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Concerning the Traditional Understanding of “Folk Culture” in the German Democratic Republic A Scholarly-Historical Retrospective*

Abstract

The concept of “folk culture” has undergone significant changes within the discipline of *Volkskunde* in the German-speaking world. In the early years of the discipline it was used as a more inclusive term for various socially differentiated strata of the populace. In time, however, the term came to mean the “peasants,” particularly by a bourgeois-national *Volkskunde*. It was this attitude toward the “folk” that became so useful for the National Socialist regime of the Third Reich. After World War II the newly created German Democratic Republic, which grew out of a portion of the former German Reich, developed a Marxist approach to *Volkskunde* that reached back to the original concept of the discipline and included all of the “folk,” particularly the working classes, as part of its investigations. Two men in particular, Wolfgang Steinitz and Paul Nedo, were primarily responsible for promoting the new concept of “folk culture” in the GDR.

Key words: German Democratic Republic — folk culture — Marxist folklore
Wolfgang Steinitz — Paul Nedo

BY putting the term “folk culture” in quotation marks here the intent is to say first that the “folk” should be looked upon as a socially differentiated mass of the working classes and strata that stands in a very effective complementary relationship to various social formations and their special conditions. “Folk” is thus made up of the peasant strata, artisans, land-poor or landless plebeian groupings, proletarian strata, workers, and petits bourgeois, among others. By “complementary relationship” is understood a processually determined, many-sided network of connections between those in power and specific lower strata, but also among the latter. That network of connections is very much like a net that not only proves effectual as a common field for carrying out class struggles, but is also characterized by all kinds of innovations and their acceptance, implementation, or rejection. Their resiliency, i.e., ability to continue, to function or to adapt intellectually to changes in traditions, in the areas of material, spiritual, and social culture, etc., helps constitute an everyday life that is ever changing.

The way in which the suggested process of change and constancy, of new and old, in shorter or larger time spans of specific periods, takes place in general or socio-specifically, and just how it has been concretely manifested in various expressive forms, is what we call “culture” in the broadest sense of the term. The overall manifestation relates to the working classes and strata, i.e., the lower social strata within the network of connections described, which then would be logically described simply as folk culture. One might thus ask why “folk culture” was placed in quotation marks. The answer to this is to be found in the following scholarly-historical relationships in *Volkskunde*.

The bourgeois 19th century, particularly the first half, did not understand by “folk” the above socio-culturally differentiated totality of those lower strata that actually existed, but, rather, simply a folk concept in which the “peasant” past and bourgeois yearning are united (BAUSINGER 1987, 137). This takes on an increasing ideological charac-

ter until well into the 20th century, with consequences that could be anticipated. From this a construct develops, the conceptualization of a "filtered folk culture, purified of all encumbrances," which in the final analysis was supposed to function and did function "as a kind of protective armor from below, as a buffer to the bourgeoisie" (BAUSINGER 1987, 137).¹ *Volkskunde* provided a legitimization that was understood by scholarship and, in its unreal and anachronistic attitude in regard to the *Zeitgeist* of the capitalistic 19th century, was always looking for new objectivations, mostly of a psychological character. It was tied up for decades in debates, survived in fact on relict research, and came down to the present with about a hundred definitions in which the real meaning, purpose, and goal of scholars' endeavors concerning ancient "folk culture" were found. Such consciously applied limitations become apparent when we look at the controversial views that deal with the folk and folk culture as an historically undifferentiated and eternally functioning peasant substratum. This was particularly the case when such views were limited to the so-called spiritual relict areas, i.e., there was a somewhat conscious exclusion of economically relevant portions of material culture.

In contrast to this, there is the complexity and the practical application to a specific age. Both are components of an earlier preoccupation with the life of the folk, along the lines of our opening and more inclusive definition. It is a preoccupation of the kind that reaches back to the early Enlightenment in the spirit of Thomasius, and to cameralistics (i.e. public finance and administration), or to the statistics of the 17th and 18th centuries that was conceived of as political science. This more pragmatic preoccupation with the folk and folk life under the rubric of a "polyhistory" that was both conceived of and laid out along interdisciplinary lines, found substantial support in the developing Enlightenment or in a late-feudalistic economy. Whatever one experienced, whatever one wanted to collect, by means of specific descriptions, travelogues, or enquêtes into the plans and objectives of state leadership—in whatever sense—it was a way of getting acquainted with the conditions under which a broadly conceived folk organized its existence. All of these factors determined its behavior. In the *Materialien zur alten und neuen Statistik von Böhmen* [Materials concerning old and new Bohemia] published in 1788, the Prague scholar Josef Mader wrote a "list of several aids for a pragmatic study of the state, folk, and country of Bohemia." Statistics indeed "had only the political constitution as its object. However, this is most intimately related to the actual makeup of the state . . . , to the thinking and lifestyle, to religion, to trade, customs, practices of the in-

habitants, etc. One cannot separate these objects, since they are based on each other, and one must explain and judge the one as it relates to the other" (MADER 1787, Chapter 2).

This inclusive preoccupation with everything that can constitute folk life and folk culture is seen even more clearly in the large number of travelogues around the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, a characteristic of the age. One begins to look beyond the boundaries of one's own small territory, to be sent out at state expense to become acquainted with and to study other relationships. All of this was for the purpose of profiting, of striving for progress in one's own land by looking at one's neighbors. Among the most important reports of this type are the *Briefe eines reisenden Franzosen über die Deutschen* [Letters of a traveling Frenchman about the Germans], which appeared anonymously in 1796 but, as we know, were written by the German theologian Wölfling. There is virtually nothing that was not described by him, or which he would not have described. These were not just additive lists of observations; on the contrary, the phenomena are presented in detail, including a complete societal background, and everything points toward a synthesis. For example, the characteristic traits of individual provinces are presented together with considerations about the influence of the governments on the customs of the citizenry. That leads even to questions of the "national physiognomy," the "national sensitivity," and to the "general character of the German nation," and Wölfling points out the "old German lifestyle," the conservatism of the Germans, and then critically evaluates it (WÖLFLING 1796). The student of August Ludwig von Schlözer, the later cameralist Christian Heinrich Niemann of Kiel, must also be mentioned. In 1802, in the first volume of his journal *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkskunde*, he published an extensive forty-page questionnaire as a methodological example of how he was trying to assemble a description of a state or a community. Here the totality of folk life is an appropriate part, an object of research and expression (NIEMANN 1807; cf. also SIEVERS 1970, Chapter 1). This is one of the first attempts at interdisciplinary cooperation for a comprehensive investigation of an area and its people. There is almost nothing that could not be subsumed by Niemann under folk culture. His plan presents "an unusual attempt to co-ordinate social, economic, and cultural scholarship" and may "have more than just curiosity value" (MÖLLER 1964, 222-23). If one considers that Niemann had already participated in 1793 in the founding of a *Gesellschaft freiwilliger Armenfreunde* in Kiel [Kiel Society of Volunteer Friends of the Poor], then it is clear that through his efforts there began the first active study of land and folk befitting

