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FINDING AND ASKING THE RIGHT PEOPLE THE RIGHT QUESTIONS. ON THE USE OF ORAL TRADITION IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Abstract

The background of this paper is extensive surveys and interviews for thirty years in maritime milieu, including a great lake environment, as well as the mountains of the interior of Scandinavia.

The central theses are: 1) that you can almost be sure of a genuine tradition if a specific place for it can be pointed out in present neutral space, thus a potential archaeological site, and 2) that tradition and place names make a holistic view of culture possible, they offer extremely many-sided aspects of cultural history: mundane everyday existence, emergencies, dramatic events and aspects of life alike. Four principles for field work are outlined, geographical, social, gender and personal.

By way of the study of folklore it is possible even to formulate intricate hypotheses on e.g. cultural barriers and ancient cosmology.

Living tradition

This is largely an account of living oral tradition. There are a number of important facets of this. Tradition is not only oral, and there are bits and pieces of other traditions in the transfer of oral tradition. The concept of living tradition was formulated by the Swedish maritime ethnologist Olof Hasslöf in 1972:

A. What is handed/traded over consists of evidence about human beings, their ways of living and their activities.

B. The handing-over tradition takes place between individuals, groups, and institutions; between districts and countries, across continents and seas; between generations, over decades and centuries.

C. The evidence is transferred by means of various kinds of communication – tradition media – such as the spoken and written word, pictures, actions and behaviours, objects and equipment (artifacts), social groups and institutions.

Below I will mention the importance of the so-called mnemonic pegs, for example, places with names, which serve as revelations for a mind attuned to the memories of tradition. Even ruins or relicts outdoors, and in a more private sense, indoors, heirlooms and other objects would be implied as mnemonic pegs. They all serve as the reminders of tradition and are also part of it. Most of this can be included in a wider concept, the cultural landscape. Such a landscape serves as a marker and catalyst for this type of tradition. In this landscape the pattern of movement is a very salient feature. The landscape is “populated” by certain points, their importance being emphasized by how you use the landscape. The mental map is transferred inside the human being: man in landscape=landscape in man. At sea, I baptized this pattern the tradition of usage – and by that I mean above all the sea route patterns between harbours and havens, once plied by all kinds of boats, big and small. The choice of routes and harbours is a cultural phenomenon, not a self-evident functional product of topography (cf. below on the invisible cultural landscape under water).

The various media of transfer are listed by Hasslöf as the following:

- oral tradition,
- written tradition,
- iconographic tradition,
- manual tradition,
- object tradition,
- social or institutional tradition.

Of these I think the most forgotten type is the manual tradition. It should never be forgotten that in traditional societies, and even to day, a very large part of tradition, oral or not, is handed down by a visual/motor/tactile way of communication, which is very un-academic and could be described simply as the grandfather to grandson or the grandmother to grand-daughter method. Just remember in the reverse how you (or 80 % of us) actually learned to use your computer. It is far more common that it could be described – in the generation that I belong to – as the son to father, daughter to mother method. But it is definitely the same type, notwithstanding brickstone-like instruction books. Am I not right in this?

It should be observed that by definition genuine oral tradition is an offshoot of something totally apart from literate culture [see 23]. The consequences of

this fact are to be taken into account in all kinds of field work. It is hard to avoid booklore. But it must be done.

Wise words of the past

Referring to past authorities is not an exercise in the emptiness of one's own soul. It is necessary because we are also part of a tradition, an academic tradition. Excellent advice on the classical field of social anthropology is e.g. offered by new editions of *Notes and Queries*... (originally from 1874) [22]. If we do not keep it alive, it is to our own detriment and to that of our subject in question, our own cultural landscape. For this purpose, I want to make a fairly extensive quotation:

"It usually surmised that the traditions of the people is a legacy of the entire people and is found everywhere in the depth of the 'popular soul' Nothing can be more false. If you seek through a parish for a certain tradition, e.g. a story, a tale, a representation or a custom, you will soon find that every particular tradition has its distinct carriers of tradition, which are only a tiny minority of the entire population of the parish. Different traditions have different numbers and different kinds of carriers. If you look for e.g. hunting traditions you will get nothing if you ask the women and only a small fraction of the males have anything to communicate. The same goes for other kinds of tradition.

Such an uneven distribution of different traditions is nothing unique for our time. It has always existed, even if there is now found a relatively greater number of tradition-blank people and a smaller number of carriers than before.

