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An Archive Beyond the Texts:

The Lund University Ecclesiastical History Archive

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After the October Revolution of 1917, St. Catherine's Swedish Church and its clergy in St. Petersburg suffered immensely. This was the first Protestant congregation in Russia to experience having its property confiscated and nationalised by the new authorities. In 1934, the building was desacralised into a Soviet sports school. The vessels were handed over to the Soviet authorities, whereas the archives were transported to the Swedish consulate and, in 1938, illegally sent to Stockholm, later to be deposited in the Swedish National Archive (Sw. Riksarkivet). This removal of the archives represents a fascinating historical act that from a cultural perspective may be compared with the *translation* of holy images, vessels, etcetera. The location and preservation of the archives is a question that became important with regard to the renewed memory of the congregation after 2005, when the church was returned to the re-established congregation. These circumstances bring to the fore the quite obvious but important words of Aleida Assmann, that "the archives is the basis of what can be said in the future about the present when it will have become the past".[1]

Having said that, I have in other contexts stated that an archive is always something beyond the texts. However, below I show that the contents of textual archives could also be a highly concrete bearer of material memory. My example is the Lund University Ecclesiastical History Archive, which

1 Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive", in Astrid Erll & Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies*, Berlin 2008, 102, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262.2.97.

was founded in 1942 at the initiative of Hilding Pleijel (1893–1988), professor of church history at Lund University 1938–1960. He sought to map out and collect information on ecclesiastical customs linked to older times and which were gradually disappearing. This was consciously done to resemble the gathering efforts in folklore research. The work began by interviewing seniors born in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s. A total number of more than 5,500 men and women were interviewed until 1970. Pleijel's initiatives also inspired other institutions to launch similar archives, in particular at the Åbo Academy University in Turku, Finland.

Simultaneously with the studies of older church customs, the archive also started to examine changes in contemporary church customs. The first questionnaire was sent out in 1962 to all parishes belonging to the Church of Sweden. It included questions on old and new customs in relation to ordinary services and at church festivals, but also in relation to different ceremonies such as christenings, confirmations, marriages, and funerals. These questions were often concerned with rituals that included the use of material objects, such as the lighting of candles in churches or on graves, the introduction of statues of the Virgin Mary, and different customs during the liturgical year, such as Christmas cribs and Easter candles. Some distinctly regional customs were found, while some questions concerning more recent customs fairly soon became obsolete; for example, whether there had been any services related to pets during the preceding year. Special questionnaires have also been aimed at the major free churches in Sweden and separate activities, such as the special services before the beginning of the annual judicial court sessions. Today, the archive contains thirty different surveys on ecclesiastical customs, the latest focusing on St. Lucia customs and this time answered by the local organists.

It could be valuable to present an example from one of these later surveys. Questionnaire No. 26, carried out in 2006, was created to highlight changes in communion traditions in the Church of Sweden. One of the questions put to the parishes concerned whether certain vessels or furniture were present in the church, followed by how often they were used during communion. The questions concerned a communion rail, separate cushions for kneeling, individual chalices, a separate chalice for intinction, bells, tabernacle, etcetera.

A consecration bell was present but never used in thirty-three cases. In fact, it was only used regularly in five cases. The communion rail was always or almost always used in 200 parishes, while twenty-five used it only in special masses. Twenty-six replies stated that it was only used on rare occasions, and two that they never used it. I would guess that a standing communion

is more frequent today. No one has studied standing communion as a less material or less physical liturgical practice compared to kneeling at the rail. One could imagine that a post-pandemic questionnaire on issues concerning communion would present a slightly different result when it comes to material objects and practices, such as the use of individual chalices.

A tabernacle was always or almost always used in eighteen parishes. As one might expect, fifty-five replies stated that they had individual chalices but never used them. The use of intinction seems to have replaced the separate chalices in nursing homes but also in ordinary church services. Another question concerned non-alcoholic wine. Here, twelve parishes answered: "Yes, but only at special services or special groups of communicants", while eleven answered "[a]lways".

Still, the most thorough collection of replies included in the archive consists of the first questionnaire, which is why I focus on this in the following.

