

# Mapping the History of Folklore Studies



# Mapping the History of Folklore Studies:

*Centres, Borderlands  
and Shared Spaces*

Edited by

Dace Bula and Sandis Laimē

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## FOREWORD

*Mapping the History of Folklore Studies: Centers, Borderlands and Shared Spaces* results from the conference organised by the Archives of Latvian Folklore to commemorate the approach of its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Held in Riga on October 19–24, 2014, the event gathered together folklore scholars from Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, the USA and Latvia.

Anniversaries – whether of institutions, organisations, the birth of influential scholars, path-breaking publications or even particular terms – trigger historical contemplation. As Konrad Köstlin recently stated regarding the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), “Jubilees have to be celebrated. [...] As a matter of course any group and any institution that would neglect such an occasion might be blamed for missing the unique chance that an anniversary offers: to reflect, to promote, to celebrate” (Köstlin 2015, 17).

Reflection was the principal goal of the conference in Riga, and it was not confined to the history of one institution. Founded in 1924, the Archives of Latvian Folklore is the oldest among similar institutions in the Baltic countries, and its history is closely linked to the disciplinary history of international folklore studies and the political history of Europe. Formed in the spirit of the active international cooperation of European interwar folkloristics, the Archives – and Latvian folklore studies at large – was excluded from that shared intellectual space after the end of the Second World War until the early 1990s. Thus, the history of Latvian folkloristics encompasses several episodes of dislocation with regard to international folkloristic thought, and it was this reality that prompted the decision to focus the conference on the international nature of scholarship and the geographies of knowledge.

Intense involvement with the disciplinary past, however, is by no means confined to celebrations. It is a general characteristic of the current reflexive stage of folklore scholarship, given its focus on the epistemological trajectories leading up to our present thinking. Lately, several grounds for historical inspection have emerged in folklore studies, including a dominant emphasis on the role of personalities: an impressive number of books, anthologies and published diaries present biographies and professional accounts of folklorists (e.g., Bringéus 2009; Dundes

1999; Hellspong and Skott 2010; Kuutma and Jaago 2005; Strömbäck 1971; Thompson 1996; Zumwalt 1982). Two other important directions have been histories of approach formation and richly contextualised conceptual histories (Bendix 1997; Ó Giolláin 2000; Anttonen 2005). Institutional histories (Briody 2007) with their political underpinnings (Lixfeld 1994) have been less frequent.

Latvian folklorists have recently contributed to this historiographical discourse by publishing *Latviešu folkloristika starpkaru periodā* – a monograph on the interwar years of Latvian folkloristics (Bula 2014). It combines several of the mentioned perspectives, covering the issues of folklore theory and method, key personalities, the work of institutions, and relevant international and local contexts. The publication of this monograph was an additional reason for hosting an international meeting to address the disciplinary history of folkloristics.

The conceptual core of the conference included a range of related questions. To what extent and in what sense can folklore studies be regarded as a shared field of knowledge? Which lines of authority have held it together and what forces have led to segmentation? How have the hierarchies of intellectual centres and peripheries shifted over time? Do national or regional styles of scholarly practice exist in folkloristics? What factors have contributed to regional formations of intellectual space – common political history, geography and shared research topics, traditions of intellectual cooperation? What roles have scholarly micro-spaces – archives, institutes, museums – played?

By foregrounding “geographies of knowledge” (Burke 2012, 187–217) and “traveling theory” (Said 1983, 226–47), the conference envisioned a debate on theoretical and methodological dissemination in folkloristics. It sought to stimulate scholarly reflection upon disciplinary sources, centres and routes of influence, relevant histories of border-crossing, dialogue, and transfer within and across the discipline, including the strategies and results of knowledge transmission (borrowing, adapting, translating) and the attitudes and conditions that prompt acceptance or refusal. Similarly, the conference foregrounded attention to individual personalities, the politics and economics of scholarship, and forms of communication (conferences and symposiums) as meaningful contexts for discussing the dynamics of folklore theory and method.

While conference participants addressed the bulk of these topics, academic sharing and collaboration emerged as the key concerns uniting contributors to the present volume. Susanne Ziegler, in her article, asks, “What has been shared within the discipline?” She focuses on remote archival collections whose contents have little chance of being shared with

source communities and local experts and therefore become “mere physical objects and lifeless material”. Her point underscores the premise that folklore archives result from the joint efforts of numerous actors – folklore scholars and collectors and their local counterparts – communities, correspondents, and volunteers. Two other authors illuminate the complex processes of archive formation. Aigars Lielbārdis deals with the work of Fricis Brīvzemnieks (1846–1907), one of the founders of Latvian folkloristics and the organiser of the first folklore expedition, which resulted in the creation of a nationwide network of folklore collectors in Latvia. Ave Goršič focusses on August Martin (1893–1982), a local schoolteacher who became an enthusiastic folklore collector and collaborator with the Folklore Department of the Estonian Literary Museum.

Collaboration and sharing have had many faces and a rich history in folkloristics. Indeed, folkloristics as a discipline is exceptional for striving to share not only methodologies and models of interpretation but also research material. During the interwar years – the Golden Age of comparative approaches – it was common practice for scholars to supply foreign colleagues with the national examples of the texts, beliefs and customs they studied. The resulting connections and close personal ties among folklorists can be assessed retrospectively through their international correspondence, as Rita Treija demonstrates with regard to Anna Bērzkalne (1891–1956), the founder of the Archives of Latvian Folklore. Writing about the same time period, Dace Bula addresses (from a Latvian perspective) the collaborative networks created by professional organisations, periodicals and international meetings as well as through joint efforts to develop an internationally acceptable disciplinary identity and methodologies. Vilmos Voigt provides a broad historical perspective on the international comparative study of Baltic folklore and mythology, covering the timespan from the eighteenth century to the present.