It is true that schools, newspapers and books have created radically changed conditions for traditions but they have not obliterated them nor done away with laws for their continued life. Like before, tradition is connected to distinct social groups, family, hamlet or village, working team etc. To understand the life of tradition, its emergence and development, its diffusion and reproduction, a primary task is to observe these groups and various kinds of carriers.

Of these carriers two categories could be discerned which relate quite differently towards traditions: the active and the passive ones. Only the active ones keep tradition alive and reproduce it. The passive carriers may have heard of a certain tradition and may during an interview remember some fragments of it, but they do not try to reproduce it or to keep it alive."

These words, which have been rather freely translated by the present author, were once pronounced by the famous Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von

Sydow¹ [32]. Von Sydow was one of the very few scholars who formulated the new academic discipline of folkloristics in the 1920`s. He was also active on an international stage, e.g. in Ireland, where I myself much later had some of my earliest impressions of a many-sided and living oral tradition already in 1963.

Continuity and discontinuity

Von Sydow's views were accordingly published before the enormous upheavals from 1939 and onward. I am deeply aware that it might appear almost tactless to refer to the peaceful conditions of Scandinavia in front of my colleagues in the east Baltic orbit. Traditions of archaeological value would often have been dispersed and possibly been obliterated entirely in the course of war, mass deaths, deportation, and other kinds of migration. Sweden and I myself – being born after the war – have been privileged in the sense that the continuity of tradition has at least superficially been probable or possible. However, the fundamental truths of von Sydow's statements are still valid, even in the east. And the situation will never be "hopeless". Even if upheavals occur, there will always be people, albeit they may be very few, who try to reproduce tradition actively. They need not stay in the same place; they may be new-comers, but they all need the old stories and manually transmitted handicrafts as parts of their identity in the landscape.

Because they are parts of the cultural landscape, most of our relevant traditions work and are still propagated. This fundamental cognitive role of tradition does not only concern agrarian activities or remodelling the ground on land. In my principal field works the cultural landscape could even be "invisible" (to non-divers). Such a basic need as to know by heart (not on the map, mind you!) the shoals and shallows of the fishing grounds will inevitably lead to the exact location of places where nets and trawls get stuck. Such sites in the remarkably preserving waters of the Baltic are often ship wrecks or other human constructions, for one reason or other spilled out on the sea bottom. Equally inevitably reasons are sought for these objects. They may be partly invented, in the form of a story with an attendant place name. The place name refers to the story, as a part of the oral tradition transmitted. These names could thus contain references to the skipper, the name of the ship, its nationality, and a couple of other indications. They are exceedingly valuable in wreck-search.

¹ C.W. von Sydow is, by the way, the father of the famous film actor Max von Sydow.

The invisible cultural landscape under water was valuable directly to Maritime Man of the past, even if he never went there. This cultural landscape could also be expressed as the tradition of usage. The mental map of Maritime Man would be studded with potential harbours, based on the "tactile" knowledge of the sea floor. This is a largely underestimated determinant in settlement archaeology².

So, in a very significant sense, place names are part of the oral tradition. Since they are a part of language, a tacit accusation for the same tactlessness as above could be felt when referring to the stable conditions on the other side of the Baltic. Still, I feel that even the effects of linguistic upheavals may level out in the end. We all have a need of our cultural landscape.

Maritime field surveys

The background of my own experiences is basically that of oral tradition at the sea. I personally conducted a survey in 1975–1982 on such traditional material along the northern Baltic coasts of Sweden from the border to Finland to the outskirts of Stockholm, perhaps 1250 km of coastline. During these years, the number of interviewed people, informants, exceeded 1400. Most of these people were divers, professionals or amateurs, fishermen, professionals or part-time, (former) light house staff, pilots, but quite a considerable number were ordinary landsmen. Together with other historically transmitted material and some archaeological remains it enabled me to produce catalogues and maps covering most intricately the past maritime cultural landscape: sailing routes, harbours, loading-places and havens of different kinds, including fishing harbours, wrecks, ship yards or boat-building sites. The material was published in 1987–89 as *Norrlandsleden, I–II*, 'The Norrland sailing route', and in a great number of other papers and publications. It is hard to estimate the actual number of details supplied by oral tradition, but there were registered impressive 4000–5000 separate statements, most of them from several informants. Only a very small number of the informants, however, approximately 90 people, supplied more than half of the separate statements, thus confirming the views expressed by von Sydow in the quotation above. The long process of finding these super-informants was inevitable. There is no way around an extensive survey. And it could never have been done by sending letters.