To understand Professor Pleijel's construction of the questionnaire, we must relate to his contemporary position in research, in this field mainly found between two distinct poles. On the one hand, the prospering Lundensian Luther research, carried out in the field of systematic theology and ethics by theologians such as Anders Nygren (1890–1978) and Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977), focused on the concept of motif research, seeking to find the essence of Christian faith in the doctrines and teachings of Christian theology. On the other hand, there was humanistic folklore research, with an emphasis on popular notions of elves and trolls, things that the theologians rejected as vernacular and nothing but popular superstition.

In opposition to these scholarly trends, Pleijel wanted to study popular Christian beliefs and customs among ordinary people in older times. This could not be deducted from the systematic research on doctrines and prescriptive theology, nor could it be found in the results of questionnaires concerning supernatural events, ghosts, and notions of various natural beings. Thus, he started compiling his own questionnaires and creating his own archive. This was long before the term lived religion was coined.

Most of the interviews were carried out by students as an alternative to writing a thesis. Some of them were able to inspire their informants to expand on their stories and go into more detail, while others exhibited a stricter attitude, which obviously limited the informants. These efforts were initially looked upon with disbelief and some contempt among Pleijel's colleagues, who found the tales of old men and women to be beneath their dignity. They also justified their criticism by being sceptical of the method used. Contrary to the study of conventional archival material, such as the

minutes from church synods, cathedral chapters, and various committees, the interview material seemed to be lacking in terms of both clarity and consistency The replies varied from being greatly restricted by the interview guide to long stories heavily influenced by the informants.

What was meant by ecclesiastical custom (Sw. *kyrklig sed*)? Pleijel's use of this term was consciously broad, or perhaps limitless. A positive outcome of this possible lack of methodical strictness was that the informants were not controlled or limited to give the "right" answers. A couple of questions used a terminology that was only understandable in the traditions of Pleijel's own childhood in the Diocese of Växjö, but most of the questions were formulated in a consciously open way to include customs hitherto unknown even to the professor.

What did Professor Pleijel ask?

Almost all questions opened up for material perspectives, while some of them were directly formulated to capture a rich world of things. The very first question concerns which collections of sermons (Sw. *postillor*) and other devotional books were read by "the old ones". Normally, we might not view religious books as the most material of things, but based on the interviews, it is clear that these devotional books were not only read for their spiritual contents but also kept and regarded as bearers of holiness in the household. A key point of interest is obviously which books were read and which clergymen had recommended, sold, or distributed them free of charge. Still, the material nature is nevertheless obvious.

The second question asks for detailed information on how Christmas, New Year, and other festival days were celebrated in the household. The answers could include almost anything from food and drink to which prayers were said, which hymns were sung, and which services at church were attended.

The third question concerns household devotion: What was read, what was sung, which special customs were observed? Did they kneel, say silent prayers? For example, singing hymns is something quite material, insofar that sound may be regarded as material. The combination of hymns with other material elements is also noted in questions such as: Were hymns sung during the meals at a party? In older theology research, hymns have almost without exception been studied exclusively as texts, often combined with a long historical investigation into the author's personal and theological history but without being interested in their practical or material context; that is, how and where they were sung, by whom, and accompanied by which musical instruments. Hymns cannot be understood – neither historically nor as an expression of religion – without the musical dimension. Furthermore,

to understand the nature of a Christian hymn, you have to sing it yourself, not only listen to a recorded version.

The fourth question in the questionnaire concerns funerals and acts of mourning: who was reading when the coffin was carried out, which hymns were sung, etcetera, but also whether the closest mourners sat down during the Sunday service when the rest of the congregation stood up. And, obviously, whether ceremonial rods were used.

The seventh question concerns musical instruments. In the archive, Pleijel included a couple of musical instruments; for example, the psalmodicon, a single-stringed instrument developed in Scandinavia for simplifying music in churches and in schools, thus offering an alternative to the violin for sacred music. It was adopted in many rural churches from the early nineteenth century and onwards. Since the psalmodicon was inexpensive to build, and since it was not used for dancing and could be played by people with little musical training, it was used both in churches and at home. Two psalmodicons were included in the archive. They cannot be used today but are still very decorative.