Several authors explore the impact shared methodologies and models of interpretation have had on a particular scholar’s research practice. Guntis Pakalns illuminates how Pēteris Šmits’s (1869–1938) 15-volume edition of Latvian folktales and legends (1925–37) mirrors the international trends in folktale study at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Šmits’s work is also the focus of Martin Boiko’s article, which reveals how the application of generalised theoretical schemes can lead to the misinterpretation of local cultural data. An “empiricist position”, the one that is grounded in folklore material itself not in “abstract theories”, is defended in Ulf Palmfelt’s retrospective overview of intellectual paradigms that governed folklore collecting in 16<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden.

The dynamics of current intellectual exchange between national and international scholarly discourses at the conceptual level appear in Svetlana Tsonkova's analysis of the cross-national dissemination of terms used in the classification of oral genres (verbal charms). Anita Vaivade extends the scope of this topic to cultural political discourse in her study of the history of substituting "intangible cultural heritage" for the term "folklore" in the international vocabulary of UNESCO.

In the intellectual space, collaboration and sharing coexist with their opposites – boundaries and divisions. Whether disciplinary, political, national, geographic or institutional in character, boundary maintenance has been one of the means used by diverse fields of study to preserve their identities. At the same time, research fields often overlap. Sandis Laime in his article points to the shared interest of folkloristics and history in the study of witch trials, whose beginnings in Latvian scholarship he traces. Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, on the other hand, explores the historical linkage between the study of "exotic cultures" (i.e., colonial anthropology) and the birth of scholarly interest in the domestic populations of Ireland, Italy and France in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The cultural political dimension of border-crossing intrigues James I. Deutsch, who considers the role of folklore performances (the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival) as a means for making cultural connections.

Political barriers within the academic world are studied by three authors who deal with Soviet folkloristics – Toms Ķencis, Anu Korb and Kaisa Kulasal. They disclose the peculiarities of a regime of knowledge production developed under the strong guidance of powerful political institutions and among individuals compelled to work in isolation from international intellectual processes. Ķencis addresses the ideological premises that guided Soviet scholarship, while Korb and Kulasal concentrate on the politically biased techniques evident in the everyday work of folklorists – collecting the so-called Soviet folklore, censoring archival material, instructing local folklore collectors. Barbro Klein, in turn, provides insight into scholarly life on the other side of the Iron Curtain by writing about the Baltic scholars who escaped to the West and, in the aftermath of the Second World War, tried to continue their professional careers in Sweden. Klein seeks to reassess their scholarly contribution as a constituent part of the joint Baltic-Nordic disciplinary legacies that has not been properly acknowledged so far.

Lina Būgienė turns to the issue of post-Soviet disciplinary identity confronted by Lithuanian folklorists after the political barriers that divided scholarly thought ceased to exist. By turning to narratives about property relations in the Kaliningrad region, Svenja Reinke-Borsdorf elucidates

how the decline of the Soviet system as an intellectual context enabled reclaiming formerly restricted methods of knowledge production and memory making.

*Mapping the History of Folklore Studies* thus provides rich and diverse insights into the historical dynamics of folkloristic thought with its shifting geographies, shared spaces, centres and borderlands. By focusing on intellectual collaboration and sharing, the volume also reveals the limitations, barriers and boundaries inherent in scholarship and scholarly communities.

Dace Bula

### Acknowledgements

The conference and the present volume are supported by the Latvian Council of Science in the project “Institutionalisation of Folklore Studies in Latvia: Intellectual History of the Discipline in a European Context” (No. 332/2012). We cordially thank Ieva Lešinska for her careful reading of the manuscript and linguistic help.

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# I

## PĒTERIS ŠMITS AND THE CONCEPT OF THE HISTORICAL LAMENT-LOSS IN THE 20TH CENTURY LATVIAN HUMANITIES

MARTIN BOIKO, LATVIA

**Abstract:** The archives and collections of Latvian traditional music and folklore do not contain any documentation of laments. This establishes an exception in the context of the neighbouring musical cultures: Lithuanian, Estonian, Belarusian and Russian. The lack of the laments became a concern among early 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian intellectuals: as though confronted with some kind of cultural defect, they hurried to “close” the “gap” by claiming a former existence and a later disappearance of that phenomenon in Latvia. By claiming this they referred to several passages from the medieval Livonian Chronicles: *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia* (written about 1225/1227) and *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* (beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century), containing, as they were convinced, evidence of the later-lost-laments. This practice was introduced by the influential linguist and folklorist Pēteris Šmits in 1918 in his book *Latvian Mythology*. Šmits was deeply influenced by the *Psychologie der Volksdichtung* (1906) of the German folklorist and politician Otto Böckel, who theorised that the death lament evolutionary is an essential part of every folk tradition, and if a contemporary tradition lacked it, that was due to its historical disappearance. Šmits adopted Böckel’s scheme and way of thinking, and “rescued” the Latvian case by claiming that Latvians had lost their laments and the aforementioned chronicles had preserved evidence of them. Šmits’s idea has been passed from book to book till the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet a simple semantic and contextual analysis shows that the existence of the medieval lament cannot be proven through the mentioned chronicles. And it is surprising that the idea of Šmits could flourish in the context of an advanced chronicle research represented in the 1920s and

1930s by the historians Leonid Arbusow, Jr. and Vilis Biļķins. The case under discussion is symptomatic in many ways: it focuses the sources of ideas and the ways of thinking used in 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian folkloristics, characterises the interdisciplinary relations and registers important ideological and other extra-scientific implications.