the situation of that time, and which—in Niemann's words—had a constitutive part in the "lifestyle and the customs of the folk, that great working majority that made up the core and the mass of the nation" (SIEVERS 1970, 18–19).

Johann Gottfried Herder characterized this epoch between feudalism and capitalism as an

economic one . . . The history of individual provinces in the fatherland, the sources for what is useful and rich, trade suggestions, plans for stimulating industry, the accounting for inhabitants and their strengths and such, all come to light and are sometimes brought about by the government and sometimes just tolerated . . . The trade of all nations, the interest of the peoples toward one another has become a science that lends itself to the finest calculations (HERDER 1893, 356–57; cf. also MÜHLBERG 1984, 9–26).

This assessment by Herder gives us the opportunity here to devote a few thoughts to the thinking, feeling, and desires of the man who dealt so often with the working folk and their everyday life. It was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who said in a 1786 letter that "the folk is of enormous interest to me" (GOETHE 1887–1919, 248).

He possessed a real natural talent for sensing and presenting happenings that he was able to observe among all strata of the working folk on the most varied occasions.² He always understood how to interpret and arrange these individual facts into the general historical and social conditions of his age or to evaluate them pragmatically, especially for the betterment of the living conditions of the working people. Just how seriously he was concerned not only with this folk but also with its history, comes to light in a conversation with the Jena historian Heinrich Luden. The latter had commented to Goethe in regard to a more intensive study of the history of a folk: "the history of a folk is the life of the folk." Goethe responded:

The history of a folk, the life of the folk? That is a keen insight! How little does the most detailed history contain when compared to the life of a folk? And of that little, how little is true? And of that which is true, is there anything that is beyond any doubt? Isn't everything more unsure, the greatest as well as the least?³

This may correspond to what he expressed in the following way in his *Maximen und Reflexionen über Kunst* [Maxims and reflections on art]: "We know of no world except in relationship to man; we want no art that is not a reflection of this relationship." The fullness of

Goethe's expressions about life and work, and also about the happiness of the working folk in general—in no way limited to just the peasant population—is almost overwhelming, and his presentation of those observations so pregnant that one could list one example after another like links in a chain. That cannot be done here, but a quotation from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* [Poetry and Truth] should be mentioned. It is one that so clearly presents his inner relation to what he lived through and experienced. Concerning the visit of a textile manufacturer whose factory had already been mechanized, he wrote: "When one walks between the numerous moving spindles and weavers' stools in a large factory," one feels "with all this whirring and rattling, with all this mechanism so confusing to the eye and the senses, with an incomprehensible view of a place that is so busy in so many ways to do all that is necessary to make a piece of clothing, . . . one's own jacket . . . that one is wearing . . . suffers."

Complexity, interdisciplinarity, and practical application for the present are thus the components of an early preoccupation with folk culture, with the things of folk life, with the folk in general. If one wanted to call this folk culture, one would have to emphasize that it had its essential meaning as a study *of* the folk and as a study *for* the folk. That would reflect its involvement as one element, as one part of a political, scientific, and scholarly system of national customs of that age located between the two great social orders. *Volkskunde* would thus have been laid out from the very beginning as interdisciplinary and oriented toward the present, and it would have been supported by a clear-cut realism. In such a *Volkskunde* there would have indeed been little room for an idyllic and romanticizing glorification of the "honorable old" folk-nation, no one-sided hyperbole and praise.

It was, however, exactly this latter that developed during the first decades of the 19th century, when a clear break with the previous preoccupation with folk culture took place, i.e., that which was ultimately a politically and ideologically motivated consideration of Germanic-German originality, an ostensibly unbroken continuity below the surface of the pure German mother soil. What Joseph Schumpeter once said about Romanticism can be applied to this tendency, from which later, in the course of the bourgeois century, *Volkskunde* developed into a science. Schumpeter commented very perceptively that a certain branch of Romanticism—and this includes also the other kind of preoccupation with "folk" and "folk culture"—had tried to reach "occasionally into the spokes of the scholarly wheel." He continues,

And the result was an unbridled proclamation of a prescientific

method of thinking. But this didn't change anything about the final outcome. And the Romantics could parade their beloved discovery of the folk spirit around . . . wherever they pleased. In itself a worthy thought, . . . in their hands it became a phrase or a metaphysical flourish. As always, when the inquiring mind tried to take a step on the steep and slippery path, they held out their folk spirit to him like a Medusa head—and thus they believed they had done everything (cited in STADELMAN-FISCHER 1955).

This assessment holds that such a changed attitude toward folk and folk culture had caused the original relationship to cameralistics to be completely broken off. In this way, however, the connection to people, to the working populace of the present, was also cut off. The former complex and contemporaneous study *of* the folk was limited from this point on to consciously chosen partial aspects of the whole, and as such it was no longer looked to for completeness. As a study *for* the folk, i.e., for practical application, it could not represent it at all, or it presented a one-sided, distorted view. The stereotype that then developed of the idealized "folk" and a corresponding "folk culture" was raised to a position in the scholarly canon and became a scholarly-historical "tradition."

