

FROM WAX-CYLINDER PHONOGRAPH TO LASER-BEAM OPTICAL PLAYERS (1):  
“SLAVIC-LANGUAGE” RECORDINGS IN BRONISŁAW PIŁSUDSKI’S  
PHONOGRAPHIC COLLECTION OF AINU FOLKLORE

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Bronisław Piłsudski (1866-1918), Marshal Józef Piłsudski’s brother elder by one year who, sentenced to death penalty replaced by fifteen years of hard labor (*katorga*) and exile on the island of Sakhalin for a dubious involvement in an attempt at the life of Russia’s tsar Alexander the Third, studied extensively the Gilyaks, today referred to as Nivkh or, better, Nivhgu, but also other aboriginal peoples of Sakhalin and the Lower Amur (*Priamurye*) Region – the Uilta (Oroks), Ulcha (Manguns), Nanai (Golds), but above all the Sakhalin and Hokkaido Ainu.

He managed to collect enormously rich material concerning the languages and cultures of these peoples, now extinct or drastically acculturated and on the verge of extinction, material surpassed by none, although he himself did manage during his life to publish only a fraction of what he had collected in a number of articles and reports scattered through various local journals and newspapers now hardly accessible and even traceable, in languages ranging from Japanese (his *first* work *ever* concerning the Ainu to appear in print was one of 1906 in Japanese), through Russian and Polish, to French, English, and German. He used to write a number of articles on one subject and publish them in different versions and languages, providing in one version often information in part complementary to other versions. This part of his legacy, compiled from all the source texts available, constitutes the bulk of CWBP 1, published only in 1998.

His greatest achievement during his life time, however, was his immortal book of 1912, the famous *Materials for the study of the Ainu language and folklore*, containing only a fraction of the Ainu texts he had collected (27 out of, as we know today, at least 452) and republished with a reconstructed missing dictionary-index as CWBP 2 also in 1998. It was only very recently that his detailed plans of the publication of his remaining

Ainu materials have become known<sup>1</sup>, and CWBP 3, due to appear in press in 2002, is the first step in the posthumous execution of these plans.

It has been long known from the texts written by Piłsudski himself that he had collected much more abundant material and it was also known, at least partially, what kind of material he had collected, but for decades it was patent to specialists in respective fields and virtually to anyone interested in Bronisław Piłsudski's biography that his entire unpublished archives did not survive the turmoil of the two World Wars and should thus be considered lost forever.

The recovery in 1976 in Poznań – in fact, for the fourth time<sup>2</sup> – of phonographic wax-cylinder records of Ainu folklore taken by Piłsudski on Sakhalin and Hokkaido in 1902-1903, however, and following it a combined effort of numerous scholars from various countries associated to a varying degree under the ICRAP Project label (see CWBP 1, 1ff., 8ff.), or only extending an assisting hand to it, led to the recovery of a considerable amount of material considered lost or completely unknown, and recent recoveries allow optimistic prospects of possible further recoveries<sup>3</sup>.

Piłsudski started recording the sound of the Ainu language with an Edison-system record-playback phonograph machine in 1902, shortly after arriving for his second time in Sakhalin from Vladivostok, sent there officially on an expedition by the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg<sup>4</sup> and the first portion of approximately thirty recorded cylinders was dispatched by him to St. Petersburg end October 1902<sup>5</sup>.

He must have taken the phonograph with him to Hokkaido during his expedition there with Waclaw Sieroszewski, and although Sieroszewski portrayed Piłsudski recording Ainu texts with a pencil rather than a phonograph<sup>6</sup>, documents have been preserved issued by the Japanese Consulate in Korsakov officially permitting Piłsudski to go to Japan and to take the recording machine with him<sup>7</sup>, and the fact is that some pieces recorded have been recognized as unquestionably belonging to Hokkaido Ainu folklore.

Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) constructed his voice-recording machine in 1877 and, as Toshimitsu Asakura under whose supervision the technological reconstruction of Piłsudski's cylinder records has been made and Jun Uozumi write, "after 10 years' improvement, the phonograph, based on wax cylinders, became very popular. These wax cylinder phonographs were distributed all over the world for about 40 years from 1887 to 1932. In the United States, wax cylinder phonographs were used mainly for the

1 From Piłsudski's undated (but written shortly before the Easter of 1913, i.e. April 13) letter sent from Lausanne to Jan Rozwadowski, in fact co-author of Piłsudski's *Materials...* of 1912. Mr. Jan Staszel from the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters (PAU) and Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) who discovered the letter is duly credited with giving access to it.

2 Cf. CWBP 3, III/2.

3 The materials discovered and those yet to be hopefully discovered will constitute further consecutive volumes of CWBP (4, 5, 6, and 7 are planned now).

4 For Piłsudski's own reports from the expedition see CWBP 1, 192-221 and CWBP 3.

5 Cf. CWBP 1, 185, 193, 195, and chronology in CWBP 3.

6 See Waclaw Sieroszewski's account *Wśród kosmatych ludzi* or its English translation in CWBP 3.

7 See Photo 1.

purpose of amusement. In Europe, on the other hand, these phonographs were used for recording not only the voices of famous people but also well-known music and songs. In addition, the phonographs were used for the academic purpose of recording the various languages of especially minority races"<sup>8</sup>.

Bronisław Piłsudski was the first Pole to use the phonograph for ethnolinguistic purposes. Returning from his involuntary stay in the Far East to the Polish soil about the end of October<sup>9</sup> 1906, he brought with him to Cracow a collection of records of approximately 100 cylinders<sup>10</sup>.

Soon after his arrival, he settled in Bystre, today a quarter of Zakopane, a town in the Tatra Mountains in southern Poland, and became very actively engaged in the successful establishment of an Ethnographic Section of the Tatra Society and in the organization of an ethnographic exhibition in the Tatra Museum there. He convincingly demonstrated the advantages and usefulness of the phonograph in ethnographic, linguistic, and regional studies to the longtime director of the Museum, Juliusz Zborowski<sup>11</sup>, and both became ardent advocates of phonography. They failed to convince the Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters to purchase a phonograph, but Zborowski bought himself one from his own savings and one hundred cylinders, on which several hundred tunes of Tatra highlanders' folk music and samples of their unique dialect were recorded. After World War I, these recordings were written down in musical notation by Adolf Chybiński (1880-1952, a prominent Polish musicologist and specialist on the music and musical instruments of Polish Tatra highlanders and on old Polish music, who since 1914 cooperated with the Tatra Museum in Zakopane) and in this form used by the outstanding composer Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) in composing the music for his *Harnasie* ballet ('the highland robbers', 1933, first staged in its entirety in Prague in 1935, followed by performances in Paris in 1936, and Poznań in 1938).

The "fourth rediscovery" of Piłsudski's records is associated with the publication, for the first time, of a detailed description of the collection in 1977 and following it the establishment in 1983 of the international ICRAP<sup>12</sup> Project aiming at the reconstruction of the contents of the cylinders and leading directly to the publication of *The Collected Works of Bronisław Piłsudski* (CWBP)..

8 Uozumi-Asakura 1999:410. In the USA phonograph was used for such recordings also quite early, and e.g. Passamaquoddy lore was recorded with this method prior to 1890, and recordings of Navajo songs soon followed.

9 Ciesielska (1994:35-36), on the basis of her analysis of Piłsudski's letters to the Japanese writer Futabatei Shimei (see CWBP 1, 30ff.), established his arrival on Polish soil on "approximately October 21, 1906".

10 Thus Sieroszewski 1914-1921:xvi; cf. also CWBP 1, 703 note 107, also 185, 217.

11 Juliusz Zborowski (1888-1965), longtime director of the Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum named after Dr. T. Chałubiński, the "discoverer" of Zakopane as a spa and as a Mecca for Polish (and not only Polish) intellectuals for several decades at the turn of the 20th century. Zborowski very highly evaluated Bronisław Piłsudski's activities in Zakopane and in the Tatra Museum in an extensive 80-page article published posthumously under a very misleading title (Zborowski 1976).

