

Notas e Recensões

WALTER HEISSIG, RÜDIGER SCHOTT, *DIE HEUTIGE BEDEUTUNG ORALER TRADITIONEN. IHRE ARCHIVIERUNG, PUBLIKATION UND INDEX-ERSCHLIEßUNG / THE PRESENT-DAY IMPORTANCE OF ORAL TRADITIONS: THEIR PRESERVATION, PUBLICATION AND INDEXING*, Opladen/Wiesbaden, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998. 384 pp.

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The book under review is the publication of 28 contributions to a workshop which has taken place in St. Augustin, near Bonn, in November 1995. This was attended by a large number of prominent scholars, gathered around the commonly felt concern for the need to preserve “the oral traditions of all kinds” (p. 26).

The papers, written in German (11), in English (16) and in French (1), are introduced by the organisers Walter Hessig and Rüdiger Schott in both German and English.

The first contribution (written in German) is the opening lecture by Bella Čistova (St. Petersburg), “The way from recording folkloristic texts over their preservation in archives to their edition – textological problems”, who deals with the question of transforming an oral performance into a written text without “improving” it.

The following lectures have been grouped into four main areas of concern. The first three papers (“‘Traditional’ Folktales and ‘Modern’ Storytelling”) draw the attention to modern forms of “tradition”: Linda Dégh (Bloomington) — “Oral Tradition in the Age of Mass Reproduction” — emphasises the need to recognise contemporary material and incorporate it in the old Indices, adapting them accordingly. Vilmos Voigt (Budapest) — “Results and errors in working on ‘present day’ oral texts” (in German) — draws one’s particular attention to the need to register and preserve oral history. Guntis Pakalns (Riga) — “A Latvian catalogue on legends – past or future?” (in German) — puts forward the dilemma of whether one should invest one’s limited resources in cataloguing three million units of oral literature stored at the Archives of Latvian Folklore or should one rather opt for collecting today’s living material. This same dilemma is braced by two other lecturers, Gabriela Kiliánová (Bratislava) and Radost Ivanovna (Sofia) whose papers are grouped in a further section, related with fieldwork and archiving.

A second group of five scholars gathered around the concern for “the preservation of folktales and proverbs in the archives”: Walter Puchner (Athens) — “The unpublished card catalogue of Georgius A. Megas on the Greek types of the folktale according to the system of Aarne-Thompson — the fate of a personal archive and the problems of its edition” (in German) — describes the difficulty in publishing Megas’ card catalogue of 20,000 types and variants of

Greek oral literature, the result of 66 years work: the inadequacy of the Aarne-Thompson system to solve many of its classification problems. Siegfried Neumann (Rostock) — “Organisation and Utilization of the Wossidlo Archives in Rostock (Collection, Preservation in the Archive, Stocktaking, Publication)” (in German) — expounds on the problems of preserving an archive of two million records. The three remaining papers in this group focus on the classification and modern archiving of proverbs.

The third group of papers deal with fieldwork research for the preservation and archiving of oral literature: Whereas G. Kiliánová and R. Ivanovna (mentioned earlier) considered the difficulties of choosing between cataloguing archived material or collect and work on new one, Lauri Honko (Turku) — “On the Difficulty of Documenting Oral Epics” — puts forward the problem of documenting material which, like a South Indian epic, lasts seven days to be recorded. Nicole Revel (Paris) — “The Present Day Importance of Oral Traditions: Their Preservation, Publication and Indexing (with Examples from South-East Asia)” — gives an account of her fieldwork in anthropological linguistics in the Philippine Islands since 1970, and of all the immense amount of material she has gathered, stored and made available. Kristina Lindell (Lund) — “A Short History of the Research Project ‘The heritage of the Kammu [Thailand]: The Culture, Language and Experience of an Indigenous people’” — also accounts for her linguistic fieldwork on an unknown language from the Kammu, now studied and stored, and she appeals for the urgent need of surveying many other ethnic minorities whose languages will vanish within a decade. So does Georgi Kapchits (Moscow) — “The Somali Oral Traditions: A Call for Salvation” — with regard to the Somali tradition, ignored and in danger of collapsing, in view of its recent history.