On the other hand, in such a turbulent time as the capitalistic 19th century there was, of course, a need to grasp and further research contemporary folk life and folk culture. This could not be expected from a *Volkskunde* that had been isolated in such a romanticizing way—here we include the lecture by Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl in 1859 "Die Volkskunde als Wissenschaft" [Folklore as a science] (RIEHL 1859). And thus—stated quite generally—the social sciences stepped into this recently developed gap, and continued as the "heirs" that dealt with the old *and* the new social strata, with the socio-economic and socio-cultural re-educational processes that affected it, with the new conditions of life and their consequences for the behavior of the folk masses, and much, much more. A few examples will be pointed out here.

Alexander von Lengerke had already employed a large questionnaire procedure toward the end of the 1840s, concerning the situation of the land workers in Prussia (LENGERKE 1849). Von der Goltz repeated this in the 1870s (GOLTZ 1875). The Verein für Sozialpolitik [Association for Social Politics] investigated all kinds of things (BEHRENS 1979, Chapter 3). What a treasure chest for sociology, social history, or even for contemporary *Volkskunde* can be found in Schmoller's yearbooks, Roscher's studies, and many other publications! These are all genuine contributions necessary for a critical look at the sources of

a more inclusively conceived folk culture during the bourgeois 19th century! Here too, quite obviously, one must at least mention Friedrich Engels' profound work *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* [The condition of the working class in England] of 1845 (MEW 2), his partial studies on the question of housing (MEW 16), alcohol misuse (MEW 18), and many other topics regarding the lifestyle of the working populace. Finally, we must remember not only *Das Kapital* of Karl Marx, but also the fact that he published in 1880 a ninety-nine-item questionnaire for investigating the social condition of workers in France, an effort that had been preceded by similar investigations in 1866 and 1871 (MEW 16; MEW 17). What is important for *Volkskunde* as a science is the fact that those investigations alluded to here, those by social scientists of the 19th and 20th centuries and by the classicists of Marxism-Leninism, were not discovered as source materials for the discipline's own purposes until recently, i.e., when it began to deal with its own historiography.⁴

Here we must also remember one individual who cannot be left out of any treatment of this theme, and who was an authoritative member of the German educated bourgeoisie: Jacob Grimm.⁵ Quite incorrectly, he and his brother Wilhelm have often enough been raised to the position of the fathers of *Volkskunde*. Even the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* [Household Tales] provide no real basis for their supposed fatherly role. What they and their work represent is something else: a broad, complex view of what folk and folk culture, in general and as an object of research, are.

Both were men very conscious of their age. This can be seen not only in their participation with the Göttingen Seven and in their involvement in the Kurhessen constitutional struggle, it is also evident in Jacob's activities in the Congress of Vienna and in the Frankfurt Parliament in the Paul's Church. It can also be seen through their involvement with the "Berlin Plan for German History in the Summer of 1816," which was handed over to the State Chancellor Hardenberg by many patriotic forces as a mechanism for founding a "Society for the Study of Germany's Older History." Savigny, as one of the most active in this undertaking and from whom the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* arose, wrote to Jacob on 25 May 1816 about the plan. He hoped to accomplish by it a "fraternization of Germans in various states who would then work on one and the same great work," and would also

awaken and encourage many good talents that otherwise would have remained hidden, and that also would lead to much devotion

to history and collecting by rich people, as well as antlike industriousness for a certain and grand goal, so that such devotion would not be lost in things indefinite, lost in the sand, without use, joy, or honor.

As stated in the preamble, this plan was ultimately directed toward a "vita populi," and Savigny already knew why he had turned to Jacob Grimm so exclusively with his letter. He, like his brother, had in the meantime outgrown what had united them in 1808 with Clemens Brentano and with *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (a German folksong collection). They leaned more and more toward those who were of the opinion that one had to deal with all of the realms of folk life if one was working toward a "vita populi." This becomes most apparent in a 23 April 1822 letter of Jacob to Werner von Haxthausen, in which he carefully offers him admonishment and encouragement, and adds that he should not go overboard with his own collecting activity. But then he goes on to say: "Special attention should be devoted to the way and method in which the folk carries water and loads throughout the various provinces; is this on the head, the back, or the arm? How do they behave while talking and sitting, while eating and drinking—e.g., how do they position their arms and legs?" And, finally, he wishes that the "peculiarities of animal breeding and farming" might be included in the Haxthausen plan.

The great interest, particularly of Jacob Grimm, for an inclusive compilation of what belongs to a "vita populi" then goes beyond simple suggestions to others and becomes part of a wish to apply one's own hands, to do more than just collect. This is quite evident in the Foreword to the *Legal Antiquities* of 1828 and in subsequent letters to Savigny and to others. Still, at the beginning of the 1860s there is the sketch by Jacob Grimm of a *Handbuch der deutschen Alterthümer* [Handbook of German antiquities], which lays out in 22 points the full breadth of that which constitutes historical folk life. It is regrettable that the new social strata of the working folk were not treated. It is really not worth asking why this did not happen. It is far more important to emphasize that it was a historical interest that led the brothers along the path of understanding and researching folk life, even if it was only in the village. In their investigations with language the brothers came to a further understanding of the complexity and historicity of folk life. In 1848 Jacob wrote his famous statement: "Language research, which I am committed to and from whence I proceed, has never been able to satisfy me in such a way that I did not proceed to move from words to objects." This sentence makes it clear that the Grimms were

not satisfied with merely ascertaining the contents of an object, but that rather they were driven to look behind the appearances and seek larger relationships. Anyone who has worked with the *German Dictionary* can appreciate this. The fundamental meaning of the Grimm principle of "words and objects" played a larger role—particularly after 1900—than the Grimms could ever have seen for the future: folk culture conceived of as a complex phenomenon.