12 Acronym for "International Committee for the Restoration and Assessment of B. Piłsudski's Work".

The description of the collection itself was based on notes made hastily during a short superficial inspection of each cylinder individually and taken to Japan without any intention to publish them. It was under the persuasion of Shichirō Murayama<sup>13</sup>, that they were shaped into a short article for an academic journal<sup>14</sup> and a newspaper article<sup>15</sup> which succeeded in attracting the interest of the Japanese in undertaking a technological attempt at checking what Piłsudski had actually recorded on his cylinders. Thus, the ICRAP project originated with the following three aims specified:

recovering the contents of the cylinders,  
organizing an international conference on the results of the recovery attempts,  
publishing the *Collected Works of Bronisław Piłsudski*.

To be sure: the recovery of the contents recorded on the cylinders was of prime importance and the two remaining points were added bluntly for mercenary purposes as the prognosis of success in the recovery of the contents of the records was estimated at 2% only<sup>16</sup>.

For technological assistance and cooperation the ICRAP turned to the Research Institute of Applied Electricity (*Ōyō denki kenkyūjo*) of Hokkaido University, which headed by Toshimitsu Asakura started the process of recovery of the contents of the recordings immediately after they had successfully been transported to Japan<sup>17</sup> reaching Hokkaido University on July 4, 1983.

The collection had diminished by that time to 65 cylinders and was generally in the state of preservation described as “decidedly bad”.

The final result of the reproduction process has been released on four cassette tapes and altogether 79 items have been positively identified from the cylinder recordings,

13 Shichirō Murayama (1908-1995) was one of the probably three best linguists of Japan; well trained in the methodology of historical linguistics (a rather rare occurrence in Japan) in Germany, he was in the first place interested in the problem of the origin of the Japanese language, one of the hottest issues of research in the humanities in Japan, and therefore he studied extensively also the Ainu language, especially its older records, among them the records of the northernmost Ainu dialect of the Shumshu island in the Kurile Archipelago written down by Benedykt Dybowski in Kamchatka and published by Ignacy Radliński in 1892, which made the core of his 1971 monograph of the “northern Kurile Ainu language”. He later published numerous works concerning the Ainu language (cf. CWBP 1, 82, and bibliographies in CWBP 3), and his historical inquiries in Ainu should be ranked among the most competent ever made.

14 Majewicz 1977, with a tremendous abundance of misprints, reprinted several times with all the misprints retained.

15 *Mainichi Shimbun*, yūkan (evening edition), of Feb 23, 1977, the material entitled “Pōrandono Ainu kenkyū, Karafuto chōsa-nado furui rekishi” (Polish studies on the Ainu, the old story of Sakhalin data).

16 In view of such a devastating prognosis, the founders of the project wanted to secure any positive result of the then prospective project to increase the chances of the petition for financial support of the proposal. This strategy seemed to have been working as quite impressive support was indeed obtained from IBM-Japan.

17 The temporary export of the collection from Poland to Japan was not easy and typical for any bureaucracy: the authorities kept refusing to assign any financial support for saving “the crap” but at the same time kept effectively preventing “the national treasures” from being expedited abroad.

including 53 items classified as originating from Sakhalin, 19 items originating in Hokkaido, 4 items clearly being Japanese, and 3 items were classified as “Slavic-language materials” (Kato-Kotani 1987:212). Details on the contents of all these items, with lyrics and musical notation as recovered from the recordings as well as details on the very process of recovery have been presented in Japanese in Kato-Kotani 1987 in Japanese, in Ogonowska 1993 in Polish, and are to be presented in English in CWBP 3. The purpose of the present contribution is to inform the potentially interested reader about the contents of the recordings with this strange “Slavic-language” label.

The recordings had been provided consecutive numbers written on the boxes by Piłsudski himself who has later renumbered them several times; at least in several cases additional numbering has been added by other hands. To combat this mess, but incidentally also to increase it, the cylinders have been renumbered again for packing and transportation purposes and again for technological processing, and it is the latter numeration that is currently used as a reference tool in relation to the recordings.