² Pointed out recently by K. Ilves [12].

The catalogue of objects and sites contains at least c. 1000 actual wreck sites, c. 400 sites where nets get stuck, about 1000 foundering sites, c. 500 ship yards or boat-building places, c. 500 fishing harbours etc. There are many other categories. The number of some of them, e.g. the sailing routes is hard to estimate [44].

The implications of this enormous material and its ramifications still inspire and fill out my research ideas and theories more than thirty years later. They will presumably do so for a long time, possibly as long as I am alive, fit and active. The latest cross-disciplinary study of mine which is inspired by it concerns cosmology in a maritime environment [48]. And the same goes for the other surveys, notably that on the South Saamis (e.g. on the Saami heart [45]). I hope that I can demonstrate the significance of the surveys of oral tradition in this brief text. Only personal contacts and intercourse with living people can produce such a wealth of food for future reflection and analysis.

Even here it was supposed in the 1970's by most museum people that the tradition had died out. It was "too late". Coastal fishing was dying, it was true, but it still existed. And new-comers were as active in reproducing tradition as the "natives". It only took somewhat more time than before to find them, perhaps in a nearby town adjacent to their former landscape. However, it was also said that a systematic survey must be done before it was too late. But no museum took the initiative, or the responsibility. I had to finance most of the survey by way of applications to private funds, notably J.C. Kempes Minnesfond in Örnsköldsvik. And no follow up at other coasts has been possible since then. Still, I believe, the survey is the largest one ever undertaken.

Some important reflections to be made are addressed precisely to the sheer size of the surveyed area. Of course, it might be argued that a lot of material may have been missed because of this scope. A proper survey would require much more time. Nothing is indeed infallible. And there are still essential gaps, of course! The original intention was that museums and skin divers would continue the field work in a systematic way. Part of this ambition has in fact been realized, yet still surprisingly little by institutions [44].

On the other hand, maritime conditions always have to be observed over much larger horizons than land conditions. The current long coastal stretch was therefore the result of a conscious and logical choice. Secondly, the systematic passage along a coast of this size offers possibilities for formulating ideas of cultural borders and what I called the traditional zones of transport

geography (transport zones for short, for both complexes [40, 42, 43]). Even intuitively the impressions of the borders were quite strong when passing them. The existence of another cultural barrier along the coast, in the northernmost part, has been pointed out by the ethnologist Phebe Fjellström but by way of a material different from mine [8]. The discussion of such subjects has been part of the legacy of the survey. An interdisciplinary project at the University of Umeå later addressed the issue of the cultural borders of northern Sweden, *Kulturgräns norr*, led by the linguist Lars-Erik Edlund.

Another great advantage with a large number of informants is the “statistical” value of individual statements. No single statement on a certain issue was ever accepted or registered at face value. Only two could sometimes suffice, depending on context, but mostly there were more of them. On the other hand, it must be underlined that some of the most interesting pieces were isolated, individual stuff. Although they have been registered faithfully they have never been given credence if not related to and substantiated by historical or other source material.

Maritime culture and the maritime cultural landscape

Curiously enough, some of the most important results, as I see them, are not related directly to the kind of material which was the primary aim of the survey. In a relatively straightforward way they only comprised objects and the remains of a maritime archaeological significance, i.e. along the water-table, most of them underwater at present or in the past.

But it was inevitable that the concept of a maritime cultural landscape had to be formulated to incorporate those remains which were either the responsibility of the national ancient monuments survey (on land) or were immaterial, such as place names and oral tradition in general. The first project to use this term was named after it, by the ethnologist Phebe Fjellström at Umeå University, to address the coastal culture in the inner Bothnian Bay in 1986–88³. Maritime culture is of course something that takes place above the surface, either in a boat or on land. The fact that a substantial portion of its remains are found under water does not change its fundamental adherence to the coast and to all forms of activities centred on the exploitation of not only the sea but all kinds of resources of the archipelagoes and the coastal ecosystems.

³ “Bottenviksprojektet”, ‘the inner Bothnian project’ reported in *II*.