Here it was the linguists who took a vehement position against a psychological or a so-called limited spiritual and psychological *Volkskunde*, and who worked for a completely different approach. They viewed the "object" in the Grimm sense as more inclusive and in many ways like *Volkskunde* of today, which conceives of itself more and more as a social and cultural-historical discipline. Rudolf Meringer stated in 1909 that object research or object science was

almost everything that relates to man, the science of all manifestations and works of his spirit, insofar as these were not individual but were widespread in society. Object science is ethnology, archaeology, prehistory, *Volkskunde*, religious studies, law, cultural history—and object science would be much more that does not exist at all or where there are only just the beginnings. Object science would be cultural science in the broadest sense (MERINGER 1909, 595).

This broad view is fantastic, one that calls for interdisciplinary work and that the Romance scholar Hugo Schuchardt made more theoretically and methodologically concrete. When, for example, there was to be some dealing with the history of a house, a horse, a grapevine, or a needle, a pot, etc., it would be more correct and relevant to talk "about the history of house construction, horse breeding, wine culture, smithy art, or pottery . . . most correctly, however, about constructing, breeding, planting, smithing, potting." And then there follows this grandiose, wise statement that one could or even should generally add to the work on folk culture, on everyday life. It says: "The word spoken only once cannot have a history—it dies out immediately—only that which is spoken many times has a history and in principle it is the history of those who speak" (SCHUCHARDT 1912, 831).

At this point it is necessary to establish direct contact with the history of folklore as a science, and with the Germanist, cultural historian, and mythologist, Karl Weinhold. He taught around the turn of the century at the University of Berlin, together with Rudolf Virchow founded the Berlin Folklore Museum in 1889, chartered the first or-

ganizational league for the disciples of folklore, and started a journal that even today in its 85th volume functions as a central "guild organ" (*Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*). In 1891 Karl Weinhold published in this journal the first essay that was to lend a scholarly character to folkloric activity. It was a programmatic essay that for the first time looked into the potential fullness of the material with which this discipline was dealing and that, in the final analysis, could only be researched in an interdisciplinary way. This essay is entitled "Was soll die Volkskunde leisten?" [What shall folklore accomplish?]. Weinhold was also a student of Jacob Grimm, and it is interesting, but certainly not coincidental, that his program did not allow for any one-sidedness: "More belongs to folklore . . . than the gentlemen of folklore surmise. To it belongs a familiarity with history and linguistics, with anthropology and psychology, with historical legalities, with the history of economics, technology and nature studies, literature and art; but above all, to it belongs a naturally clear understanding" (WEINHOLD 1891, 1-10). Weinhold formulated in this same essay the statement: "Lack of prejudice in all national questions is our principle" (WEINHOLD 1891, 10). That may well have been true of comparative studies, linguistics, and cultural history, but it appears nevertheless to be a turning away from that narrowly conceived pure German thinking that was spreading out in all directions among those who were working with *Volkskunde*—and they were not few, even at this time.

Volkskunde is thus just one area in what Rudolf Meringer called "object science"—and that was for him and his followers, after all, history. However, it was not anything different for the Grimms in their more universal thinking and treatment of the larger relationships. Indeed, they were always concerned with this one great goal: a pre-history, or better yet, a history of the populace in its larger complexity of expression. This is how they worked during their time, this is what they transmitted to their students; thus the words that Will-Erich Peuckert once wrote down for the Grimm jubilee are still valid for us today:

They gave the folk its history. Not the history of the princely houses—that was already being investigated before this time—but just the history of the folk itself. *Just* that of the folk? Let's ponder that. That *is* in truth German history. . . . The simple things, daily life, the goals of the folk become history—not just the deeds of special men (PEUCKERT 1935, 3).

Also relevant here is the passage from the memorial lecture by the

well-known historian Georg Waitz in 1863 in Göttingen, in which he says:

Dealing with the past, with antiquity, didn't make them complacent for the demands, the battles, of the present. They also listened to the expressions of the folk spirit that came to them only softly and half faded out. Nor did they avoid, through formal reserve, that which resounded from the market of life, but they advised and acted wherever it was a matter of public affairs (WAITZ 1863, 8).

With this we close the circle of relationships to that which we understand today by *Volkskunde*. We find Jacob Grimm's conceptualization of it as an historical discipline as early as 1815 in a letter to Savigny: "I am not for a practical reintroduction into our life of most of that which we recognize among our ancestors as wonderful or praiseworthy. Today it is different, it must be different, and it cannot go backwards" (GRIMM 1953, 192).

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The science of folklore is different, however. Its task should have been, in the sense of the attempts of the 18th-century scholars, of Jacob Grimm, Karl Weinhold and others, devotion to the research of folk culture in its full complexity, and feasting on the possibilities of interdisciplinarity.

Enough of that. It is far more important to note that it was this discipline, "*Volkskunde*," that first took on in a restorative sense the ideological positions of the ruling-class struggles of the 19th century and whose further reactionary development worked forcefully until the time of Hitler's fascism. This is such an undeniable fact that the talk about the misuse of *Volkskunde* by the Nazis is only a half-truth, or even less. In the same way it is also valid to state that only after the defeat of Hitler's fascism and with the building of a new social order within the territory of the German Democratic Republic, could the real foundations for that "new" *Volkskunde* be laid. It was to be an independent discipline within the Marxist-Leninist social sciences, and was concerned with the lifestyle and cultural expressions of the classes and strata of the working populace as those who suffered under historical-social conditions. It also dealt with the history of those who helped shape and advance it, and it continues to do so by including the present (cf. JACOBET 1985, 37-58, with numerous references).

Such a point of view, in the sense of complex enlightened thinking, breaks off in Germany with an attitude that countered the French

Revolution and its effects, and it culminated in the highly stylized emotions of the so-called wars of liberation. It was finally characterized by the denial of and resistance to a new historical period, a new social formation, a bourgeois-capitalistic society that was developing through the reactionary wing of German Romanticism and its turn toward a "folk spirit" that was being transformed into something in a far-distant history.

"*Volk*" is equated from this point on with an undifferentiated peasantry. Trade guilds are included to a certain extent, but one finds a treatment of the plebeian masses in the city and the countryside, indeed with the proletariat, only insofar as the new bourgeoisie warns of the paupers and rabble and employs its newly gained power in numerous ways against them. At this level the first forms of a common interest between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie are established. A fear of and an irreconcilable battle against the proletariat in the broadest sense put their stamp on the relationship between the ruling populace and the workers, from the middle of the 19th century until well into the time of Hitler's fascism.