**Keywords:** East European lament, Livonian medieval chronicles, Latvian 20<sup>th</sup>-century humanities, Pēteris Šmits (Peter Schmidt), Otto Böckel.

The archives and collections of Latvian traditional music and folklore do not contain any documentation of laments – neither bridal nor death laments. This establishes a strange exception in the context of neighbouring cultures: in Lithuania, in some remote south-eastern corners the lament still is a functioning style, in the case of Estonia the well documented lament of the Setu region is well known. In Belarus and western Russia, in rural regions the lament is still performed, when traditional burials or weddings take place.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of the lament became a serious concern among 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian intellectuals. As though dealing with some kind of cultural defect, they hurried to “close” the “gap” by claiming an earlier existence and a later disappearance of that phenomenon in Latvian culture. Among intellectuals having pronounced such claims are folklorists, archaeologists, historians and musicologists representing diverse approaches and ways of thinking – from romanticists and nationalists to Leninist-Stalinist hardliners, and, strangely enough, some representatives of an otherwise strictly empirical and critical approach, too.<sup>2</sup> The circumstances also

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<sup>1</sup> On the functioning, types and structures of the Lithuanian laments see: Čiurlionytė 1966, 132–38; Sauka 1982, 117–25, about the styles and functions of Belorussian and Russian laments: Mukharinskaya and Yakimenka 1993, 110–19; Mahler 1935. The most comprehensive published collection of the Setu laments see in: Pino and Sarv 1981 and 1982. The English reader should be advised to turn to the country's articles in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *The Garland Encyclopedie of World Music*, always containing descriptions of the laments of the respective tradition.

<sup>2</sup> The list begins 1918 with Pēteris Šmits's *Latvian Mythology (Latviešu mitoloģija)*. Šmits was at that time one of the leading authorities in Latvian folklore studies. In his footsteps follows the literary historian Teodors Zeiferts, church historian Ludvigs Adamovičs, one of the most successful Latvian archaeologists of the interwar period Eduards Šturms *et al.* The most important names after the Second World War are musicologist Jēkabs Vītolīšs, linguist and folklorist Arturs Ozols and folklorist Ojārs Ambainis (he closes the list in 1989).

contributed to the diversity of supporters of the concept of the lament-loss, which after the Second World War was continued by both the exile and Soviet Latvian scholars. In addition to being adherents of the concept, they also share, as if dealing with an established truth, that none of them has undertaken an analysis of the concept – neither philological, historical nor anthropological: without any analysis the concept travelled from article to article, from book to book. Some of the authors under discussion have referred to dubious sources from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, too, but all of them and almost always to two passages from the medieval Livonian Chronicles: *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia* (written about 1225/1227) and *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* (written at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century). At least fourteen authors from 1918 to 1989 have referred to the mentioned chronicles to support their opinion about of the existence of medieval Latvian laments.

### Referred material

The most popular passage stems from Chapter XIV in Henry's Chronicle: it is an episode from the year 1210, when in mid-July the Curonians – a medieval Baltic people (ancestors of the contemporary Latvians) – have besieged Riga, the city founded in 1201. After the unsuccessful siege:

[...] Curones a civitate recedunt et collectis interfectis suis ad naves revertuntur et transita Duna triduo quiescentes et mortuos suos cremantes fecerunt planctum super eos (HLCh 1955, 114).	[...] Kurs [Curonians – M. B.] withdrew from the city, collected their dead, returned to their ships and after crossing the Duna [Daugava – M. B.], they rested for three days while cremating their dead and performed <i>planctum</i> over them (ChHL 2003, 98). <sup>3</sup>
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The term *planctus* commonly has been interpreted as an indication of Curonians performing death laments and, thus, an indication of the existence of laments in the repertoire of the Old Latvians.

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Further, the concept of the lament-loss was continued through some repeated editions and Latvian neo-pagan publications (see Grīns and Grīna 1991, 103, Grīns and Grīna 1992, 391). (See more in *The Reception of the Concept of Lament-loss.*)

<sup>3</sup> I have made the Latin insertion *planctus* here in the corrected English translation by James A. Brundage in order to avoid precipitously ascribing a particular meaning to that crucial term.

The anonymous *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, written in Middle High German, delivers the second most favoured passage. It consists of three lines only:

Man hôte die Semegallen clagen und singen ouch den jâmersanc, den Doblên und Racken sanc. (LRCh.AH 1998, 290, 11462–11464)	One heard the Semgallians moaning and singing the same <i>jâmersanc</i> , that Doblên and Racken sung. <sup>4</sup>
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The lines cited are supposed to show the reactions of Semgallians (another ethnic group of medieval ancestors of the contemporary Latvians) after they have lost their castle Sydober (*Sidrabene*) to the crusaders in a battle in 1290. Doblên (*Dobele*) and Racken (*Rakte*) are two other Semgallian castles, lost to the crusaders shortly before. The idea of the anonymous author is that the loss has hit Semgallians so hard that they have sung a *jâmersanc*, in contemporary German one would say – *Jammergesang* or *Kummerlied*: “the sorrow song”. The intellectuals who are concerned because of the non-existence of laments among the Latvians have used this opportunity, and interpreted *jâmersanc* as “lament”, and the passage under discussion as an indication of the former existence of the lament in Latvian traditional repertoire.