The fisherman was almost never only a fisherman; he was a small-scale peasant as well, perhaps a part-time seal hunter or boat builder. During the dynamic span of his own life he often changed from sailor to fisherman or pilot. His family subsistence depended on a combination of economies, on varied occupations for each member of his household. The role of his wife was as varied as the various combinations. The interviews gave invaluable and quite unique details of such pursuits and also information on their traces in the landscapes, often too discrete to be noted by a visitor in a normal fashion. Later, I have been convinced that a full "holistic" understanding of maritime life must include the remains of all of this double or treble life, the landscapes of barren rocks having been transformed, and terraces and stone fences erected for agrarian purposes. Seal hunting culture was a most fascinating subsidiary subject where the last remaining practitioners were still alive in the 1980's. It was indeed another "fresh" subject of research. Even this subculture was explored later in a cross-disciplinary project at the University of Umeå, led by the archaeologist Noel Broadbent. The facets of maritime culture are almost infinitely variable. Its traces and remains constitute the maritime cultural landscape.

I was too young to apply these principles during my first surveys during the 1960's at Lake Vänern in the southwest of Sweden, although I understood the intrinsic value of oral tradition. Later, I have applied them consistently around the lake, the results being published in a monograph as late as 2003 [47]. The human systems around a lake of this size, the third largest in Europe, display the same characteristics, the same measures of folklore and maritime cultural tendencies of the same kind as the sea coasts. The same subjects could accordingly be covered as in the Norrland survey, although the number of interviewed people may have been less than a fourth of those in the north. This survey had for this reason a slightly more narrow scope than the Norrland survey, its catalogue concentrates on harbours (c. 300) and ship yards (c. 150). I argue, therefore, that the term maritime culture could, with a substantive view of its contents, be applied even at an inland lake [47].

Inland field surveys

My third great survey was devoted originally to inland conditions, more specifically to standing buildings, a choice number hopefully to be restored, in the administrative county of Västerbotten in 1978–80. Oral tradition led astray most emphatically. Among the secondary results were extensive lists of long

since deserted Saami camps, but also a large number of clues to the transhumance migration routes practised by these Saami groups from Norway down to the Baltic. Later, my field work at the museum of Örnköldsvik led to interviews with local people there who could supplement not only on the routes and camps but also on various other aspects of Saami life and on the lively interaction with the agrarian settlers. The results were published in a book on the cultural history of the Saamis of this area [36]. Largely, this was a forgotten history. The interest aroused by the book gave birth to a documentation project, called *Ljusminne*, for some years from 2001 organized by the regional museum in the administrative county of Västernorrland, thus enlarging the subject not only geographically but also thematically.

As another by-product this survey and others in the northernmost province Norrbotten on lumberjacks and timber-floating gave find sites of Saami sewn boats, published as a part of a book on Saami boatbuilding [37]. The unique scope of the survey on Saami camps much later produced ideas, as I mentioned above, on the shamanistic cosmology reflected by the hearth of the hut, partly based on interviews [45].

It is roughly the area of these Saamish groups that I was referring to above when speaking of cultural border-zones or barriers. There are, as mentioned, others in Norrland as well, but they have been described by other scholars without any reference to oral tradition [e.g. 8]. Such a border-zone, if consisting of a partly ethnic, partly economic boundary-line, may show signs of what has been called ethnic stress. This means that the groups concerned intensify their signals of identity or ethnicity in this confrontation. Among these signals, oral tradition is one of the most powerful, and usually along with language. Normally, there are also signs of interaction between the groups in e.g. myth-making [e.g. 4; 25; 33]. It is perhaps not by chance that it has been possible to document unusually old traditions, some of them even medieval, among the settled Swedes in this area especially, but not only, on both sides of the lower reaches of the *Ängermanälven* river [5; 6; 19–21].

How far back could we still go? In the 1960's and 1970's most of the obvious chains of traditions on specific events could not be traced further back than the 1840's. But I stumbled across another surprise among the Saamis, who were best acquainted with the whole area from Norway down to the Baltic coast [41]. My best informant, Elisabeth Stinnerbom of Borkan,

Vilhelmina parish, was in 1982 asked about something else (but related), but came down with the names of the first legendary Christian missionaries in the area. According to her tradition, there were exactly 100 years between them. But when did it start? To my consternation, one name, Torsten, who was supposed to be the first, conforms well with the name of a priest by the name Toste, at least later recorded as a parish priest in Vadstena and found in diplomas from the year 1419 as having been sent out by the king Eric of Pomerania to Lappland. Another name mentioned by her, Bengt, could be the latinized Benedictus, also of Vadstena, who had been recorded as a missionary planning to take off in 1526, on the order of the king Gustavus Vasa.

