1903

[1984]) or in Alessandro Adriano's ethnological repertoire for North Calabria (Maddalon and Trumper 2019, 147). Apparently, this story was widespread, and maybe therefore Salvatore Fucilla from Cosenza (Lechleitner 2019) recited this story.

Although these recordings obviously were made interactively with the performers in the prisoner-of-war camps the sound examples finally were taken home for listening again and analyzing dialectological peculiarities (in case of the Phonogrammarchiv's strategy only listening copies had to be used). Thus, the personal acoustic features were taken away from the 'field,' from the people, and finally were used by Karl Ettmayer for his studies about intonation or syntax in Romance languages.

Just recently, in course of the memorization of WWI, some interest arose by researchers like Ignazio Macchiarella or Serenella Baggio, who referred to these sources (including the recordings of the Berlin Phonogrammarchiv as well) in their contributions on "Memories of the great War" (2016).

One more event showcased the voices of the Italian prisoners-of-war – within the exhibition in June 2017, titled *Uninvited guests*,⁴ an installation let the voices of those people, imprisoned there 100 years ago, sound through the air. As the last leftover of the prisoner-of-war camp the water tower is a highly visible memorial. Surrounded by one-family houses the tower recalls remembrance. And this remembrance was intensified when the recordings were circularly arranged and played via five loudspeakers echoed in the today empty tower. Amplified by a light installation the effect was even more increased. The installation 'counted out' by Katarina Matiasek has brought back the preserved recordings to the place where they were made, and, in this way, gave those examined persons their voice back. As allusion to 'taking and returning sound recordings' this installation not only experienced the remembrance but also allowed for the imagination to let the voices sound not really back to Italy but in that direction.

Both examples, taken from an 'exceptional' recording situation, show similar to other fieldwork situations a close contact between researcher and performer. The researchers follow their ideas and thirst of knowledge, but they need the 'tradition bearers' and their knowledge. Once they had 'gathered' what they searched for the recordings are stored elsewhere and the voices and sounds are cut off their origin. One century later, specifically in respect of research in war times, we are trying to find sense in (or make sense of) the acoustic witnesses from back then.

What is then the role of archives in a discussion about the taking and returning of sounds?

An archive preserves collections of research sound recordings and thus is perceived as a place, a central point (either real or virtual). As we know that cultural expressions are not static, but in a flux, and that various influences shape their 'image' we have the possibility of following the paths of changes as long

⁴ *Ungebetene Gäste*. Festival der Regionen, Marchtrenk, June 30–July 9, 2017.

as we have sound recordings and archives where they are preserved – and this is the opportunity we have for more than 100 years.

Anthony Seeger and Shuba Chaudhuri in their book about archives in the 21st century reflected on the relationship of performers (i.e. informants), researchers and archivists (Seeger and Chaudhuri 2004, 72 ff.) and underlined the strong collaboration which should take place to reach a balanced recognition and mutual understanding. Such findings should not end as theoretical phrases but should be included in workflows based on reflections concerning our doing and finally reaching a balanced knowledge of giving and taking or taking and returning. Such considerations are similar to those of Miguel García who regards archives with suspicion. He attempted to replace the conception of ‘archive as sets of things’ by the conception of ‘archive as knowledge’ and suggested the following interweaving archive attributes: archives as discursive knowledge, as emergence of particular scientific paradigms, as aesthetically and ideologically oriented knowledge, and as multi-sourced, fragmentary and unfinished discourses (García 2017, 10–11). The resultant questions pertain to: whose knowledge, the knowledge for whom, and which way knowledge is recognised, and finally, how we deal with these questions. Such paradigm probably can work only if performers, researchers and archivists will discuss and recognise each other as coequal partners. And some archives have already started to function as a meeting point of all those who act collaboratively.⁵

Besides websites and on-line catalogues archival holdings are also disseminated via publications, e.g. by the Phonogrammarchiv’s CD-series, which submit the complete edition of its historical collections, or by the Phonogrammarchiv’s Yearbook *International Forum on Audio-Visual Research*.⁶ The goal of the yearbook comprises topics on recording technology, preservation strategies and re-recording techniques (the fundamental technical prerequisites of modern audiovisual archives’ strategies) as well as content related topics including methods in field research, the analysis and evaluation of the sound recordings, and field reports. The contributions derive from colleagues outside and inside the archive to receive a multifaceted perspective on cultural studies and their impact for researchers, archivists and performers (as e.g. a multi-perspective analysis of a spirit possession made by the researcher, the performer and the archivist (Schaffler and Brabec 2015)). Publications might be seen as ‘old fashioned’ but still make an impact. Researchers are reliant on the performers, and editors of (historical) sources are reliant on specialists, today rather often practitioners who have clearly in mind to fill the gap between

⁵ In course of the project “Researching the Expressive Heritage of Ílhavo” the local municipality has initiated a partnership with the Universidade de Aveiro to jointly contribute to the preservation and valorization of memory and local identity, and to increase the knowledge about cultural manifestations. This is project can be seen as “best practice” in cooperation of academics and the community.

⁶ www.oeaw.ac.at/en/phonogrammarchiv/publications/international-forum-on-audio-visual-research/, last access 15 February 2021.

sources preserved at safe places (outside and thus taken away) and to be returned for the sake of the creators.

And as many archives the Phonogrammarchiv is aware of the necessity of giving back the preserved intangible heritage to the source communities since the beginning of its edition of the historical collections – and with this exchange the reputation is increasing.

Finally, it could be said that it might look like that an archive is like a terminal, but there is a lively exchange now; thanks to the digital possibilities, sounds are easily accessible and ethically respected – they are just preserved at distinct places for a while due to technical reasons.

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