

**MEMORY OF THE WORLD INTERNATIONAL REGISTER
NOMINATION FORM**

Austria - The Historical Collections (1899 -1950) of the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv

PART A - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Abstract:

The Vienna Phonogrammarchiv was the first sound archive in the world, founded in 1899 by members of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. During its almost 100 years of existence, the Phonogrammarchiv's collections have grown to over 50.000 recorded items, amounting to approximately 7000 hours of material. The Phonogrammarchiv is one of the greater collections of universal coverage, which, with others, safeguards a considerable part of the worldwide heritage of orally transmitted cultures.

This nomination highlights the Historical Collections of the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv, 1899 - 1950. At that time sound recording in anthropological field work was complicated and technically demanding and therefore not as routine as it became after the introduction of portable magnetic recorders in the mid-fifties. The Viennese historical holdings contain over 4000 recordings of a mainly ethnolinguistic and ethnomusicological nature. Together with the historical collections of the Berlin Phonogrammarchiv, they constitute one of the few early collections of phonographic field recordings of worldwide coverage reflecting stages of orally transmitted cultures before the impact of western civilization, some of which have become extinct since the time of recording, or have at least substantially changed. Many of these recordings are the oldest of their kind, several are unique, and have been sources for extensive and renowned publications.

1. Identity and Location:

Name of the Documentary Heritage: The Historical Collections of the Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Phonogrammarchiv, Austrian Academy of Sciences), 1899-1950.

Country: Austria

Origin: Worldwide

Address: A -1010 Wien, Liebiggasse 5

2. Legal information:

Owner: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften

Custodian: Dr. Dietrich Schüller; Director Phonogrammarchiv

Legal Status:

- *Category of ownership:* Public
- *Details of legal and administrative provisions for the preservation of the documentary heritage:* The task of the Phonogrammarchiv is defined as preserving its collection for "the future". This is not a legal commitment but a voluntary obligation undertaken by the Academy of Sciences to serve the scientific community in the present and future. Recently, the archive's work was evaluated by the Academy and its mission was upheld.
- *Accessibility:* In principle the Phonogrammarchiv is open to all researchers. Accessibility is dependent on the individual legal situation of each collection. There is, however, no such restriction for the historical holdings. Access to the historical recordings has so far been restricted only for technical reasons, because of the time consuming and sometimes complicated process of their transfer (re-recording) to modern carriers. The Phonogrammarchiv has, therefore, recently embarked on a project to re-record its entire historical collection by using the latest technology, and to make these recordings available to the public on a series of about 90 CDs with accompanying textbooks. This project will take approximately 15 years to complete.
- *Copyright status:* Generally, there are no copyright restrictions for the historical recordings of the Phonogrammarchiv.
- *Responsible administration:* The Phonogrammarchiv set up appropriate managerial procedures for the preservation of and access to the heritage in its custody.

3. Identification:

Description: The Phonogrammarchiv is a multi-disciplinary sound archive that records, promotes recording and collects acoustical primary source material for research purposes without regional limits. Its historical collections - as well as the greater part of recent acquisitions - were generated by researchers who deposited their field recordings in the archive, supported by methodological and technical advice, and the loan of equipment from the Phonogrammarchiv and by archive staff members.

The historical collections comprise more than 3000 disk phonograms and approximately 1000 gramophone records. The disk phonograms are carriers of the "Wiener Archivphonograph", a unique format specially developed by the

Phonogrammarchiv to meet the demands for "eternal" preservation. The original recordings were made on 15cm wax disks, employing the groove format and modulation used by the Edison cylinder recording system (vertical cut, "hill and dale", 100 grooves per inch). Matrices (copper negatives) were made from these disks by a galvanoplastic process. These served as durable, "eternal" masters, from which access copies, either wax moldings, or galvanoplastic positives, were made. During World War II the access collection (positives) was destroyed, but the negative matrices survived. In the sixties, these served as shells for producing new positives, made this time from durable epoxy resin. These plastic disks are replayed on a specially adapted record player. This format was in use from 1901 to 1931. The gramophone disk format (coarse groove, lateral cut, 78 rpm) started to be used in the studio in 1927. The collection consists partly of shellac records, replicated in small runs from matrices but mainly of single originals, consisting of the so-called "instantaneous records", some on lacquer disks, but most of them on "Decelith". Amongst the historical holdings, the most significant linguistic and ethnomusicological collections are the following:

Süd-Arabische Expedition: The earliest recordings from Soqatra and the Arabian Peninsula 1902, 1904;

Felix M. Exner, Sanscrit Recitals, India 1904-05;

Rudolf Pöch, Papua New-Guinea, 1904-1905, Namibia/Botswana 1907-1909;

Rudolf Trebitsch, Celtic minorities, Basques and Inuits, 1906 - 1912;

Josef Subak, Sephardic chants, 1908;

A. Dirr, Caucasian languages, 1909;

Abraham Zwi Idelsohn, Synagogal chant, Christian liturgy and Palestinian music, Jerusalem 1910-1913;

Robert Lach, Rudolf Pöch et al., "Gesänge Russischer Kriegsgefangener" (songs of the various Peoples of the Russian Empire: Caucasian, Turkic, Finn-ugrian and other ethnic groups), 1915-1918.

Bibliographic and registration details: The historical collections are registered as 1 - 4266 prefixed either by Ph for phonograms or G for the gramophone format.

Each recording is accompanied by a written "protocol" which gives details of the persons recorded, the context, and content. In the course of the recently initiated re-recording process, this data, along with the technical details of the transfer, are documented in an electronic data base.

Visual documentation: Written evidence is sometimes accompanied by photographs.