The epic aura and the fact that the either passage describes particularly important events in Latvian medieval history makes these episodes especially admired by the Latvian popular historical literature of diverse types: the siege of Riga by Curonians in 1210 was one of the climaxes of the military resistance, and the defeat of Semgallians in 1290, its final point.

### **The meaning variations of the Latvian term *rauda* (lament)**

Let us postpone for the present the investigation of the interpretation of the above mentioned episodes and the question whether they can be used indeed as indications of the existence of a medieval lament, and first turn to the question, what could emerge in the mind of an interpreter (an abstract contemporary of the concept of lament-loss) when the term *rauda* appears? (This question is not of a lesser importance, because there are

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<sup>4</sup> Here the English translation from the Rhymed Chronicle is mine. I have made the Middle High German insertion *jâmersanc* here in order to avoid precipitously ascribing a particular meaning to that term.

several possibilities and therefore also among the authors, who adhere the concept of the lament-loss, variations of the meaning appear, and sometimes only vague hints or small lexical details reveal which version stays behind the term *rauda*.) Below the three principal versions are drafted:

1. Naturally, one had the association with the lament of the classical world in his stock, as it was inherited through the Homeric epics. There are two points to be specially stressed concerning this case: firstly, that this association is limited to the formal and content aspects of the text only, because its sources do not include music. And secondly, that the lament in that case is understood as a heroic epic. Behind this variation stays the practice of use of the Iliad (containing Andromache's lamentation over Hector and the lament for Patroklos) in the gymnasium and higher education.

2. Since about the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the term "lament" was often provided with the simple meaning "a sad, sorrowful song", "a song, complaining about sorrow". A good example comes from the book *Die deutsch-russischen Ostseeprovinzen, oder Natur- und Völkerleben in Kur-, Liv- und Esthland* (1841) by the German geographer, historian, traveller and writer Johann Georg Kohl (1808–1878) in his time also popular in the Baltic lands.<sup>5</sup> In the chapter "Von der Poesie und dem Gesange der Letten" ("On the Poetry and Singing of Latvians"), an enthusiastic description of Latvians as a people of poets and singers, one finds the section "Klagelieder" ("Lament-songs"). Kohl is ready to assimilate every song in his concept of lament that "contains the expression of pain and of a sad feeling" (Kohl 1841, 162). In Latvian folkloristic and historical writing, and in musicology, too, this broad understanding of lament is often represented, and because of its obscurity it often plays a problematic role.

3. Lastly, there is a circle of associations or even some kind of concept, which focuses especially on Lithuanian and Russian patterns of lament: the lament as recitative that is formally bound upon verse line and becomes interrupted by stylised weeping, sobbing, sighing, etc., like a refrain. Such a lament is usually improvised, and its content and expression is focused upon a certain person. Normally women are the

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<sup>5</sup> Kohl lived for six years in the Baltic Provinces. In 1830 he moved "as a private tutor and educator to Courland, where in the beginning he was working for the family of Baron von Manteuffel and then, for six years, for the family of Count Medem and experienced a stimulating, intellectually promoting time" (Wolkenhauer 1882, 426).

performers. (From the point of view of contemporary ethnomusicology, it is approximately the so-called “East European lament”.)<sup>6</sup>

Although for understanding the concept all the aforementioned variations are relevant, from the view of contemporary folkloristics, ethnomusicology and anthropology of music, only the last is of interest. The lament as a “sad, sorrowful song” in Kohl’s sense (the second variation) would result in a conceptual ambiguity. And, facing the trivial observation that every culture has sorrowful songs, the confirmation of this through ancient chronicles plays no role. Again the association, first mentioned, is rooted in the ideas of the Age of Romanticism that there are special elements (e.g., the heroic epic) that simply belong to the so-called early history of a national literature. Only the third version focuses on a lament tradition still vital and in the neighbourhood of Latvians. When the present-day Baltic folklorists or musicologists focus on the question under discussion, only the laments of an East European tradition can be meant. Only focusing on this phenomenon, reasonable questions can be formulated, e.g., did Latvia earlier belong to the area of the East European tradition? Can the fragments of the chronicles be used as indications of an earlier existence of that tradition in the Latvian traditional music? And so on.

## **On the East European lament**

In the chapter “Laments as an Eastern European women’s tradition genre” of her Introduction to the thick edition *Ingrian Laments*, the Finnish folklorist Aili Nenola outlines the following area of the East European lament:

The laments of the Balto-Finnic groups, that is, Karelians, Ingrians, Vepsians and the Setu, form their own group within the Eastern European traditions, which have survived to the present day. The laments of other Finno-Ugric groups also belong to this Eastern European tradition<sup>7</sup> (this

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<sup>6</sup> An association with the lament of the Old Testament that could give the fourth variation, which again would bring a purely text-oriented category, remains excluded, because from the point of view of the adherents of lament-loss, such a version would be incompatible with the paganism of ancient Latvians.

<sup>7</sup> The edition under discussion is bilingual and the sentences quoted are from the English parallel text – the translation from the Finnish. In the Finnish original of the quotation, the plural form is used here (see Nenola 2002b, 28), so that the correct translation of the line should be “those Eastern European traditions”. This is important, because the idea of one East European tradition would hold claim on

includes the Komi-Zyrians, Mordvinians, Mari, Voguls and Hungarians [...]), as do those of the Slavs and Balts [...], as well as the Greeks and other Balkan peoples (for example, the Albanians and Romanians [...]) (Nenola 2002a, 73).