"*Volk*" is thus henceforth concentrated in the peasantry, whose path into agrarian capitalism is looked upon more as an aberration than as reality. In these relationships we find the ostensible beginnings of "Folklore as Science," and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl is the first, in his lecture of 1859 ("Die Volkskunde als Wissenschaft," RIEHL 1859; cf. also GERNDT 1979, and recently KÖNENKAMP 1988), as well as in his other writings, particularly those about bourgeois society, to define this conceptualization in its complete reactionary tendency. *Volkskunde* is supposed to contribute to a harmonization of those vast social contrasts and it is supposed to point out the illusionary values from the various strata of the past. Relict research and "the idea of salvaging" distinguish folkloric activity, and the tendency toward seeking out expressions of the "folk spirit," as we have already seen, is in the foreground. Included here by way of indoctrination (under the cloak of so-called spiritual folk culture) with nationalistic embellishment, and directed consciously toward societal contrasts, are those uniquely created "village histories" of Germanophilia, Frankophobia, and anti-Semitism that were produced in large numbers as early as the 1840s. The Riehl teaching of the so-called "good" (=reactionary) peasant, who aided the 1848 revolution against the German potentates, found an intensified continuation in Heinrich Sohnrey and his country folk movement. Here the Alldeutscher Verband [Pan-German League], the Stefan George circle, and wild Teutonism are united. Here, too, a folklorism arose that was being produced with the clear reactionary objective of

promoting the homeland (*Heimat*). The irreversible socio-economic fact that Germany had, from the middle of the 19th century on, been developing more and more from an agricultural land into an industrial land, caused the spirit of "agricultural romanticism" and urban hatred to grow. Slogans were created out of this, like "folk without space," or "*Blut und Boden*" ("blood and soil"), and they took on a nearly legal meaning. It is an exceptionally important line of tradition in the history of German *Volkskunde*, which we have scarcely considered before now.

Only a few names can be listed here in the tradition prior to 1945, people who followed other paths of discovery. Actually, there are only two besides Will-Erich Peuckert, who published the first volume of a folklore of the proletariat in 1931 and was then chased from his position in 1933. They are the previously mentioned Karl Weinhold, with his broadly conceived first scholarly program of 1891 under the title "What shall folklore accomplish?" and the Swiss Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, with his teaching of the "Vulgus in populo" (HOFFMANN-KRAYER 1902), who was one of the few who later refused to spend time in Hitler's Germany.

Weinhold's program not only was carried out through large museum collections and the creation of organizations, it should also be assessed for its great accomplishment in evaluating materials and recording them. His anti-folkloristic (i.e., folklorism) attitude met with rejection for the most part. After his death in 1901 a continuing theoretical and methodological battle, under the influence of neo-Kantianism and Diltheyian idealism, broke out concerning the objects of *Volkskunde*. In spite of its sharpness, the battle dealt mostly with nuances in the conceptualization of the effects of the folk soul. All of this not only has relevance for *Volkskunde*, it is also related to the German "*Historikerstreit*" (historians' battle) that grew up around Karl Lamprecht. In the course of this battle a cultural history, associated with folklore and ethnology, was defeated by a nationalistic and one-sided historical theory utilized by those in power. Here, with Karl Lamprecht, a multi-faceted historiography (with a conscious inclusion of *Volkskunde*) could have developed (JACOBET 1965, 58ff), one like what we have accomplished today. In this regard, around the turn of the century, or rather, on the path to German imperialism, came the turning point for the further development of German *Volkskunde* (JACOBET 1985). After the First World War it was especially Hans Naumann who set the tone (see SCHMOOK 1988). His anti-folk theories of "*gesunkenes Kulturgut*" (sunken cultural goods) and a "*primitive Gemeinschaftskultur*" (primitive communal culture), which were filled with elitist presuppositions

of a master race as well as a hostile attitude toward the first German republic in Weimar, created large waves at that time in folklore circles. Through confrontations his theses were only slightly modified, and only the school of Julius Schwietering in Frankfurt am Main assumed the logical counterposition by promoting a specific historical approach to folkloric research (SCHWIETERING 1927).

Adolf Spamer, who occupied the chair for *Volkskunde* at the University of Berlin in 1936, was certainly not the counterpole that he was often called. To write in detail about him here would certainly lead us too far astray, but at least one of his statements concerning the goal of folkloric investigations should be cited here. For him in particular "researching the folk-national within that which was the racial-folk was supposed to serve the intellectual-spiritual substance and life attitude of folk man within the folk community." He designated the folk man himself as the "bearer of such a spirit and soul attitude, . . . his attitude itself as folk-national, without being deceived by it, so that with such idealistic-typical formulations real life is not included, but simply two helpful concepts of scholarly terminology have been gained" (SPAMER 1934, 4).

There were a hundred or more such statements in German *Volkskunde* whose absurdity depended on the degree of their inaccuracy, but they were made by many representatives of the discipline during this period. They were statements that, determining as they did the objectives of a scholarly discipline, should have been as exact as possible, but they were not. However, for this very reason they were useful to pure German extreme right-wing circles, particularly the Nazis, for embellishing all their goals in an ahistorical-mythological way, for hiding their aggressive and expansionistic Germanophilia, for justifying their racial madness, for stirring up anti-Semitism, and finally for starting the horrible Second World War (JACOBET 1965, 125ff; EMMERICH 1971, esp. 95-125; SCHOLZE 1988).

It can come as no surprise that the Rosenberg Bureau and the organization of the SS-Ahnenerbe [SS-Ancestral Inheritance] gave considerable support to such a psychologically oriented *Volkskunde* that had long been preparing the way. It was *Volkskunde* that was supposed to become the basis for a "racially pure" religion after the war, that was used everywhere for propaganda purposes and for justifying what the NS regime was attempting to carry out within the realm of its ideology. There were attitudes and actions that were new, that for the most part had been known among those pure Germans since the turn of the century, and that had been raised to a level of perfection.⁶

There were scarcely any critical voices or rejections of the logical

consequences in German folklore circles. The resistance fighter Adolf Reichwein was an economist and a pedagogue who finally used his work in the Berlin Folklore Museum, on Nazi-approved peasant exhibitions and institutional courses for folkloric practices, to disguise his conspiratorial activities in the Kreisau circle and the plans for 20 July 1943 (JACOBET 1974).

