

# **The First Sound Recordings of Lithuanian Speech and Music: The Fate of Eduard Wolter's Collections in St. Petersburg, Vilnius and Berlin\***

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The possibility of recording sound was first demonstrated by the American inventor Thomas Alva Edison in 1877. For many ethnographers, it opened an era of collecting audio material (voice and music) from various peoples of the world.

The first sound recordings of Lithuanian were made in 1908 with Edison's phonograph on wax cylinders by Eduard Wolter (1856–1941), a distinguished Baltic scholar, privat-docent at St. Petersburg university, head of the First Slavic Department of the Library of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, full member of the Russian Geographic Society and one of the organizers of the Lithuanian Scientific Society in 1907. He introduced to phonographic recordings the head of the Society, the outstanding activist of the Lithuanian National revival, Dr. Jonas Basanavičius, who has also greatly contributed to the collecting of authentic folklore materials (Nakienė, Žarskienė 2007: 17–18 = 40–42).

E. Wolter was the first custodian of the Phonotheque at the First Slavic Department of the Library of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, where his own recordings comprised an important part of the collection together with those of academicians A. A. Shakhmatov and N. S. Derzhavin. This phonotheque was the predecessor of the present Phonogram Archive of the Institute of Russian Literature (the Pushkin House) in St. Petersburg, housed there since 1939. Already in the early 1930's the Phonogram Archive pulled together the resources of all major depositories of St. Petersburg and Moscow as a subdivision of the Institute of Anthropology, Ethnography and Archeology (Ivanova 2009: 587–592).

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\* We would like to thank Dr. Susanne Ziegler for her enthusiastic assistance in our research in Berlin, Dr. Auste Nakienė and Dr. Vilma Daugirdaitė for their help with the Vilnius materials, and our colleagues involved the project: Nadezhda Alekseeva, Jekaterina Fedorina and Prof. Natalia Svetozarova. The project is supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (nr. 09-06-00300-a). We are greatly indebted to Prof. Steven Young for his kind and thorough editing of our English text.

Today, E. Wolter's Lithuanian recordings are preserved at three institutions: the richest collection is in the Berlin Phonogram Archive (99 cylinders) (Ziegler 2006: CD, p. 923–926), the Pushkin House in St. Petersburg has 54 cylinders, and the Archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius possesses 30 cylinders (contrary to Nakienė, Žarskienė (2007: 17), who mentions only 19 cylinders; possibly, 4 more cylinders may be ascribed to E. Wolter). Only a small portion of the recordings have been specially investigated by scholars; there is no comprehensive description of the whole collection, its composition or history.

For the most part, the St. Petersburg and Vilnius materials are copies of the originals stored in Berlin. The Berlin Phonogram Archive had an agreement with the *Presto* company to produce galvanic matrices from the wax cylinders (so called galvanos — copper tubes bearing a negative image of the surface of the cylinder on their inner side), which made possible the preservation and qualitative copying of the materials. During this process, the original wax cylinder was destroyed — it was melted out of the copper negative which further served as a matrix for making as many copies as necessary by filling it with hot wax (cf. Wiedmann 2000: 203–204).

E. Wolter's co-operation with the Berlin Phonogram Archive in copying the recordings is reflected in his correspondence with the first director of the Archive, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel and his colleague Otto Abraham. This correspondence can be found in the Berlin Phonogram Archive (11 letters from 1908–1910), and in the St. Petersburg branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2 letters: funds 178, inventory 2, files 1 (Abraham, 1908) and 334 (Hornbostel, 1911)). E. Wolter sent his recordings to Berlin and asked for two sets of copies: one for the Library of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, the other for the Lithuanian Scientific Society in Vilnius in order to promote its use of the phonograph for collecting folklore and music (letter 31.10.1908). E. Wolter presented a paper on using the phonograph for recording songs at the 3rd annual conference of the Lithuanian Scientific Society on July 11, 1909, and he also demonstrated the recording technique (Archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, fund F 22, file 2, p. 63). Unfortunately, there are no further details about this report.

E. Wolter sent his first set of 6 recordings to Berlin on August 20, 1908 (letter 23.08.1908). The return of the copies to E. Wolter is mentioned by Otto Abraham in his entry in Hornbostel's notebook (p. 24, undated, appearing between notes from October 17, 1908 and February 13, 1909): Dr. Wolter in St. Petersburg was sent 6 Lithuanian phonograms,

each in two copies, and, following his wish (letter 31.10.1908), some samples of music from Asia (peoples of Siam, Japan, India and Java — 6 cylinders). In E. Wolter's draft inventory list of phonograms, these Asian cylinders are mentioned in November 1908 (St. Petersburg branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences, fund 178, inventory 1, file 45, p. 17, 18), 4 of them were reflected later in the list of holdings of the Leningrad Phonogram Archive (Magid 1936: 424), they are preserved to the present day. E. Wolter was not satisfied with the quality of the first 6 Lithuanian copies, which were uneven ("nicht glatt un gleichmäßig genug hergestellt sind"), and asked to be sent at least one galvano (letter 26.04.1909). More information about the copying of materials for E. Wolter can probably be found among payment bills in the Berlin Phonogram Archive.