In anthropology of music, the lament is seen as an effective means to channel painful emotions. The features of a typical East European lament are recitativensness, melodic lines of irregular length and insertions of stylised vocal expressions of pain and grief (not always, yet very often). The lament is a stichic, i.e. a line form. (Because of this a typical lament is not a song (!), for it lacks a song's basic quality – the strophic form.) The transcription of a death lament from south-eastern Belarus (Fig. I-1) gives a written representation of the characteristics mentioned above. Incidentally, it can also serve as a purely graphic scheme, e.g., when ignoring the musical semantics of its notational signs. The citation contains three melodic lines of different length, which in each case is determined by the number of syllables in the respective line. That the lines are in a variable relation to one another signals that improvisation is taking place. Each line has at its end, or – as in the case of the second line, towards its middle – a sudden lowering of the voice, which then turns into sobbing:

♩ ≈ 164

1. А га - лу - бчык мой да - ра - ге - не -(чкі ж мой),

2. А на - што ж ты нас па - кі - (даў, ку - да ж ты са - браў - ся)?

3. А ма - ма ж жы - ва - я, а ты ма - ла - дзе - нкі пай - шоў (ат нас).

etc.

Fig. I-1. Death lament for a son from south-eastern Belarus. E. I. Gruzna (b. 1920) from the village Maiskae (Gomel region, Zhlobin district).

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homogeneity: the plural form better represents the real diversity of the East European lament.

## Pēteris Šmits and the emergence of the concept of the lament-loss

The issue of the lament in the Latvian traditional music has been in my field of view since about 1996, when the Latgallian Office of the Dead and Latgallian death rites were my focus of interest. Since then a collection of sixteen cases by fourteen authors, pointing the idea of the lament-loss, have been brought together. The concept was invented by the sinologist, folklorist and Baltic philologist, professor at the University of Riga Pēteris Šmits (Peter Schmidt, 1869–1938). He was an international authority on East Asian languages – Tungusic, Manchu and Chinese, and the founder of modern Russian sinology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Less known is his contribution to Baltic philology, but in Latvia he is remembered foremost as a folklorist, and author of the monograph *Latvian Mythology (Latviešu mitoloģija)*, published in 1918. The discourse and concept of the lost laments start with this book. In the chapter about the ancestor cult Šmits writes:

It is an old custom to mourn the deceased by singing about them, and such lament, as is universally acknowledged, belongs to the oldest folk-songs. That custom has been encountered since the oldest times, and among almost all peoples of which we have broader knowledge. Latvians and Old Prussians, too, have had such lament songs, and the Lithuanians have preserved them until now. Although in our [Latvian – M. B.] contemporary folk-songs [folk lyrics – M. B.] only some remnants of the old laments remain, they [the laments – M. B.] are confirmed for us by history: already Henry’s Chronicle tells us that the Curonians in 1210, after an unsuccessful battle with the Germans, “cremated their dead and performed laments (*planctus*)”. According to the *Rhymed Chronicle*, the Semgallians were defeated in 1290: “they wailed and sung the same lament-song (*iamer sanc*), they sung in Doblên and Racken” (Šmits 1918, 50).

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<sup>8</sup> With Šmits’s book *A Treatise on Mandarin Grammar with Texts for Exercises (Опыт мандаринской грамматики с текстами для упражнений)*, 1902) begins the modern Russian sinology. See also: Peter Schmidt *Gesammelte Arbeiten zur Tungusologie und Mandjuristik* (edited by Hartmut Walravens, vol. 1–2, Hamburg, 1984–1985). In Latvia he is famous as a researcher bridging Latvian pre- and post-First World War folkloristics (see Kencis 2012, 106). Several times in his life Šmits held leading positions: from 1923–1925 he was Dean of the Philological Faculty of the University of Latvia and Chairman of the Philological Society. From 1924 until his death he was a board member of the Archives of Latvian Folklore.

Typical of Latvian research literature of the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is the muddle here of the term “lament” (*rauda*) and “lament-song” (*raudu dziesma*) that copies the German terms *Klage* and *Klagelied*. Only the implication that such “lament-songs” are still preserved in Lithuania indicates that Šmits, here under lament/lament-song has the phenomenon in mind, which the contemporary terminology would classify as belonging to the East European laments, because the Lithuanian laments truly represent them.

As far I know, this is the first time the idea of the lament-loss surfaced in a Latvian context. This idea must have occurred to Šmits sometime between 1908 and 1918, because as early as 1908 he had already reviewed the relevant passages, but found no laments there so he did not discuss the issue of laments at all: I am referring here to Šmits’s study *On the Origins and Age of the Latvian Folk-Songs (Par latviešu tautasdziesmu celšanos un vecumu)*. It includes a paragraph where he states what the early sources have to say about the singing of the old-Latvians:

Henry tells nothing about the singing of Latvians; he only mentions a play with loud screaming (*ludum cum clamore magno*) and slapping of the armour [with the sword – M. B.], and, in the case of the Curonians, their complaining about the dead (*planctum*) (Šmits 1908, 104–105).

In passing Šmits makes an important observation:

Only when talking about Germans he [Henry – M. B.] mentions singing [...]. The chronicler obviously did not want to refer to the singing of Latvians and Germans by the same word (Šmits 1908, 105).