What no folklorists in Hitler's Germany could express, was obvious to professional colleagues abroad. Thus, the Swede Sigfrid Svensson of the University of Lund drew the correct conclusion from the folklore publications of that time, "that *Volkskunde* for the Nazis had only one objective, namely to point out inside and outside of Germany what is German and thereby to strengthen Nazi activism. The Nazis are uniting *Volkskunde* with their politics of expansion," he wrote, and "Nazis will also seek in the old folk-national attitude a tradition for the existence of the dictatorship, . . . the cult of heroes in the legends is being equated with the servility of modern despotism. Perhaps *Volkskunde* should also prove that old village gatherings were organized according to the Führer principle" (JACOBET 1965, 124). In this way, Svensson said, *Volkskunde* was in danger of being changed from a branch of research into a branch of advertising. And he wrote further: "In support of those in power, they are trying now in Germany to make a cultural-historical research discipline into a practical-psychological investigation that will then deliver the necessary agitation material" (JACOBET 1965, 127).

* * *

Even though this represents only a brief retrospect at the history of German *Volkskunde* as a science, perhaps it has brought out the fact that a reenlivening and a new definition of the object of folkloric research was only possible as a consequence of a revision of society.

This happened in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), but only after years of consolidation. It was set in motion and carried out by Wolfgang Steinitz, who was able to free himself from these earlier constraints in his *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten* [German folksongs of a democratic character from six centuries].⁷ Here he made known for the first time a wealth of songs that had been collected in the archives but whose publication had been consciously suppressed. In an authentic and clear way they sang of the needs, oppression, suppression, and persecution of the working folk from feudalism to the Nazi period; they also articulated their determination to free themselves from their bonds. This important work,⁸ which was influential far beyond the boundaries of the German

Democratic Republic, was ultimately an expression of the attitudes of Steinitz as a Marxist and of his deep humanism. It was a great concern of his to promote *Volkskunde* so that it could serve for getting to know and understand various peoples, to do battle with all elitist concepts, and in scholarly history to lay out what had contributed to the abuses of the past, particularly during Hitler's fascism. Folklorists were to devote themselves to the thought that there are no superior and inferior peoples, classes, or strata, even though there may be more highly and less developed ones.

He was always concerned with the problems and questions of just how German intellectual life became fascistic. In October of 1946 he gave a lecture with the title "*Wissenschaftler und Sozialismus*" [Scholars and socialism], in which he explained among other things that during the Weimar period many intellectuals, even scientists,

let young people go their fateful path rather than deciding clearly for democracy and cooperating with the working class. The fateful results of this political behavior are known to us all. There can be no doubt that the majority of German intellectuals, and especially scientists, by their unpolitical stance, by distancing themselves from politics, in reality supported reaction and are thus also responsible for everything that then happened!

And after 1945?

Most [intellectuals and scholars] did not pursue these problems deeply or earnestly enough. When the great difficulties in the work of reconstruction appeared—and just how could this proceed after such destruction without great, in fact enormous, difficulties?—many began to have their doubts about socialism. They had not even really become acquainted with it, and had not yet established contact with the old socialists, with the workers. They saw that things did not happen easily, so they capitulated because of all the difficulties. When someone first tries to create order out of something that is chaotic, it is always easy to criticize him. And it is easiest to return to what is familiar and known, and to believe that it would go much better, but the new thoughts are then incorrect and are not adequate for scholarship or education.⁹

It was one of Steinitz's life maxims to learn, to learn new things, never stand still. Thus, this lecture in 1946 closes with clear recognition of all that has to be accomplished, and that everyone would be needed: "When a scholar whose entire life consists of learning some-

thing new works up new material, processes it and then presents it, this challenge will be understandable and possible." He perceived this, however, through learning and the application of socialistic thought processes, particularly after the experiences at the end of the First World War, the period of preparation for fascism and its destructive force. "Get acquainted with socialism," he called out as a result of the many difficulties in rebuilding in 1945, "and through reading not just newspapers but also the sources, as should be self-evident for scholars; i.e., by reading and studying the works of the founders of scholarly socialism. That is not easy work. Since I have trod this path as part of my own work in the discipline, I know from personal experience. I know also, however, what kind of lessons one experiences in his own scholarship" (ZA-AdW-DDR, vol. 62).

This quotation from a relatively early period shows quite well what really always drove him. He wanted to put *Volkskunde* scholarship at the service of the new ideas of socialistic development, at the service of a new society in Germany. This could only happen by breaking with old concepts, seeing the absolute need to warn others of the dangers of this unholy past, and calling things clearly by their names. But this also required the courage to win over people, scholars, who were willing to tread this new path, to admit their first mistakes. Finally, in a positive way, this would strengthen them because they were convinced of the need for a "democratic renewal of Germany."

How clearly this new image of the folklorist's responsibility for elucidating the history of the working classes and strata fit the new creed! In February 1946 it was placed on a banner above the auditorium entrance of a former high school in Berlin Niederschönhausen where the first central meeting of the "Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands" [Communist Party of Germany] took place. The theme was "Our Cultural-Political Mission," and there were speeches by Wilhelm Pieck and Anton Ackermann. On the banner were the following words by Karl Marx: "The highest essence for mankind is mankind itself. Thus, all relationships, all restrictions must be destroyed where people are suppressed, enslaved, or despised" (MEW 1, 1957, 395).¹⁰ These words reflected the call by Anton Ackermann and others for a new conceptualization of culture.