In 1908–1909 E. Wolter sent to Berlin not only Lithuanian, but also Ukrainian (recorded by A. I. Zachinyayev), Bulgarian and Serbian recordings. For identifying the recordings, each galvano is marked on the inner end with a short signature indicating people recorded, the collector and ordinal number: LI W 1–6 or LI WO 7–20 or LIT W 21–69 or LIT WO 70–99 (= Litauen Wolter), KLR WO I–IX (= Kleinrussen Wolter), BULG W 1–5 (= Bulgaren Wolter), SERB W 1–4 (= Serben Wolter). These signatures also left impressions on the heads of the wax copies, which is the most reliable information for their identification, because the inventories were rewritten and renumbered several times and the cases were sometimes mixed up.

According to the inventories of the Berlin Phonogram Archive, by the end of July 1910 E. Wolter's collection already looked the same as preserved till now:

|            | Quantity | Galvanos |
|------------|----------|----------|
| Lithuanian | 99       | 99       |
| Ukrainian  | 9        | 9        |
| Bulgarian  | 5        | 5        |
| Serbian    | 4        | 4        |

In a draft version of the inventory, the quantity of Lithuanian recordings and galvanos was indicated as 107 (with a question mark) / 55.

Thus, the opinion that the St. Petersburg copies were ordered only in the early 1930's by the head of the Archive E. Gippius (A. Kastrov and Ju. Marchenko, who are currently in charge of the Archive, personal communication) appears not to be correct. These copies should in no sense be considered secondary material of little importance. After the destruction of the originals while producing the galvanos, these copies are the main source of information for playback. That is why in transferring the phonograms to Digital Audio Tape in the Berlin Phonogram Archive, both old and newly made wax copies from the galvanos are evaluated and sometimes both digitized (Koch, Wiedmann, Ziegler 2004: 229–230). Old copies sometimes preserve sound better than newly made ones from original galvanos, which can be deformed, scratched or otherwise harmed by time. E. Wolter's collection in Berlin has now already been copied to Digital Audio Tapes. The Vilnius holdings have also been transcribed into digital format. The St. Petersburg materials are the last to be digitized. The digitization will preserve their content and make it possible to compare them with those already accessible in digital format in Berlin and Vilnius. Digitization and evaluation of all material is necessary before choosing the best source for publication.

The Berlin Phonogram Archive currently stores not only the galvanos of E. Wolter's Lithuanian collection (all 99), but old copies as well (76). Other collections are also safely preserved: Ukrainian (9 galvanos and 9 old copies), Bulgarian (5 galvanos and 4 old copies) and Serbian (4 galvanos and 3 old copies)<sup>1</sup>.

It is not yet clear whether E. Wolter received entire sets of copies. The galvanos remained the property of the Berlin Phonogram Archive, usually together with the original cases of the cylinders bearing important inscriptions concerning the date and place of the recording, title of the song and name of the performer. Copies were mostly returned in new cases, sometimes bearing the logo of the *Presto* company. The copies were made of black or very dark brown wax, whereas the original cylinders were light brown.

Only a part of the recordings (56 cylinders) was registered in the first comprehensive list of phonographic funds in Leningrad (Magid 1936: 424), 54 of them have been preserved to

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<sup>1</sup> It is impossible not to mention the dramatic history of the Berlin Archive. According to S. Ziegler "In 1944, a large proportion (90 %) [of the Archive] was evacuated to mines in Silesia and later taken to Leningrad... At the end of the 1950s, the holdings were handed over to authorities in East Berlin, partly exchanged with the West, but later put under seal... After the reunification of East and West Germany, the historical collections were returned to the Museum für Völkerkunde in 1991. A review of the number and status of the cylinders in 1993, showed that about 95 % of the wax cylinder collections of the former Phonogramm-Archiv survived" (Koch, Wiedmann, Ziegler 2004: 228–229).

the present day. E. Wolter's other collections are likewise incomplete: Ukrainian had only 1 copy, which is now missing, Bulgarian comprises 6 cylinders (two of them are identical copies) and Serbian has 4 cylinders (Magid indicates only 3). It is interesting to mention that the cylinder marked *LI WO 12* in the St. Petersburg collection is different from the others: the signature is not an impression of the galvano kept in Berlin, it is scratched on the top and on the side of the cylinder; the color of the cylinder is also different. This copy was obviously made by some other technique; the corresponding copy in Berlin is an ordinary molding of the galvano.

