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# Ethnographic Video for Instruction and Analysis (EVIA) Digital Archive [Review]

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## Review

### **Ethnographic Video for Instruction and Analysis (EVIA) Digital Archive** (<http://www.eviada.org/>)

The Ethnographic Video for Instruction and Analysis Digital Archive Project (hereafter referred to as EVIA) is an online archive of worldwide collections of ethnographic field recordings that offers added-value features for the discovery, description, and analysis of video. This collaborative repository was founded and is currently sustained by researchers at Indiana University and the University of Michigan. The project received \$2.5 million in funding from the Mellon Foundation from 2001 to 2009. EVIA “gives depositors an opportunity to preserve their field video using the latest technologies for digital video preservation and to make their materials accessible to researchers, educators, students, and others who are interested in the relationships of music and culture.”<sup>1</sup>

EVIA is composed of more than a thousand hours of field video recordings, grouped into collections and submitted by numerous contributors. Disciplines currently represented in the project include ethnomusicology, anthropology, folklore, and dance ethnology. Those wishing to participate in the project as an EVIA Project Fellow must submit around ten hours of field video recordings and commit to annotating the collection. A contributor may also be required to attend a two-week summer institute held in Bloomington. This competitive, peer-review-flavored process ensures that EVIA’s content remains at a high standard, however, it is not required in all cases. The many collections in EVIA cover a wide variety of geographic areas and include footage of music and dance performances, religious ceremonies, ethnographic interviews, and ethnic and cultural traditions. Some current collections cover children’s songs in South African villages, performances of African American music by Dutch choral groups, the making of musical instruments across Indiana, and sacred Vodou rites in Haiti. The list of collections includes those that have been completed as well as collections that are in process. Some collections are quite large; for example, Project AHEYM consists of nearly 800 hours of interviews with na-

tive Yiddish speakers in Eastern Europe born between 1900 and 1930.

EVIA’s content is presented as a tiered system. Collections contain events, which refer to a specific time period or a concert, encounter, or interview session that was shot. Events are broken down into scenes; it is at the scene level that search and browse hits display, most likely due to the manageable chunk of time and transcript length. Scenes are often a single song.

Though EVIA is available free of charge, its permissions structure requires that usage be limited to educational purposes; therefore, immediate access to the video collections is restricted to those on certain universities’ IP ranges or who have a personal account. Anyone may search and browse content and view minimal metadata, but logging in is required to access the video and the annotations prepared by the depositors. In order to login, a user must have consented to EVIA’s End User License Agreement and requested an account from an EVIA administrator, or be connected to a university network.

Software development is an aspect of EVIA that appears to have received as much or more attention as building the video collections. Through collaboration with depositing scholars and staff at Indiana University’s Digital Library Program, project developers have created several custom applications for EVIA, most notably the Annotator’s Workbench and the Online Search and Browse Tool. The Annotator’s Workbench is a local client that gives depositors control over collection creation, permissions, viewing and transcription of video, and assigning metadata. An application based on the Annotator’s Workbench is used for EVIA’s peer review process; reviewers can view and add comments to any segment level of a collection and the editor can track and view comments from multiple reviewers simultaneously. One accesses video collections in EVIA through the Online Search and Browse Tool. This tool includes a full-text keyword search with a specialized algorithm that pushes controlled vocabulary search terms to the top of a result set, in which a pane of faceted terms appears. In addition, users can browse video segments through categories that have been assigned based on their relevance to ethno-

musicology and ethnographic video. It is the integration of this tool and the Annotator's Workbench that provides access to video segments and their metadata. The EVIA project team intends to release the source code for its developed software in the near future. EVIA's completed collections are stored in a FEDORA repository created by the project team and maintained by IU's Digital Library Program.

MARC records are created at the collection level and collection metadata is METS-compatible, so EVIA's descriptive metadata is likely to be indexed outside of the Online Search and Browse Tool. This arrangement ensures that even if access to the video itself is not available to a user through an institutional affiliation or special arrangement, he or she may still view crucial information about the collection.