Šmits continues the paragraph by telling us that: “Somewhat clearer about the singing of the Latvians is *The Rhymed Chronicle* [...]” (Šmits 1908, 105) and concludes with his translation of the famous tristich, where the *jāmersanc* is translated as “sorrow song” (*bēdu dziesma*).

Thus, no laments are mentioned in the study of 1908: the *planctus* is translated as “complaining” and *jāmersanc* is understood as “sorrow song”. What has happened between 1908 and 1918, leading Šmits to the radical changes in his interpretation of the passages?

In 1906, an ambitious and influential treatise had been published: *Psychologie der Volksdichtung* by Otto Böckel (1859–1923). Böckel was a German politician and folklorist, the forerunner of the political anti-

Semitism in the German pre-First World War *Kaiserreich*.<sup>9</sup> He was a nationalist ideologist of the German peasantry and filled his political discourse prolixly with symbols and images of the so-called *heile Welt* (idyllic world). His book shows massive ideological implications, too, although not in the form of frontal political propaganda. His anti-Semitism is expressed in the book through an almost complete ignorance of Jews and Jewish data, and because of this it remains hidden to an uninformed reader. In the context of the German *Geisteswissenschaften* contemporary to Böckel's *Psychologie*, his book emerges as theoretically weak, although it has the ambition to be a basic work in folklore studies, and was perceived as such by many contemporaries, Šmits among them.<sup>10</sup>

In his *Psychologie* Böckel turns to such basic questions as “the origin of folk singing”, “the essence of folk-poetry”, “the origin of the folk-song”, etc. Instead of a foundation of his theoretical propositions (those always remain rudimentary), Böckel presents long series of selected examples from his own observations and retells the observations of others (most often). These numerous examples impart his book its size and the illusion of solidity, and they are actually the most interesting (entertaining) elements in his text. In the chapter “The origins of folk singing” Böckel presents a simple evolutionary scheme (*Entwicklungsgeschichte*) with a linear succession from simple to complex. The singing and the folk-song stem from “the spiritual excitement, the exuberance of emotion”. Everything that “a child of nature (*Naturmensch*) experiences of joy and suffering [...] elicits from him singing-like sounds: he acts instinctively just like an animal or child, who reacts to the stimulus through sounds. Those unarticulated sounds, which represent an immediate and unspoilt expression of emotions, we call ‘calls’; within them lays the nucleus of the phenomenon we call folk singing, folk poetry or folk-song” (Böckel 1913, 1).

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<sup>9</sup> “After the waning of the Berlin Movement [*die Berliner Bewegung* – a movement of advanced German policial anti-Semitism in the 1880s – M. B.], Otto Böckel, the ‘peasant king’ of Hessenland in west-central Germany, brought anti-Semitic electoral politics back to life, introducing a new style of populist agitation featuring torchlight parades, raucous open-air meetings, party badges and incessant campaigning” (Levy 2005, 75).

<sup>10</sup> There is no need to refer to the top achievements of that time such as Max Weber's sociology of religion or studies by Ernst Cassirer and Georg Simmel that precede the modern German *Kulturwissenschaft*. Even the *Kulturkreislehre*, which was already known at the time of the publication of Böckel's *Psychologie*, is an unattainable intellectual and theoretic achievement in comparison to the rudimentary theoretical formulations by Böckel.

The call, the short immediate expression of mental excitement, is for Böckel “the first and oldest form of poetry” (Böckel 1913, 2) – some kind of proto-form and the starting point of his *Entwicklungsgeschichte*. He distinguishes between “the call of joy and that of pain”. And the last has been preserved “basically in the death lament” (Böckel 1913, 4). Through this Böckel has positioned the death lament as a genre in the immediate proximity of the presupposed proto-form. At the beginning of the chapter “Death lament”, he declares: “To lament the dead in a song is an age-old custom of mankind: this lament was a sacred duty to the dead. One finds it already in ancient times and in almost all peoples, of which we have near knowledge.” The motif of the historical loss of the death lament meanders throughout the chapter:

With the Saxons of Transylvania, the lament was towards the mid of the bygone [19<sup>th</sup> – M. B.] century still everywhere the custom (Böckel 1913, 101).

In the German Empire, there is no trace of the death lament detected anymore (Böckel 1913, 102).

With the English, the custom of the death lament must have been lost already early on (Böckel 1913, 103).

On the island of Sardinia, once the custom of death lament was normal [...] with both the noble and the humble (Böckel 1913, 108).

In Portugal, the custom of lamenting women mourning over the dead in old times was a very common practice (Böckel 1913, 109).

In Spain, too, the death lament earlier was everywhere a common practice (Böckel 1913, 110).

## **Böckel and Šmits**

Böckel implies that the death lament, at least as a historical phenomenon, is a compulsory element in every culture. Those who are ready to accept Böckel as an intellectual authority and believe in an evolutionary development of culture (both was the case of Šmits), now would have a problem with the Latvian material, which lacks the lament. It seems that Šmits was inclined to believe that, through his interpretation of the chronicle-fragments, he had rescued the Latvian case and brought it in line

with Böckel's scheme. It seems that the Latvians, not unlike the English, lost their custom of lament already early on.<sup>11</sup>