According to this numeration, the “Slavic-language” recordings can be found on cylinders №№ 50, 51, and 62.

Cylinder № 50 contains a 2' 21" long recording of a woman's voice. Its content, very weakly heard, is undoubtedly in Polish, in a Wielkopolska-region dialect; it starts with the words of explanation *u nas po prostymu tak mywiuom...* ‘in our [village] using our simple language we speak thus...’ and then a nostalgic folk song about the Vistula river (*Wisło moja Wisło stara, co tak smutno płyniesz*) follows; the words *...wkoło mnie tak smutno, dawniej śpiewy brzmiały ciągle, dzisiaj [or dziś tu] tak okrutno, dawniej śpiewy brzmiały ciągle, dzisiaj [~ dziś tu] tak okrutno...* are very well heard.

As it turned out by a very close inspection of the boxes in July 1984 in Japan, items then with the numbers 61 and 62 bore, written in pencil and hardly detectable by a naked eye, the names of the Polish villages *Chrzypsko [Wielkie]* and *Pęckowo* from central Wielkopolska (the region with the city of Poznań as its capital); most probably, these boxes or their parts (one had two lids, one forced into the other) did not belong to Piłsudski's original collection and were added much later, perhaps (or rather most probably) after Bronisław Piłsudski's death, and could be related to records of Polish dialects in the Wielkopolska and Pomorze (Pomorania) regions of Poland taken by Kazimierz Nitsch in 1914. Results of those recording sessions with the use of wax cylinders were rated at that time as very insignificant. Three cylinders with such recordings – one from Chrzypsko and two from Pęckowo were preserved in the Phonographic Department of Poznań University in the early 1950s (see Kaczmarek 1953:22).

Thus, cylinder № 50 doubtlessly is one of the three cylinders recorded by Kazimierz Nitsch just mentioned or, more precisely, one of the two recorded in Pęckowo among so-called Wielenian Masur(ian)s (in Polish *Mazurzy wielenscy*, the name coming from the name of the small town Wieleń on the Noteć river, north of Poznań; inhabitants of several forest villages in the region retained in their language features alien to Wielkopolska and characteristic of a majority of other Polish dialects – the so-called *mazurzenie*) and the singer was a young woman named Jakubkowa (cf. Nitsch 1960:147).

From the 2' 44" long recording on cylinder № 51a a woman is heard, pronouncing separate words (like e.g. *uoko* 'eye', *uokno* 'window', *masło* 'butter') then phrases and sentences (like e.g., *przy drodze rosnum rozmaite drzewa* 'various kinds of trees grow along the road') in her dialect. This recording must therefore again be one of the three cylinders with Kazimierz Nitsch's records of Wielkopolska-region dialects, most probably the one from Chrzypsko. Although the state of preservation of the recording as well as the recording itself are very bad (in addition to overwhelming technological noise, unstable cylinder revolutions with many sudden acceleration moments considerably impede perception), the material recorded seems to be in its majority recoverable. Nitsch, nevertheless, evaluated his recordings as well as the method of recording and the very instrument (phonograph) as of little, if any, use for linguistic research (cf. Nitsch 1960:147-148).

The content of cylinder № 62 was perhaps the most astonishing. The 2' 45" long recording contains the part (*aria*) *Non so più* of Cherubino, Graf Almaviva's page, from act one of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Le nozze di Figaro* as sung by "Ms. Ewa Bandrowska" (introduced at the beginning of the recording). Ms. Ewa Bandrowska-Turska (1894-1979) was a Polish soprano singer of international reputation; the year of her birth suggests that if it is to be a recording taken by Bronisław Piłsudski (which is very possible – Miss Bandrowska was from Cracow) then it could be taken only between end 1906 and 1914 when the future primadonna was still a child or a teenager; it cannot be excluded, however, that the recording is of a different provenience that found its way into the collection later and by accident, similarly to the cylinders with records of Polish dialects taken by Nitsch in 1914 – the voice heard is that of a full-fledged artist.