But if 1519 is the next interesting year with the specific tradition of one hundred years taken at face value, this is the year when the later famous ethnographer Olaus Magnus visited the area. The great Nordic humanist was humbly employed by the Papal chair to sell indulgences in the North to finance Bernini's basilica of St. Peter in Rome. This is the means by which he acquired his astounding knowledge of the northern Baltic. It is highly probable that he visited Saami meeting-places in precisely this area. In other traditions, not only among the Saamis, another legendary cleric, Spå Herr Ola, appears at about the same time or a little later. Ola is an abbreviated form of Olaus or Olof, Olav, Spå means 'sorcerer'. Usually Spå Herr Ola has been identified with a Lutheran parish parson, Olaus Stenonius of Resele in the middle of the 16th century. In various legends, Spå Herr Ola is supposed to have committed some important local feats of sorcery. If this applied to the Catholic Olaus Magnus, the sorcery would presumably be connected with the letters of indulgence which were supposed to produce forgiveness for sins. Is his nickname an interesting popular reaction to his pursuit? Anyway, even the year 1619, another hundred years later, may be a year of particular Protestant activities among the Saamis in the woodlands and the mountains of the interior. My informant pointed out that the age-old traditions of the first missionary were the reason why her first son was christened Torsten.

I am still not quite sure if this is a genuine medieval tradition. But it does not seem altogether improbable. At the beginning of the 20th century Johan Nordlander was able to prove the historical existence of Gunnil snälla, another legendary figure, a powerful woman, in the Sollefteå area of Ångermanland. Gunnil is mentioned by name in a border treaty between Sweden and

Norway, normally dated to 1273. But details in the text of the treaty indicate that her life fell somewhere in the transition between paganism and Christianity. Here it would probably mean late 11th century [21].

There are of course a number of striking examples of the convergence of folklore and archaeology, but mostly in other more central areas of Scandinavia [1; 3; 18]. To some extent, they may in fact appear a little spurious.

However, they serve as a reminder that the application of oral traditions in archaeology is not a new phenomenon. What is new is perhaps an emphasis not on the archaeological confirmation of oral material but rather on the orally transmitted indication of an archaeological site. There is also a new tendency to study popular traditions on antiquities in general as part of the history of ideas.

Migratory tales and dominants of tradition

Recurring traits observed during all surveys were different types of migratory tales and dominants of tradition. Among maritime migratory tales were those of the foundered salt ship, iron moorings in rocks high above the present sea level, presumably showing the great age of a certain sea route or a harbour, and in the same vein boat and ship finds in bogs and wetlands high up among the hills. The ship yard legend retells the excruciating experience when a ship cannot be launched from the slipway because of a spell. But by way of counter-magic the ship glides down by itself. This legend is of at least early medieval date, probably starting in the 12th century. Another interesting recurring tale concerned the origins of coastal chapels. A young woman, a virgin, sometimes thought a princess or otherwise of some prominence in this context, e.g. a captain's daughter, is either supposed to have founded or/and to have built a chapel or to have drowned in a shipwreck and to have been buried at the spot. Sometimes she was supposed to have been assisted in the erection of the chapel by a male, a brother or even a father.

Often the need for drama in popular tradition among the Saamis connected certain localities with Carelian or Chud enemies. On the coast, Russians and possibly earlier Carelians were the dominants of tradition. Such elements belong to international folklore. But this does not mean that there is a total lack of a local background, only that we have to be very sceptical of the recurring details. And the legends themselves may perhaps be founded on some kind of elementary cosmology, as I have suggested in the case of the coastal chapels [49].

Less important and fading types of tales link the deserted remains with the Black Death of the High Middle Ages⁴. In several places another classical feature recurs, the murder of a priest at the altar by a chieftain, who has arrived too late for the sermon. This story is often interconnected with other migratory tales. Undoubtedly, the background is the story of the English (or if you see the point, Anglo-Saxon) archbishop Thomas Beckett of Canterbury, murdered by the (Norman) King's savage knights at the High Altar of Canterbury Cathedral in 1170, but the details are deceptively local, even probable to some extent⁵.