The metadata of the collection in St. Petersburg is extremely poor. The cylinders were placed in new cases bearing no information about the content. The lids with the signatures (*LIT WO 80*, *BULG W 5* and others) originating from Berlin can be found among the holdings of the Phonogram Archive, however they are now placed on improper cases. One should check the entire funds to find out if there happens to be any lids corresponding to the missing cylinders, or to be sure that no original cases with authentic inscriptions by E. Wolter are preserved in the Archive.

E. Wolter's recordings are registered in an inventory book indicating the content very generally: "a song", "a dance tune", "vernacular" and so on (Inventory book nr. 11: Lithuanian 4856–4910; Ukrainian — only an obsolete signature P-324, cylinder is missing now; Bulgarian 4925–4930; Serbian 4921–4924). In addition, there are registration cards placed inside every cylinder. According to the printed titles ("Фоноархив Г. И. И. И.") the cards date back to the Phonoarchive of the State Institute of History of Arts (1926–1931). These printed titles are crossed out and corrected to "ИАЭ АН" (Institute of Archeology and Ethnography, Academy of Sciences), whose folklore section has accumulated the sound recordings since 1931. There is only slightly more information on the cards (sometimes a male or female voice or the instrument is indicated). It is obvious that the descriptions were made without access to the metainformation written down by E. Wolter (St. Petersburg branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences, fund 178, inventory 1, file 45).

Among the 30-cylinders of E. Wolter in the Archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius (the attribution of 4 more cylinders to E. Wolter or J. Basanavičius is still uncertain) there are 10 (perhaps 14) original recordings on brown cylinders and 20 black copies from Berlin (4 of these are duplicates, so the number of different copies is 16). Some 3 of the original recordings are similar to those stored in Berlin: E. Wolter seems to have repeatedly recorded certain compositions, perhaps because of some

technical problems or mistakes made by singers or musicians. The other 7 (or up to 11) original recordings do not appear to have analogues in the Berlin collection. They were recorded during the same expeditions, but for unknown reasons E. Wolter did not send them to Berlin to make copies. The quality of singing or recording does not seem to be the reason.

Several of E. Wolter's recordings have been recently published in a book with a CD by A. Nakienė and R. Žarskienė (2007). Unfortunately, the authors erroneously ascribed some of E. Wolter's recordings (nr. 6, 7, 16) to J. Basanavičius, thus the information about the composition of the collection provided in the book (Nakienė, Žarskienė 2007: 17) is not correct. The quality of some of the recordings is rather poor, and they were not considered worth publishing. However, almost all the phonographic holdings of the Institute — 105 of 117 cylinders — are now digitized (except for broken cylinders or those not technically suitable for digitizing) and accessible in the Archive (Nakienė, Žarskienė 2007: 13, 24 = 38, 49–50). S. Ziegler's claim that a (full) set of copies is kept at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius (Ziegler 2006: 317) is mistaken.

According to the protocols of the Lithuanian Scientific Society, E. Wolter donated 50 phonograms to it in June 1910 and 25 more in June 1911 (Archive of the Institute of the Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, funds F 22, file 2, p. 144, 236). There is no further precise information about them and the greater part of these donations seems to have been lost. Linguists are very interested in E. Wolter's recordings of Lithuanians in Eastern Latvia (Ciskodas/Ciskādi) in October 1911, which cannot be found.

A comprehensive catalogue of E. Wolter's phonographic collection should include all the metadata accumulated about each recording. Such a catalogue should be supplied with a deeper insight into E. Wolter's biography of this period. It is important to trace the time and routes of E. Wolter's expeditions on the basis of his letters, reports, notebooks and metadata of the recordings. Some draft inventory lists with information about the phonograms and several notebooks from the expeditions are preserved in the E. Wolter funds in the St. Petersburg branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences (funds 178, inventory 1, files 45, 38, 192 and others). These materials, together with E. Wolter's handwritten documentation and correspondence, kept in the Berlin Phonogram Archive, are the key to investigating the history and content of the collection, as well as how it made its way to Berlin (cf. Ziegler 2000: 34–35). Inscriptions on the old cylinder cases are another important source. Some information can be extracted from the old inventory lists of the

Archive holdings, especially when a case has been lost or the text on it has become unreadable.

Due to the quite illegible handwriting of E. Wolter, especially for those not familiar with Lithuanian, a fair number of mistakes appeared in the transcription of Lithuanian words in the inventory lists and later made their way into the printed catalogue (Ziegler 2006: CD, p. 923–926). But more essential are some discrepancies revealed between the information given in the catalogue and the contents of a recording (e. g. according to the catalogue (Ziegler 2006: CD, p. 923) the cylinder marked *LI W 1* should contain a song *Dei stovėjo berželis šali kelio*, but it contains *Žalias žalinėli, žalias diemedėli* which is marked *LI W 2* in the catalogue). Thus, analyzing written materials is not enough for achieving a reliable description, — listening to all the recordings is also necessary.

A detailed description of E. Wolter's phonographic collection will be the basis for preparing a publication of the recordings with a full transcription of text and music.

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