Edison built the prototype of his phonograph on December 6, 1877 and obtained the American patent for it on February 19, 1878; the system based on tin-foil-covered metal cylinders as carriers of the recorded sound. Another system, based on a flat disc was constructed by Emile Berliner who obtained his patent for what he labeled gramophone on May 4, 1887. The latter was designed for playback only. Edison's phonograph was modernized by Alexander Graham Bell, Chichester A. Bell, and Sumner Tainter who filled the cylinder grooves with wax (patented June 27, 1885); this forced Edison to work on improving his recording device, and in 1888 he replaced his foil-covered cylinders with cylinders made of wax which could be reused for recording after grinding down the layer with the previous record. Edison treated his phonograph in the first place as a dictaphone while Berliner and his followers aimed at music and thus entertainment, and it was the latter idea that won for decades to come and developed into a major global industry, but it was Edison who first recorded music played by an artist known by name – the musician was, incidentally, a twelve-year old pianist Józef Hofman (1876-1957) from Poland, later a noted American pianist, composer, music professor, and inventor and constructor (among others, he invented windscreen wipers, car springs, and an electric clock).

As seen from examples presented in this paper, Poles incidentally found themselves very close to man's first experiments with sound recording and preserving and sound reproduction. In view of the pricelessness of his collection of the earliest recordings of

the Ainu language, now extinct, Bronisław Piłsudski's position in this domain is indisputably outstanding. Few people in Poland realize it, and still fewer realize that his position remains to be such also in the context of ultramodern technological developments in sound recording and reproduction, photonics included: to reproduce Piłsudski's wax cylinders, the original Edison-type phonograph was remodelled into a new phonograph device to be used for reproducing wax cylinder recordings with the application of two specially developed methods of reproduction of such materials – the light-stylus method and the laser-beam reflection method.

The device thus modified was first used for the reproduction of wax-cylinder phonographic records with Ainu folklore taken by Bronisław Piłsudski at the beginning of this century but soon the machine proved its usefulness employed for the reproduction of 240 wax cylinders discovered in Ōtani University in Kyoto in 1985; they had been recorded between 1929 and 1935 by Takashi Kitazato (1870-1960), a linguist and Osaka University professor, and contained the speech and songs of representatives of various peoples of Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaya, Singapore, and Indonesia, collected with the purpose of studying the origin of the Japanese language; the collection also included material recorded in Ainu.

The non-contact laser-beam reflection method used for the reproduction of the cylinders that had been rifted, cracked, or broken and underwent repair before rerecording is based in principle on geometrical optics, the device itself already found its place in the archives and museums that store old wax cylinder phonographic records in countries that can afford it.

The successive reproduction of Bronisław Piłsudski's old wax-cylinder phonographic records with the new technological methods of sound reproduction specially developed within the ICRAAP research project for its purposes was an unquestionable achievement as far as the "acoustic-technological aspect" (cf. CWBP 1, 1-2) is concerned. Specialists in various fields confirm, however, that a considerable number of Piłsudski's cylinders have already provided very valuable data for linguists and anthropologists studying the Ainu language and culture and the phenomena of acculturation processes<sup>18</sup>. Thus the ICRAAP project achieved also its other goals as

18 Cf. e.g. Kazuyuki Tanimoto: "The earliest recording of Sakhalin Ainu music known to us before the discovery of the Piłsudski cylinders was [a] wax disc recording made in 1923 by a noted ethnomusicologist, Hisao Tanabe at Shirahama district of Southern Sakhalin. The discovery of [...] inferentially the oldest recordings of Piłsudski, 20 years prior to the Tanabe recordings, is especially important because they constitute unsurpassed points of reference to examine the process of chronological changes in the music of Sakhalin Ainu against existing recordings. Piłsudski recordings are undoubtedly crucial materials in the comparative studies of music of Northern races. For example, a synoptic study with recordings of the music of Siberian races made by Bogoras and Jochelson in 1905, approximate[ly] the period of Piłsudski's [recordings], can be done just to cite one among many possibilities". (Tanimoto, in Asakura et al. 1985:78). Tanimoto (ibid.) expected interesting results from comparisons of materials from recordings taken by Piłsudski in 1902-1903, by Kitazato in 1929-1931, and by NHK in 1951 and 1961 (the latter in Tanimoto & Sarashina 1965) and presented such preliminary results at the International Symposium on B. Piłsudski's Phonographic Records and the Ainu Culture in September 1985.

specified in its official documentation (cf. CWBP 1, 1-3) and can as a whole be considered successful.

