An overview of Uralic materials from Russia and Siberia in Finland

Maire Aho
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Archaeological and linguistic research carried out by Finns in Russia began in 1847, when M. A. Castren was sent to Siberia by the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences. Castren’s interpretation of the original home region of the Uralic peoples in the Altai Mountains served as a starting point for later research.

During about 150 years of research considerable amount of materials from Russia has ended up to Finland. Part of them was gathered by Finnish researchers, some bought from Russian collectors and some were donated.

1. Archaeological materials

During 1856-1931 over 20 000 antiquities from Russia were received in Finland. For instance The Russian Archaeological Commission donated materials as well as private persons like F. R. Martin and F. A. Teplouhov. Large collection was bought from M. S. Znamenskij’s heirs. Znamenskij was artist and active in preservation of local Siberian arts and crafts. During his travels in Siberia he made plenty of sketches.

Acquiring archaeological items to Finland began from the governments of Novgorod and Tver, later Siberia and Turkestan came along.

Dr. Timo Salminen has dealt with the antiquities from Russia in his dissertation (publ.2003) Lands of conquest: Russia and Siberia in Finnish archaeology 1870-1935.

2. Ethnographical materials

There are over 16 000 items in the collections of the Museum of Cultures which represent the Uralic peoples and there cultures. Most of them were acquired during the years 1856-1927, when Finnish expedi-
tions of ethnographers, folklorists and linguists carried out their field work. The series Travaux ethno-
graphiques de la Société Finno-Ougrienne is based on these materials.

The contemporary ethnographical collections have been collected mainly from Volga-Kama region
after 1981. The preferable acquisition way is still field work, when the artefacts can be documented
reliably.

3. Linguistic materials

Researchers like August Ahlqvist, Arvid Genetz and Torsten Aminoff collected valuable materials,
but it became soon clear that many villages and riversides were still to be studied. So Otto Donner started
organizing a Society for that work. In the years 1883-1914 the Finno-Ugrian Society could fund several
expeditions. The First World War closed down this activity.

What were the results: Finno-Ugrian Society holds now a remarkable archive of manuscripts as result
of these expeditions, that means linguistic materials — vocabularies and texts with grammatical notes. On
the base of these collections the Society has published several dictionaries in the series Lexica Societatis
Finno-Ugricae. Most remarkable texts have been published as well and with comments, basically in Mém-
oires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne.


4. Photo archive

The photo archive on Uralic peoples at the Finnish National Board of Antiquities has been collected
since 1877. From the period before that time there are occasional drawings. For instance Agathon Rein-
holm sketched and painted pictures of Mordvinians, Mari and Udmurts. His collection consists of over
300 pictures.

Finnish researchers have carried cameras with them a little over 100 years. U. T. Sirelius took over
300 photos during his travels in Siberia. Finno-Ugrian Society recruited also local people to photograph
their surroundings. One of them was Timofej Jevjejjev. His photo collection as well as ethnographic
materials are under research and publishing.

After 1981 the photo archives have significantly grown thanks to the new expeditions mainly to
Volga region and Siberia.