All culture always appears to us in a double form. Culture is first the totality of material goods that a folk has created through its diligence. Secondly, culture is the totality of intellectual goods that it has acquired from the fruits of its scholars and artists. . . . Culture can only be understood as this unity. A high culture is

not just distinguished by an advanced level of scholarship, literature, art, and folk education, but also because people can live in housing and eat food fit for humans, and clothe themselves appropriately and have all the requirements for a high level of human hygiene. And so not only books and art works are part of a culture, but also sewage and house construction. Richness or poverty in material and intellectual goods and values makes for a high or a low level of the culture of a people. . . . We only need to view life a little more closely to understand that intellectual and material culture are related and interdependent in a thousand ways. One is not thinkable without the other. If this is the case, its full meaning must be recognized and the necessary conclusions must be drawn (DIETRICH 1983, 124ff; cf. DIETRICH 1986, 483ff).

Wolfgang Steinitz was one of the participants at this meeting. He reported that he had written many times about the deep impressions that this expression of "a renewal of German culture" had made on him. In the words quoted by Anton Ackermann, everything was there that Steinitz had sketched out for *Volkskunde*. In particular, there was a broad concept of culture, in the sense that there was a relationship and a mutual dependence between intellectual and material culture, an essential basis for a Marxist understanding of history and Marxist cultural politics.

At the end of a meeting in May 1952 on the theme "Our Tasks in the Area of German *Volkskunde* in the GDR," Steinitz said: "Contact among us has been established and a clear mission has been worked out. The chief goal of our scholarship"—for that time, at the beginning of the 1950s—"is an investigation and publication of democratic songs of the peasants and the workers, as well as songs against war and servitude. The deficiencies and the gaps are known and the path to their removal has been entered. Most important is the comradeship and cooperation among all institutions and people" (ZA-AdW-DDR, Akademieleitung, Vol. 95).

These goals set forth by him have in principle remained constant. Since their inception they have become broader, but the spirit from which they grew still requires today, especially today, our professional cooperation in a discipline that, in the sense intended by Steinitz and in general, is predestined to bring about a "coalition of reason" and contribute to a mutual understanding of mankind and of peoples. In the Steinitz literary archives in the Academy of Sciences of the GDR there is a small pencil-written note from some time around the beginning of the 1950s. It says: "Folklorists are to help build a new

democratic culture for the German people, not preserve superstition, kulaks, legends, mystical things" (ZA-AdW-DDR, Vol. 65).

When the development of *Volkskunde* in the German Democratic Republic is under discussion, the name of Paul Nedo must also be mentioned in addition to that of Steinitz.

Paul Nedo, a Sorbian Marxist who promoted the cultural needs of his people even under Hitler's fascist rule, and who was bridled in by the Brown (National Socialist) powers, agreed absolutely with the primary position of Steinitz. He wrote a whole series of basic works on Sorbian folklore and folk art, and developed research on the anti-feudalistic proverb and on the legends and fairy tales of the Sorbian folk.¹¹ We are also indebted to him for promoting a cultural union so that much of his and Steinitz's program was transmitted to the circles of lay researchers and regional historians, and that he led them to new knowledge about the historical meaning of folk culture (NEDO 1956).

His real importance for GDR *Volkskunde*, however, is something quite different. It was he in particular who, from the very beginning of his activity, promoted work on the lifestyle and culture of the proletariat, carried this out in his own collecting, and had his primary investigations on the cultural inheritance of the working class prepared for publication. In the same way, he fought for and propagated his own position, which is respected today as obvious, that the discipline was to deal with the contemporary manifestations of folk life, i.e., with all those phenomena that were changing or had changed as a result of altered social relationships in the GDR. New social forms had developed, there were different perspectives on property—positive as well as negative—that were becoming evident. That which was old remained but was reoriented, the artistic creations of the laity were given new justifications and contents, etc., etc. (NEDO 1964; WEINHOLD 1956). The cultural union was without a doubt a good platform for taking on these respective projects. Often, however, there was a failure to gain active participation and failures in direction by actual research institutes. Thus Paul Nedo's plans and intentions for making the latter the core of a general program of investigation were not always successful. In reality the research institutes were to carry out the work of this expanded folkloric investigation of the working class and the socialistic present with the help of a relatively large number of leisure-time researchers.

Finally, it became his objective to develop other primary scholarly structures, i.e., to attempt to move specifically from the central to the local-regional level. He thought that museums were best suited for this, but only on the assumption that their directors were trained in an

appropriate way. The lecturers and the various directives were not sufficient to do this, for Nedo and his circle were not concerned with expanding traditional folkloric scholarship by museologists looking for simple facts, but tried much more to work for deeper scholarly objectives. What he attempted was a complex teaching process that went beyond Steinitz; it concerned the objectives of folkloric activity. To put it somewhat differently, he tried to transmit or cause to be transmitted a history of folk culture, more specifically a history of the culture and lifestyle of the working classes and strata of the German folk under the conditions and the social formations of feudalism, capitalism, and socialism, in their processual character. This became the framework for a *Fernstudium* (study by correspondence) for museologists. This type of study began (in 1966) with fifty participants, had a term of five years, and was finished in the third quarter of 1983. For the academic year 1988/89 a fourth semester of similar study was begun. We can say today that the core of potential workers in and for *Volkskunde* does not include just the collaborators in the Academy, the Humboldt Universität, and the large museums. It was spread over the entire republic, where there are about a hundred members of our discipline educated in accordance with Paul Nedo's idea, who transformed what they learned, often in an outstanding scholarly and didactic way, for their museums and expositions, and who have for the most part accomplished considerable amounts of research.