The eighth question concerns the communion of the sick with an explicit question regarding which names were given to the holy vessels, whereas the twelfth question concerns the variation in dress on special holidays.

The seventeenth question, on the churching of mothers, mixes doctrinal, practical, and material aspects, such as what was the meaning of this rite. Was it purification, thanksgiving, or simply a custom devoid of any meaning? Where was this rite performed? By the church door? In the aisle? By the altar? Was the mother accompanied by a woman? And did she bring candy for her neighbours in the pew? Here, I believe that Pleijel managed to get a rather complete picture of the rite. The intention was obviously not so much about uncovering the material aspects of the rite as such, but to describe regional variations in how this rite was performed. In doing so, however, the material dimensions were presented in detail. The answers to this question were later used by Swedish ethnologist Anders Gustavsson in his dissertation on the churching custom in Sweden.[2]

However, the link between ecclesiastical law and the material dimensions of the churching practise was not established by Pleijel or by Gustavsson. It was not until the 1997 dissertation by historian Marie Lindstedt Cronberg on unmarried mothers in the Swedish countryside during the period 1680–1880 that it became clear that married mothers eagerly wanted to maintain the separate churching rituals for married and unmarried mothers, respec-

2 Anders Gustavsson, *Kyrktagningsseden i Sverige,* Lund 1972.

tively.[3] This was definitely a material matter since the stigmatised situation of the unmarried mother was clearly indicated, not only in different words, but also by their place in the church. This example shows how a focus on oral history does not reveal the entire ecclesiastical landscape. It needs to be combined with traditional historical and theological analysis. However, the rivalry between Pleijel and Sven Kjöllerström, a professor of practical theology with ecclesiastical law as one of his specialities, meant that such a combination or cooperation was impossible. Kjöllerström was the most eager colleague to express his despise of the popular, oral tradition.

Question number nineteen asks whether weddings took place at church, in homes, or in the rectory, while the twentieth question concerns the order of pews in church: Did the parishioners change pews? How often? On which Sunday? For how long was the custom of a female and a male side in the church maintained?

By now, it seems to be quite clear that the main focus in the questionnaire was not on the material objects as such, but rather on their use, the ways in which they intersected with the liturgical year, expressions of gender identities, and what they can tell us about the roles of the laymen and of household devotions.

Gender dimensions sometimes constitute the main aspect of the questions; for example, in questions numbers twenty-two and twenty-three: Did the men tip their hats and did the women curtsy when the church bells started to ring? Always or only at the beginning of the main service? And how did the death bell differ for a man, a woman, and a child?

Here, we may note that a material perspective is almost entirely lacking. There is no question concerning fees for ringing or for funeral sermons. Likewise, there are no questions mentioning the material offerings to the clergy. Pleijel's position towards gender perspectives could be described as rooted in a kind of source positivism. This means that when the sources directly reveal gender differences or a gender order, he is eager to analyse this. This is the case already in his 1925 dissertation on Moravianism in Southern Sweden. On the other hand, he was not concerned with the role of women as translators of devotional literature or as donors to churches. Nor did he note the pivotal role played by women in educating children during the absence of their fathers during the Great Northern War of the 1710s.[4]

A markedly material perspective emerges in question number twenty-seven: Did the minister hold a white cloth in his hand at the altar or in the

3 Marie Lindstedt Cronberg, *Synd och skam: Ogifta mödrar på svensk landsbygd 1680–1880*, Tygelsjö 1997.

4 Anders Jarlert, "Hilding Pleijels 'genusperspektiv'", *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 2016, 124–131.

pulpit? In his right or left hand? What was this cloth called? What was the name of the clergyman?

To understand the answers to this question, we need to localise them. This does not concern what was done or observed by someone else, in another parish or at another time. The answers should be located as exactly as possible in space and time. This question was often answered extensively by the informants. The reason for this was the discontinuation of this custom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was the reason for various speculations in popular tradition as to the reasons why a certain young clergyman did not use the cloth. Was it because of his youth? Was he not fully trained or licensed? Or, more often, had he lost the right to use this item because of some crime, often a sexual offence? This served as an imagined parallel to the unfrocking of severely criminal clergymen. Or did the absence of the cloth in fact mean that this young clergyman had not yet committed any crimes at all? Pleijel wrote a short but thorough study on the liturgical uses of this piece of cloth in which he emphasised that it was not identical to the Medieval *manipulum* but was rather part of the private clerical dress.[5] It is one of the very small number of studies he himself concluded using the material of his questionnaires. This remains somewhat of an enigma since we would expect that he would have been very interested in the differences between the dioceses, as well as differences within minor regions.