History: The Phonogrammarchiv was founded in 1899 by members of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna, including personalities like Ludwig Boltzmann and Sigmund Exner (the first Chairman). It was deliberately founded as an archive with the aim of exploiting the newly available technologies for the systematic recording and safeguarding of acoustical sources without disciplinary or regional restrictions. This foundation marked the beginning of the first sound archive (also the first audiovisual archive) in the world, soon to be followed by similar institutions in Berlin (1900) and St. Petersburg (1902).

Central to the archive's rationale was the idea of proper documentation and "eternal" stability of the recordings. In order to achieve this the "Wiener Archivphonograph" was constructed. Its phonograms were in the shape of a disk (instead of the usual cylinder), thus enabling easy production of copper matrices as permanent negatives. This prevented the deterioration of the recorded materials by frequent play-back, a problem most other early recorded sound collections suffer from.

The Wiener Archivphonograph was used in the field until 1931; in the studio, however, it was replaced by the gramophone in 1927. Since 1950 magnetic recording was used. Over 90% of the collection is of an ethnolinguistic and ethnomusicological nature. A small portion, however, is devoted to environmental and wild-life recordings. From the outset the Phonogrammarchiv co-operated with other sound archives and supported the setting-up of similar institutions. Strong early links were established with Berlin, Zürich, Amsterdam and Zagreb. The Phonogrammarchiv was actively engaged in the development of the sound archives movement and - after its establishment - in the work of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA). Over the last 25 years it has laid special emphasis on technical aspects of phonographic field work as well as re-recording and preserving sound carriers. Following established traditions it perpetuates co-operation with sound and audiovisual archives elsewhere - either on a bilateral basis in the framework of NGOs, or through relevant UNESCO activities.

Bibliography:

Felix M. Exner und Rudolf Pöch, Phonographische Aufnahmen in Indien und in Neu-Guinea, 1905.

Dietrich Schüller, The Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. In: The World of Music, XXIX /1, 1987, 87-91.

Rudolf Trebitsch, Phonographische Aufnahmen der irischen Sprache in Irland und einiger Musikinstrumente in Irland und Wales, ausgeführt von Dr. Rudolf Trebitsch im Sommer 1907.

4. Management plan:

Storage: Currently digital archiving is being prepared. Having been an early advocate of the automatic control and regenerating digital mass-storage system as a viable solution to the dilemma of long-term audiovisual archiving, the Phonogrammarchiv will begin installing a scalable pilot system in the 500 Gigabyte range for its 100th anniversary. While radio stations are installing such systems in greater dimensions with all the inherent financial implications, this pilot project aims at bringing digital archiving within the possibilities of small institutions and collections. The collection is stored in a security vault, extensively armoured against fire and flooding. Due to its special location, the climatic parameters (temperature and RH) comply with the recommendations of access storage without air

conditioning equipment. The matrices of the historical collection are kept in the Austrian State Archive. A secondary safety vault is currently planned for another part of the city.

Further development of re-recording and preservation:

The Phonogrammarchiv will continue its strong engagement in the field of the re-recording of historical sound carriers and preservation of sound and other audiovisual data-carriers. At present, emphasis is laid on cylinder re-recording with a Type III cylinder-replay-machine constructed by the archive's Chief Engineer Franz Lechleitner. As in the past, in St. Petersburg, Ljubljana, Riga; Martin/Slovakia and elsewhere, the Phonogrammarchiv will continue to assist sister institutions with the transfer and safeguarding of their holdings.

In the field of preservation, current emphasis is directed towards studies of the life-expectancy of magnetic tape. The archive's traditional engagement in this field will be pursued bilaterally and with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Access policy: In order to facilitate access to the holdings it has been decided to publish the entire historic collections (1899 - 1950) on CDs with accompanying text books. The first group of collections is being prepared and will be available on the occasion of the archive's 100th anniversary in 1999. It will include the very earliest recordings of the archives (1899 - 1904), recordings from Austria, and the famous Pöch recordings from Papua New Guinea (1904 - 1906).

There are also future plans to provide acoustic information on parts of the collection on internet.

5. Assessment against the Selection Criteria:

- **Influence:** Several historical collections (Pöch, Idelsohn, Russische Kriegsgefangene) have significantly contributed to specialists' knowledge of the respective cultures and are considered to be the basis for studies in these cultures. Without this recorded evidence, we would have missed important parts of the sequence of historical sources. A great part of human thinking and cultivated expression does not leave traces. Thus the collections of the Phonogrammarchiv in general, and the historical in particular, remind mankind that special endeavours must be made to render this part of human culture known and accessible worldwide. It should also be noted, that the archives of orally transmitted cultural expressions play an important role in enhancing self-respect and cultural identity among the respective communities.

- **Rarity:** applies to many parts of the historical collections.

Most of the other criteria apply in different combinations and in varying degrees to the collections of the Phonogrammarchiv. Most of the historical holdings are the oldest of their respective cultures, many even the only documents testifying to cultures that have subsequently faded from existence or - at least - significantly changed. The spread of western civilization, communication and media, have dramatically altered folkloric expressions worldwide.

- **Subject/Theme and Form/Style:** apply in a variety of ways. Traditional forms of ritual and daily life as well as traditional forms of singing, playing and oral literature have substantially changed.

6. Consultation:

The nomination was prepared by the archive in consultation with the Austrian National Committee for the Memory of the World-Programme. The historical holdings of the Berlin Phonogrammarchiv, will also be nominated, both having been prepared in mutual consultation.

7. Nominator:

Working Group on Documents and Collections of Austrian National Committee for the Memory of the World Programme.