Fernstudium had a large and decisive significance from another standpoint as well. For the first time we were able to transform the expanded objectives of folklore research and teaching along historical lines. Thus, for example, for the first time instruction on the culture and lifestyle of the proletariat was carried out, and there were investigations of changes in contemporary lifestyle, new forms of celebrations and festivals, and the abuses of the discipline during the Nazi period. We accepted studies toward degrees on these complexes, brought the results together in collections, and found a favorable reaction in the professional world and in neighboring disciplines (JACOBET, MOHRMANN and WOELLER 1971; JACOBET and MOHRMANN 1974).¹² It must also be said, however—and the time is right to say it—that the theoretical and methodological knowledge and the conclusions associated with this type of study were not without opposition from many professional colleagues. There were two concepts that opposed each other. The one thought that it had to limit the object of the discipline to an investigation of those cultural objectifications whose origin and developmental process rested on *orally preserved tradition*. The other was based on argumentation supported by experiences from correspondence study and

represented a *conscious historization of the discipline*, i.e., working together with historically related disciplines, particularly with economics, social history, and cultural history, and it considered this practice absolutely necessary. It viewed the period from the early bourgeois revolution down to the present as a field of research and declared accordingly that the object of a historically oriented *Volkskunde* was an investigation into and a presentation of the history of the culture and lifestyle of the working classes and strata of the German folk under specific social presuppositions and situations (JACOBET and MOHRMANN 1968/69). The conflict between these two viewpoints could not be overlooked at that time. A limitation to the ostensible original intent of the discipline existed alongside a more inclusive and complex view in regard to all strata of the working folk throughout history. It was a *Volkskunde* with a historical character that was being promoted as a discipline of integration.

This difference of opinion was not carried out only in the theoretical realm. It also stimulated several very specific research measures, primarily by the representatives of the historical approach to the discipline. Thus an "Arbeitskreis 19./20. Jahrhundert" [Working Circle for the 19th and 20th Centuries] was brought into being, in 1967 an international meeting took place concerning "*Probleme und Methoden volkskundlicher Gegenwartsforschung*" [Problems and methods of contemporary folkloric research] (JACOBET and NEDO 1969), and in the same year the research program "*Magdeburger Börde*" began, which resulted in two dissertations, several advanced-degree works, and three voluminous collections (JACOBET and PLAUL 1969; RACH 1974; PLAUL 1979; NOWACK 1969; BANDOLY and NOWACK 1970; RACH and WEISSEL 1978-82).

Even though the knowledge gained by the publication of these regional "Börden Investigations" is considerable, still, of more significance for the development of GDR *Volkskunde* may be the fact that, from the very beginning, an inclusive research program with interdisciplinary participation under folkloric direction could be carried out consistently, one that concerned the period from the middle of the 18th century until well into the 1960s. The conception and the intent of the investigation bore a complex historical character. That is to say, it was from the very beginning particularly a matter of presenting a picture of the culture and the lifestyle of a socially differentiated populace within this agricultural landscape, in its various important aspects and according to period-specific traits in the history of the 19th and 20th centuries in general and of the Magdeburger Börde in particular. Thus, a knowledge of the entire undertaking is essential for a complex histori-

cal-cultural history.

It is worth noting that the research thrust attempted in the 1960s was able to maintain its relevance as against other scholarly perceptions of *Volkskunde* at that time. Under investigation was the entire lifestyle of working groups of the population, in large cross-sections of a period, for a limited typical region, instead of those typical treatments of individual objects of research. Further, it was necessary to expand the research period to include capitalism and periods of socialistic development, and finally to include the working class in the form of the landed proletariat. The theoretical starting points had thus been maintained and justified down through the years by means of empirical research work. In a review of one of the collections mentioned above, Jürgen Kuczynski writes of a "ray of hope for our research of everyday life," and goes on to say that "it is a pioneering accomplishment of our regional history that it has already produced so many mosaic stones, though still no inclusive picture of everyday life. Finally we are catching up—but barely in regard to the quantity (though this, too, is important!). But because we use the method of historical materialism, indeed in quality" (KUCZYNSKI 1984, 201–205).

NOTES

* Translated by James R. Dow

1. Concerning "folk culture," peasantry, *Volkskunde*, and the positions in the overall social relationships, the confrontation particularly of the early bourgeoisie with the pauper masses, and of the bourgeoisie since the middle of the 19th century with the growing working class, see, for example, BAUSINGER 1973; BERGMANN 1970; BLESING 1970; LENIN n.d.; MOORE 1974.

2. We are following here for the most part the dissertation by FREITAG (1987).

3. The conversation took place on 19 August 1806; cf. FREITAG 1980, 573.

4. Proof of this could be, among other things, the obvious reciprocal tendency between folklore and ethnology, social history, general history, demography, sociology, etc.

5. We are following here the general line of statements already made in JACOBET 1965, Chapter 1.

6. The most important contributions on this matter are found in LIXFELD 1987 and OESTERLE 1987.

7. Volume 1 was published in 1954 in Berlin, volume 2 in 1962 in Berlin (see STEINITZ 1955–1962); Hermann Strobach published a short version in 1962.

8. Steinitz also stimulated exhaustive investigations on democratic-oppositional folklore, which was developed further by Gisela Burde-Schneidewind, Siegfried Neumann, and Waltraud Woeller.

9. Zentral Archiv der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR zu Berlin (hereafter, ZA-AdW-DDR), literary legacy of Wolfgang Steinitz, Vol. 62.

10. MEW=Marx-Engels Werke.

11. The journal *Lětopis*, which has been published in Bautzen since the 1950s by the Academy-Institute for Sorbian Folk Research, also has a continuing series "Reihe C-Volkskunde," which maintains high standards for Sorbian ethnographic research and publishes numerous monographs. Paul Nedo has shaped this work, but the former Director, Paul Nowotny, was also an important contributor for many years. The Festschrift dedicated to Paul Nedo (*Lětopis* C, 11/12—1968/69) contains a bibliography of his works published in Sorbian and German. Of his folklore studies the following should be mentioned: *Sorbische Volksmärchen. Systematische Quellenausgabe mit Einführung und Anmerkungen*, Bautzen 1954; *Grundriß der sorbischen Volksdichtung*, Bautzen 1966; and (together with R. Langematz) *Sorbische Volkskunst*, Bautzen 1968.

12. The relatively large number of advanced-degree papers printed as regional history publications or in the form of museum pamphlets cannot be listed here for reasons of space; cf., however, the *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 27/1 (1986), 152ff, which includes a bibliography of "Untersuchungen des Bereichs Ethnographie der Humboldt-Universität zu ethnographischen Gegenwartsproblemen."

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