A more obvious romance pattern is displayed by the etymological explanation tales. A single place name or a whole bunch, which has quite another background, is explained by an entire tale of considerable length. Some measure of intelligent activity will fairly soon reveal this to a surveyor.

Another way of looking at the landscape from this point of view is based on the existence of natural features which may have worked as a kind of environmental dominants. In particular, I am thinking of hill-tops, big boulders, and other conspicuous features. The only author mentioning them as Swedish miljödominanter, may be the Swedish ethnologist Albert Eskeröd [7, 82f], but probably the Finnish scholar Lauro Honko has treated them as well (thanks for both references to Tapani Tuovinen). To these, I believe one may surmise, certain legendary patterns have concentrated, although only a very far-fetched relationship to such patterns could be mobilized in tradition. So perhaps we need to be a little sceptical, if such environmental dominants are pointed out as the scenes of legends.

By the way, I am very interested in the occurrences of related stories of all kinds from the east Baltic! I have a very definite feeling that they exist.

Pirates and deserted church sites

A good reason for faithful recording of all kinds of tradition – even the spurious ones – is offered by a very doubtful story I heard in south Hälsingland. Obviously, the informer took it very seriously. According to him, pirates had once buried a treasure far inland along an old sea route, which at that time

⁴ See: Ahnlund, Nils. *Svenskt och nordiskt från skilda tider*. 1943.

⁵ Geijer 1918, Hansson 1923, Hellman 1974 (based on Roosval 1947), Kraft 1926, Lithberg 1916, Löffler 1903, 1905, Palmenfelt 1981 etc. Some of the tales may have been inspired by baptismal fonts with the motive of the martyrdom of St. Thomas.

had been used even for larger vessels. An active group of skin divers from Gävle made an extensive underwater survey during several summers outside the coast. They followed all the indications of the Norrland survey for this area and of course made a number of new discoveries. During the winter of the last survey year, they took their families along the frozen wetlands where the old sea route had run and discovered a circular structure on a former island, whose name indicates that it had for some reason been burnt. This structure has now been the object of a trial excavation. Some finds indicate the Late Middle Ages and a possibly military character. In a document on the Vitalians or Fetalienbröder, who made the Baltic very unsafe for sailing c. AD 1390–1410, it is mentioned that they had a temporary camp at the border forests of Hälsingland and Gästrikland. This statement may possibly refer to this site.

In an astounding number of cases, oral tradition has been substantiated in the Nordic countries when it comes to tales on old deserted church sites. The pace of new discoveries has been accelerating in later years. The foundations of a church building with a graveyard have been found at the very spot indicated by a place name or other traditions. Some even belong to the very Early Middle Ages⁶. The existence of several maritime chapels has also been substantiated by way of such material. Traditions which only mention graves on an island could indicate a disappeared chapel as well.

I would say that the legendary church sites form a perfect (in)land variation of my own, and other numerous, registered tales of foundering and wrecks along the coast.

Some experiences

The salient principles for the evaluation of oral traditions on sites in the cultural landscape are based on thirty years of folkloristic and archaeological activity. There are just four, and they display geographical, social, gender, and personal significance:

1) I think it is quite obvious that if a certain well-located place can be pointed out in a neutral space, there is indeed a very tangible background of the tale or the statement. Something has happened here of arresting importance, or a building has indeed been here, if not a church or a chapel. Underwater wreck

⁶ E.g. Brendalmsö/ Stylegar 2003 in pr., Immonen 1958, Koivunen 1982, Kuujo 1963, several published (and unpublished) works by Ville Laakso in Finland, Larsson 1990, Saloheimo, 1975, 1986, Stylegar 1998, 2001, Vretemark 1989, 1998.