The last group, devoted to the problems connected with the indexing of material, gathered the largest number of contributions. Hans Jörg Uther (Enzyklopädie des Märchens, Göttingen, now heading the committee of revision of the Aarne-Thompson) — “Tale type and motif indices 1980-1995: A stock-taking” (in German) — concluded from his survey of about 70 recent indices that as catalogues tend to include more genres they also tend to be more specialised, the Aarne-Thompson always being used but becoming insufficient. Both Christine Goldberg (Los Angeles) — “Some Suggestions for Future Folktale Indexes” — and Jahn Öjvind Swahn (Lund) — “Aarne’s type catalogue must be revised. But how?” (in German) — emphasise the need for a revision and offer some suggestions. Heda Jason (Jerusalem) — “Index of Content Types for Oral Epics: A Report” — an authority with a large experience on both indices and oral epics, puts forward her method of indexing by content types. On the other hand, Walther Heissig (Bonn) — “The content analysis of

Mongolian epic songs and poems by means of motif indices” considers the advantages of indexing epic songs on motifs, whilst pointing out the inadequacy of Thompson’s motif index for this genre. Kirill V. Čistov — “The comparative inventory of the types of the folktale of the Eastern Slavic fairy-tales: history, results, problems” (in German) — advocates regional rather than national catalogues. Two papers deal with the problem of classifying legends: Ülo Valk (Tartu) — “Estonian Devil Legends in the International Context: Problems of Classification” — also stresses the inadequacy of catalogues for the classification of Estonian material — 120,000 archived texts. Ilona Nagy (Budapest) — “Classification of Origin Legends” — reports on the new approach to classification of the Hungarian legend catalogue and her contribution to it. The three next papers deal with the classification of African folktales. Christiane Seydou (C.N.R.S., Paris) — “Autour d’une fille difficile – histoire d’une expérience” — gives hers and V. Görög-Karady’s work¹ as an example of the extensive analysis of a given folktale type, comprehending the variety of its versions throughout the African continent. Rüdiger Schott (Münster/Bonn) — “Some Problems with Tale-Type, Motif and Keyword Indices in Analysing Folktales of the Balsa (Northern Ghana)” is dealing with a corpus of 1,200 folktales recorded by his team. He confirms the utter inadequacy of the Aarne-Thompson and the relative inadequacy of Thompson’s motif index, as they didn’t take into consideration the African tale. The problem has been tackled by adding to the motif index a keyword analysis. Thomas Geider (Frankfurt/Main) — “Kanuri Text Resources and the Organization of ‘A Reference Book of Kanuri Oral Narratives’” — introduces the reference-book stated in his title, “meant to serve functions of a modified and qualified index or rather encyclopedia of Kanuri storytelling and narrative materials”. All the readers who, like ourselves, are at odds with the problem of cataloguing African material, will find these particular papers immensely valuable.

Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig (Cologne) — “Tjaube Tradition of the Kavango Area (Namibia) – Truth or Fiction?”, reintroduces the question of folklore and history from another angle. Joahannes Wilbert (Los Angeles) — “Folk Literature of South American Indians: A Multivolume Series of Verbal Art” — presents the 24th volume of his monumental series of narratives from hunter gatherer now nearly extinct peoples, a volume which discusses the question of indexing and views favourably an updating of Thompson’s Index, inclusive of the cultures that it bypassed.

This valuable work is the outcome of a gathering of first class folklorists, many of them in the process of undertaking formidable tasks, most of them

¹ Their book, published as *La Fille Difficile* is the object of a review in this issue by Paulo Jorge Correia.

E.L.O., 7-8 (2001-2)

giving valuable advice to all those who want to make a good job of collecting, transcribing, archiving and indexing one's particular worlds of oral literature. The papers often take the form of statements or reports; we can only hope that we shall hear more from them, once projects mature, answers are found and data is made available.