The new technological methods and devices developed within the project already found new applications, and still further new applications are in sight. As the principal figures of the ICRAP technological team put it: "not only the information recorded in the wax cylinders but cylinders themselves are a cultural inheritance. Since the laser-beam reflection method is non-contacting and non-destructive, it is a powerful tool for reproducing sounds from old wax cylinders without damaging them. Therefore, this system may well be employed in the future for reproducing valuable sounds from old wax cylinders"<sup>19</sup>. Since many problems and difficulties, such as the technological noise elimination, remain, the specialists "expect to improve this quality by using digital techniques for speech enhancement, like those proposed by Suzuki (1985) and Ifukube (1987)<sup>20</sup>. The resulting acoustic information can be stored in an acoustic data base, which can be used by linguists, anthropologists, musicologists, and other scholars for their research purposes. In the common project with colleagues in Europe and elsewhere in the world, we hope to set up a program for conservation of these old acoustic monuments by using the indicated techniques"<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Iwai, Asakura, Ifukube, and Kawashima 1986:604.

<sup>20</sup> Suzuki, J. 1985. "Enhancement of speech signal embeded in noise by SPAC (Speech Processing System by Use of Auto-Correlation Function)" in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on B. Pilsudski's Phonographic Records and the Ainu Culture*, 16-20 September, Sapporo, Japan, pp. 61-65. T. Ifukube 1987. "Enhancement of speech signal". *Journal Inst. Electron. Inform. Commun. Eng.* 70, 407-413 (in Japanese), the latter quoted after Ifukube-Kawashima-Asakura 1989:1765.

<sup>21</sup> Ifukube, Kawashima, and Asakura 1989:1765. On further developments and successful applications, see Uozumi-Asakura 1999.

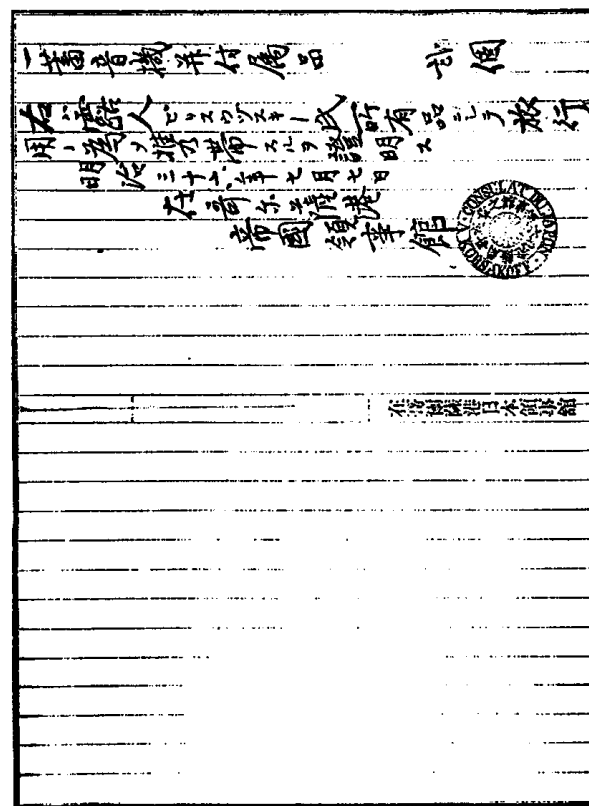


Photo 1. An official permit issued by the Imperial Consulate of Japan in Korsakov for Bronislaw Pilsudski enabling him to use the phonograph during his Japan journey (preserved in the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters (PAU) and Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) in Cracow, mss. call number 4648).

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