Sound, ink, bytes. Geographical information through the centuries

In the 1740s, Major Peter Schnitler was appointed by the Danish government to explore the border area between the middle and northern parts of Norway and Sweden/Finland. Significant parts of the text in the manuscript that he handed over to the Danish government consist of transcripts of local court interviews carried out by Schnitler in order to gather information about the local population as well as their view of the border areas. The material includes information directly relevant to the border question, as well as general information about the areas in question. The text collection corresponds to similar material collected through work carried out in Europe at the time. (Burke 2000, pp. 128 f.)

We have no direct access to the court interviews, as the sound of the words disappeared the moment they were spoken. What we do have is written evidence of the events. This written set of evidence has gone through a long history of handwritten manuscripts, printed books, digitisation, SGML/XML encoding, and finally import into a computer based system assisting the analysis of the texts (Eide 1998).

In addition to this, the texts in the Schnitler protocols themselves also have an internal history of information aggregation, performed by Schnitler and his assistants. This internal history consists of the following main steps:

1. Data collection. The court interviews were written down, and older written evidence was collected.

2. Aggregation. Based on the interviews, together with other sources of information including his own observations, Schnitler described larger areas.

3. Maps. Schnitler drew maps of large areas to indicate where the border should be located based on his sources.

In the paper, these two text histories are analysed and compared. The relations between the different documents, oral, written, and digital, are examined in order to get a better understanding of the stylistic and content changes that were likely to be introduced through each of the transformations.

Works cited

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