The squeezing of the Latvian case into Böckel's scheme passed not without consequences for Šmits: he paid for it with contradictions in his description of the Latvian mourning behaviour. Especially among the old generation of Latvians, the proverb, and earlier folk belief that it is not appropriate to cry by a dead body is well known even today: by doing so, one is making the reposing in the grave difficult and restless for the dead. Šmits was well aware of this motif, and he tells about it in his *Latvian Mythology* alongside his account of the concept of lament-loss (Šmits 1918, 53–54). Two mutually excluding points thus appear next to each other: on the one hand, the lost laments (whiney behaviour), on the other, an old folk-belief that rejects the whiney behaviour and calls it unwelcome and avoidable. (The logic behind the belief may well be that the crying by the corpse can turn dangerous, because the restless and discontent dead can disrupt the peaceful life of the living and do them harm.) Being aware of this gap, Šmits tries to reconcile the contradictions through the statement that the crying and weeping was performed by the invited wailing women and was by its nature purely formal – drained of its emotional content. This is hardly a successful reconciliation of contradictions: no trace can be found of either the laments, or the wailing-women in Latvian oral tradition or written sources. The contradiction, which Šmits tries to solve so awkwardly, contains however a hypothetical solution of the lament problem: one could assume that behind the prohibition to wail stands an old effective taboo, due to which the lament as a genre could not come into being or spread in Latvian culture. Under the pressure of the idea concerning the compulsiveness of the lament in the development of any culture, Šmits could assume this possibility to be unsustainable, or he even has not noticed it.

Just how much Šmits was influenced by Böckel can be seen from his article *The Psychology of Folk Poetry by O. Böckel and the Latvian Folk-Song*, first published in the popular newspaper *Mājas Viesis* (12 August 1909) where he argued against Latvian modernist literature. Šmits discusses here some concepts by Böckel, such as “the optimism of folk

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<sup>11</sup> The idea of universality or even the compulsory nature of the lament (at least as a historical phenomenon) does not belong only to Böckel and his followers. Phrases such as “the once universal domestic funeral lament” (Lloyd 1995, 407), “Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition” (Ajuwon 1981, 272) and the like, are only recently being replaced by softer phrases, such as: “Funeral laments, although they mark a universal fact, are not found throughout the world [...]” (Porter 2001, 181).

poetry”, “the viability of folk poetry”, etc., and projects them onto modern literature (to its disadvantage) and Latvian folklore. There is no discussion about the lament, but even so, one sees clearly that, at the latest in 1909, Šmits had read Böckel’s *Psychologie*, discovering important concepts, which he later uses. The practice of Šmits stringing together externally matching, de-contextualised examples from diverse cultures to substantiate an idea is apparently going back to Böckel’s example.

### **The reception of the concept of lament-loss**

Šmits’s adaptation of Böckel’s ideas has triggered no discussion. However, at irregular intervals his concept has been recapitulated – always in but a few sentences and never accompanied by analysis. References to the previous recapitulations of the concept or to Šmits never have been made. The recapitulations are never word-for-word accounts: some comments have always been added to the original concept. In the comments, several tendencies can be singled out.

The literary historians Teodors Zeiferts (1865–1929) and Arvīds Dravnieks (1904–1977) claim that the death lament was driven out by the church song – unfortunately without adding any proof (see Zeiferts 1922, 54 and Dravnieks 1946, 6–7).

Dravnieks and the archaeologist Eduards Šturms (1895–1959) imagine the lost lament as being heroic epic poetry (see Šturms 1938, 95 and Dravnieks 1946, 6). The lack of an authentic inherited folk epic of the type of the south Slavic, Old German or classical heroic song was, since the beginning of the Latvian national revival, a sore point in the freshly constructed Latvian cultural identity. In this way, Dravnieks and Šturms “rescued” the highly desirable epic poetry, turning it into the vanished laments. The folklorist Kārlis Straubergs (1890–1962) also had the epic in mind when he wrote that the death laments have praised the deeds of those killed (Straubergs 1956, 104).

As of the mid-1950s, only folklorists and the musicologists still wrote about the laments and their loss: historians and literary historians no longer commented on this matter.<sup>12</sup> For folklorists, the concept seemed to provide some kind of normality and helped to avoid the necessity of discussing a possibly delicate and exceptional element of Latvian folklore. That the death lament made an integral part of any nation’s folklore was beyond question.

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<sup>12</sup> See Ancelāne 1957, 580, Ozols 1968, 276, Vītolīņš 1971, 287, Vītolīņš 1972, 43, Rozenbergs 1977, 37, Bērziņa 1989, 18 and Ambainis 1989, 8–9.

One finds a grotesque up-and-down in the writings of the censor and Stalinist Jānis Niedre (1909–1981). A close confidant of the Soviet regime, he was poorly educated, but very eager in his mission of bringing Latvian intellectuals in line in the years following the Second World War. To succeed in this, Niedre wrote books on Latvian folklore and literary history. In the book *Latvian Folklore* (1948) he claims that Latvians did not weep over their dead, but extolled and glorified them in their burial ceremonies (Niedre 1948, 97). Whereas, in his primitive Marxist paraphrase of Latvian literary history of 1952, he supports the concept of the lament-loss and uses the opportunity to ascertain that Latvians practiced the kind of death lament, “as it is common among the Slavs” (Niedre 1952, 31).

This short overview is just to show that the concept of the lament-loss, although always marginally and in a few words only – time and time again has been taken to serve a variety of outlooks.

