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Archival Ethnographic Films as a Historical Source

Abstract

The article draws on text and visual archival documents to study nature and informative value of Soviet ethnographic films. Ethnographic cinema is a phenomenon almost unstudied by both ethnography and cinematology. Analyzing an illustrative experience of film director A. A. Litvinov and researcher V. K. Arsenyev, who were at tip of the spear in Soviet ethnocinema, the author investigates effective methodology of their scientific and cinematographic work: from script based on scientific texts to lengthy ethnographic filming expeditions to editing of the films assisted by scientific advisors. The choice of the chronological framework rests on the fact that

late 1920s – early 1930s was a time of growth for ethnographic filming in the Soviet Union, characterized by both quantity and quality of ethnographic films. It was a time when a panorama of ethnographic films about different peoples of the multinational Soviet country was created, in production of the most significant of these professional scientists were involved. A series of ethnographic films about ethnic groups of Primorye (the Udege), Kamchatka (the Koryaks, the Lamuts), and Chukotka (the Chukchi), a collaboration of A. A. Litvinov and V.K. Arsenyev, received recognition from the public, and also from the scientific community. These film documents are among first photovisual records on the ethnography of the peoples of the Far East. From the point of view of ethnographic cinematology, the article concludes that ethnographic films, if approached scientifically, become a form of research, film as a 'document' of the period providing historical and ethnographic data. Little-studied archival ethnographic films are a promising area of research, well deserving being included into the scholarship. Their creators' experience is of practical interest for modern ethno-cinematographers.

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### Keywords

Archival ethnographic films, historical source, visual anthropology, history of the small-numbered peoples of the USSR.

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