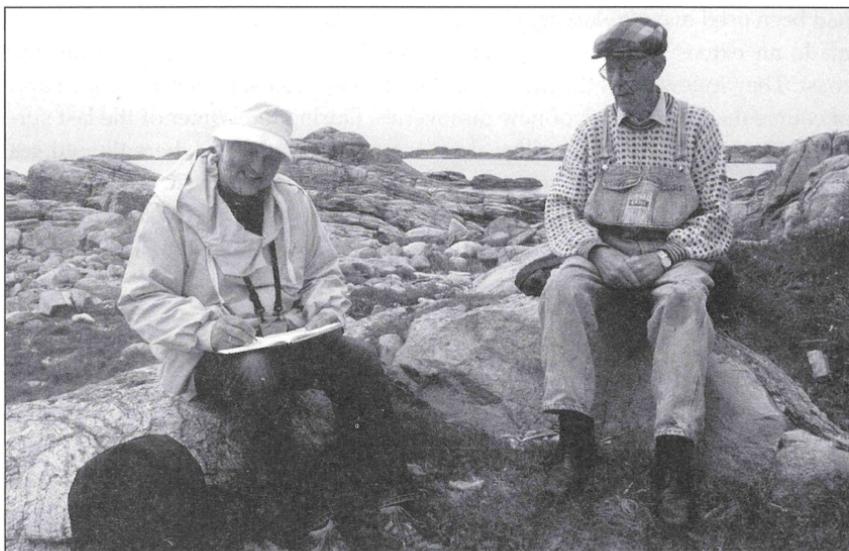


Photo 1. Interview on shipwrecks in Vest-Agder, Norway. To the left the assistant of the author, Gunnar Eikli, an experienced sailor and journalist, to the right Tormod Gjertsen, sailor and fisherman, born 1919, both presently Kristiansand

sites are found precisely at the places where nets get stuck. Orally transmitted tradition keeps knowledge on exact locations alive, not the least owing to possible net damage. This could be called the geographical principle.

2) The people who really know something unique, something that has not been registered before are not the people you would perhaps normally contact or interview, namely, those who are “experts” or local historians. Certainly, their kind of information could be very valuable at a certain stage, but they do not contribute to our fund of popular tradition. They learn by booklore. The genuine informants are often those who are the humblest of the servants of the Lord (although they may not profess to be anything), perhaps poor, perhaps uneducated and very often more or less despised by their more “cultured” neighbours. I would never dream of talking about some of my best informants like this, e.g. my best Saami informant above. Thus, some were certainly exceptions. Anyway, it takes some time, assuredly, to find these people, whatever their “rank.” But the effort is worth every minute and every penny. This may be called the social principle.

3) When it comes to the details of the sites registered, I have found that the most reliable informants invariably are women. A tendency to fabulate if not bad memory or memory deceived by active confabulation among the males may be one of the reasons. It is possible to moderate some of von Sydow's views in this respect. Even if hunting and fishing are mostly male occupations, the gender principle is still valid on the actual location of sites in connection with such pursuits. Any statement has to be rechecked at any time. *Audiatur et altera pars!*

4) It should be added that any kind of non-personal survey, for example, by post, telephone, or by e-mail would have been more or less futile. It is true that some statements will be produced, but they would only have been a tiny fragment of those required for an exhaustive survey. By the nature of things, the social principle means that the best informants were -and are- not of the "literate" kind. You have to establish mutual confidence and a personal relationship. There is no way around. This is the personal principle of field work.

A final remark: I would also make life histories on my best informants if I had the opportunity to remake my surveys today. I deeply regret having missed that chance. There is unfortunately no way back. There never is.

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Kristers Vesterdāls

Pareizo cilvēku atrašana un pareizo jautājumu uzdošana pareizajiem cilvēkiem.

Par mutvārdu tradīcijas izmantošanu arheoloģijā

Kopsavilkums

Šī raksta pamatā ir plaša mēroga aptaujas un intervijas, kas veiktas 30 gadu laikā Baltijas piejūras vidē, tostarp lielo ezeru apgabalā Venernā, kā arī Skandināvijas iekšzemes kalnu apgabalos.

Raksta galvenās tēzes ir: 1) mēs varam gandrīz nešaubities par reālas tradīcijas pastāvēšanu, ja vien mūsdienu neitrālajā ģeogrāfiskajā telpā var norādīt konkrētu vietu, uz ko tā attiecas; tādējādi, tā ir potenciāla arheoloģisko izraku vieta; 2) tradīcija un vietvārdi dod iespēju iegūt holistisku priekšstatu par kultūru. Tie atklāj ļoti daudzveidīgus kultūrvēstures aspektus: ikdienas dzīvi, ārkārtējas situācijas, dramatiskus notikumus un līdzīgus dzīves aspektus. Tiek iezīmēti četri lauka pētījumu principi: ģeogrāfiskais, sociālais, dzimuma un personiskais.

Ar folkloras pētījumu palīdzību ir iespējams formulēt pat sarežģītas hipotēzes, piemēram, par kultūras barjerām un kosmoloģiju.