### Vilis Biļķins and the concept of lament-loss

As far I know, there is only one scholar who has expressed his opposition to the concept, or, strictly speaking, the idea that behind the *jāmersanc* of the *Rhymed Chronicle* there could have been lament practice and that was the historian Vilis Biļķins (1887–1974), a student of the famous Baltic-German historian Leonid Arbusow Jr. (Leonid Hans Nikolaus Arbusow Jr., 1882–1951).<sup>13</sup> Biļķins specialised in medieval Baltic Chronicles and produced a series of studies. In 1949, he published a study *On Singing and Songs of the Baltic Peoples from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century* (*Par baltu tautu dziedāšanu un dziesmām no 9. līdz 13. gadu simtenim*). He comments on the Semgallian situation of 1290 and writes:

The author claims that the wailing of Semgallians could be heard, and that the people of the castles of Doblen and Racken sang laments:

11462 *Man hörte die Semegallen clagen  
und singen ouch den jāmersanc,  
den Doblen und Racken sanc.*

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<sup>13</sup> Vilis Biļķins studied history at the University in Riga. After graduating in 1927, he was a history teacher in Riga and Jelgava. From 1935 to 1944, he was Director of the Riga City Historical Archives. *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia, The Rhymed Chronicle*, the struggle for freedom of Curonians and Semgallians, and the fleeing of Latvian serfs to Riga in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were his research priorities (Švābe 1950–1951, 269).

[...] Likewise, the author mentions singing in other passages of the chronicle. The only certainty that one can take away from his statements is that the Semgallians had songs. [...] One has to say that neither the author, albeit he was in Livonia during the events, nor other members of the Order or the Germans could hear the Semgallian lament-songs, because amidst the most dramatic fights one could arrive in Semgallia only with a very strong army, and nobody was in contact with Semgallians close enough to listen to their lament-songs. Since he knew that the local peoples had songs and that the battles for Doblen and Racken were the fiercest in Livonia, the author could write that the Semgallians sang lament-songs to show the readers and listeners a more animated picture of the impact of combat operations of the German Order in Semgallia (Biļķins 1949, 206–207).

Even though a feasible objection could be made that the message about the *jāmersanc* might have reached the chronicler in a roundabout way, one has to agree with Biļķins: it is hard to imagine that an outsider at that time could have an experience with the Semgallians and, thus, from that fragment of the *Rhymed Chronicle*, no far-reaching conclusions can be drawn.

Surprisingly, Biļķins refrained from commenting on the question about Henry's *planctus*. This could not be an accident, because Biļķins was a very well-read researcher in everything concerning the chronicles. In addition, the *jāmersanc* and *planctus* in the previous writings almost always have been mentioned together. The absence of any mention is all the more striking since Biļķins devotes so much attention to the Curonians. Perhaps he thought the association of *planctus* and lament to be so erroneous that it did not even deserve to be discussed. Be that as it may, it is important that in his study of 1957 *Threats and Offensives against Riga in the First Decade of the City (Draudi un uzbrukumi Rīgai tās pirmajā gadu desmitā)* one finds his version of the *planctus* – how he understood it. Here Biļķins retells the events of mid-July 1210 very close to the chronicler's narration:

When they saw the circumstances of the battle turn unfavourable, the Curonians broke up fighting. They collected their dead comrades, got on their ships and crossed to the other bank of the river Daugava. There the Curonians cremated their dead in a funeral ceremony [*bēru ceremonija* – M. B.] and, on 16 July, went in their ships back to their country (Biļķins 1957, 26).

The last sentence is a bit freer translation of the corresponding sentence in Henry's chronicle. Here, Biļķins uses the term *bēru ceremonija* – “funeral ceremony” – as a translation of *planctus*.<sup>14</sup> In a similar way, this same term has been translated by Albert Bauer (1864–1961) in his edition of the Chronicle in 1959 as “funeral celebration” (*Trauerfeier*) (HLCh 1959, 115). In both cases it is about an unspecified ritual action, and not about a musical style or genre.

Altogether, this does not contribute to the credibility of the idea that the chronicles are discussing laments. Before dismissing this idea, however, one needs to control the meanings of the terms *planctus* and *jāmersanc* from case to case in their use throughout the chronicles. Before a short report on the results, an important remark on the language of Henry's Chronicle must be made.

### The language of Henry's Chronicle

In the edition of Henry's Chronicle of 1955, Leonid Arbusow and Albert Bauer provide the turn *fecerunt planctum super eos* with a reference to a corresponding line from the story of the stoning of Stephen in the Acts of the Apostles:

[...] curaverunt autem Stephanum viri timorati et fecerunt planctum magnum super illum (HLCh 1955, 115). <sup>15</sup>	Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great <i>planctus</i> .
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This indicates that Henry's *fecerunt planctum super eos* is a variation of the Biblical turn *fecerunt planctum magnum super illum*.

Biļķins was first who, in his 1928 book about the language of Henry's Chronicle, detected the actual size of the influence of Vulgate on Henry's language. The book *Die Spuren von Vulgata, Brevier und Missale in der Sprache von Heinrichs Chronikon Livoniae* was Biļķins's first sensational publication. It was written as his master's thesis at the suggestion of Leonid Arbusow Jr. (1882–1951), who was professor at the University in Riga at that time. The German translation of Biļķins's thesis was made by Arbusow himself. Biļķins indicates that it is not possible to compile a complete list of Henry's quotations from the Vulgate, because sometimes it is impossible to distinguish between Biblical phrases and the

<sup>14</sup> In his book *Courland and the Battles of Curonians (Kursa un kuršu cīņas, 1967)* one finds the following sentence in a similar context: “There the Curonians rested for three days and cremated their dead on a funeral stake” (Biļķins 1967, 42).

<sup>15</sup> *Acts* 8: 2.