A few questions are very open to detailed storytelling, such as number thirty-one concerning the confirmation period. Informants were asked about the children's teachers, the length of the teaching period, which books were used, what the confirmands were supposed to learn by heart, but also how they were dressed for their confirmation, if they were invited into the rectory for food, or even if they were supposed to bring any food themselves. The question on dress has been important for determining the point in time when girls started to dress in white instead of the old black festive dress.

Answers could be very informative with regard to the ministry of individual clergymen. I have elsewhere compared some of these stories concerning certain clergymen to official sources and found that they are often in agreement. In other cases, it could perhaps be said that there is no smoke without fire. There are also obvious exceptions. A free church informant might have heard that a famous high church minister organised private communion services for his followers at home, something that could not

5 Hilding Pleijel, *Det liturgiska handklädet: Dess innebörd i folktraditionen och i verkligheten*, Lund 1948.

have occurred, even though it tells us something about other appreciated pastors in the informant's own environment.

On a general level, the interviews had not been used for pastoral biographies until I started doing so a decade ago. In these efforts, the interviews represent a useful complement to the official sources as emotional experiences are included in a way that is seldom the case in public documents from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The ways in which I use these interviews have been observed and even praised in the academic world. Common academic attitudes have obviously changed since Professor Pleijel launched the archive.

Professor Pleijel's concept to a large extent concerned lived religion. His argument was that religion is not a system of thoughts, not only a collection of texts but everyday practises (that is, lived religion). Even though his purpose was to map out and describe popular religion as such, the results often also included new findings in the world of material religion. This inspired Pleijel to research other material customs not revealed by the interviews. As an example, we might mention his study of the Reformation custom to carry the baptismal child "under the read"; that is, under the read gospel where the prayer book is shown to be viewed as a concentration of holiness that is materialised here rather than in other sacred objects or images.

Another example is the use of metallic tokens for holy communion. Occasional tokens have been found in both Sweden and Finland. They were probably given to the communicants after the examinations in the catechism and delivered as a sign of their proper knowledge before communion. According to other sources, they represent a receipt for having paid fees to the church for wafers and wine. In any case, these tokens were discussed, prohibited in the country churches, but still in use in the cities in the 1720s. According to popular discourses, they could be understood as tokens of worthiness or even as payment for the remission of sins. Comparisons with other European settings, mostly in the Reformed churches, have not solved this interesting riddle. This is a case in which a material item evidently has much to tell us about popular practices and discourses. But what is its meaning?

Today, an archival institution such as the Ecclesiastical History Archive at Lund University may also be useful in a political/cultural situation in which religion is often defined as something exclusively spiritual or internal. In the secularised Protestant opinion, so widespread among politicians and so-called cultural figures, religion seems to have nothing to do with the material world. They view it as an exclusively private and invisible entity. This obviously means neglecting tradition, memory, and knowledge. One

of Hilding Pleijel's intentions with the archive was to maintain and explore religious memory, a memory of both intellectual and material religion, and thus to maintain religious memory as a continuing flow into the future. ▲

SUMMARY

This article explores the nature of the archive as entity that is always beyond the texts. However, this article will show that also the contents of textual archives could be a very concrete bearer of material memory. My example is the Lund University Ecclesiastical History Archive, founded in 1942 by the initiative of Hilding Pleijel (1893–1988), professor in Church History at Lund University 1938–1960. Parallel with the investigations of older church customs the Archive started to examine changes in contemporary church customs. Today, an archive may also be useful in a political situation when religion often is being defined as something only spiritual or internal. This is, of course, a neglection of both tradition, memory, and knowledge. One of Hilding Pleijel's intentions with the Archive was to maintain and explore religious memory, a memory of both intellectual and material religion, and thus to maintain religious memory as a continuing flow into the future.