EVIA consists of two domains, one for the project (<http://www.eviada.org/>) and one for the Archive itself (<https://media.eviada.org/>). Each site is easily-navigable and shares enough similarities with the other to provide the user with a relatively seamless experience. The EVIA project team hopes to eventually integrate the two sites. The project information site acts as the "front door" for the initiative, offering subpages on the project description, collections, research and development, FAQs, news, contact information, a sitemap and search. A link to the Archive is prominent in the top navigation bar. Breadcrumbs, which appear on each page just below the persistent header and navigation bar, are helpful for mapping one's way to and from important but more buried subpages, such as "Call for Submissions" and "Preservation Formats." The "Search and Sitemap" page reveals a well-organized structure for browsing the site's contents, as well as a site-level Google custom search.<sup>2</sup>

On the project information site, the "Collections" page lists the video collections that have been approved for inclusion in EVIA. Collections are sorted alphabetically by title and each listing includes a thumbnail image, the name of the principal investigator, and teaser text from the project abstract. As of January 2011, there are forty-six collections listed, a number that will surely grow and that is already proving unruly in its current arrangement as a list on a static HTML page. Perhaps displaying the collections within a grid or as a slideshow with thumbnails would be better mechanisms for browsing.

After selecting a particular collection, one sees an in-depth description of the collection and brief biography of the project author or other contributors. It is at this point that the user is made aware of the collection's availability, whether one may access it in the EVIA Digital Archive or that the collection is in development stages and not ready for viewing by the public. The "Research and Development" page offers rich documentation on various aspects of the project – including but not limited to cataloging decisions, intellectual property issues, and reformatting standards – with levels of transparency and detail for which the project team should be applauded.<sup>3</sup>

Users may access the Archive site via a link titled "Enter Archive" that is prominently located in the project information site's navigation bar. On the Archive homepage, a prominent box displays a grid of sample video segments that offers different content each time the page is refreshed. Though the image captions (which appear to be the video segment titles) are included, the images that represent each segment fail to load in both Firefox 3.6 and IE 8, prompting the alt tag text to display instead. (This is also the case with thumbnail images on both search and browse results pages, though those image placeholders display a generic caption of "thumbnail.") While the design of the Archive site is similar to the main project site, there is virtually no duplicated information; the navigation bar also clearly offers different content, including advanced search, browse, a login prompt, and links to a personalized playlist page and to the project site. The site header also has some variances, most notably an embedded keyword search box that returns the same results as those entered on the "Advanced Search" page.

Strangely, the list of collections on the project information site is not replicated in any fashion on the Archive site, despite a number of browsing options on the latter. The Archive site currently offers eight broad browse categories, each populated by terms derived from standardized vocabularies like LCSH, GEOnet, and the Getty AAT. Each category contains a list of indexed terms with adjacent numbers indicating how many hits of each term are present in the database. Each hit represents a video clip. Selecting the term "Banjo" from the "Instruments" category yields a single-column result set of the thirty-nine video segments associated with that term. Though the user has no control over how the list is sorted

and the default sort method is not obvious, a most helpful right-hand column contains faceted search options so the user can easily refine his or her search.

Each video scene page displays both a Flash video player and metadata. When a certain video scene is called up, one may toggle among three different tabs. The “Depositor Bio” tab details the background of the collection author, while the “Collection Outline” tab displays the entire collection as a tiered, collapsible/expandable menu with time durations, descriptions, and the option to view video for every event and scene within the collection. In the “Now Playing” tab, one may view a description and details for the collection, event, and scene. The collection description contains several hyperlinked words that, when clicked, open a pop-up window that displays a paragraph explanation of each term and a link that leads the user to a glossary of key terms used in that collection. Subject headings are displayed at all three levels; there is quite a bit of duplication, as the bulk of a scene’s subject headings is inherited from the collection, but sometimes a scene or event is unique enough that it contains several additional headings. In this tab, users may also view transcription or translation text of the performance and details of a specific action (which might be a specific playing technique, physical movement, or notable costume). Some records have a “View All References” link that, once clicked, displays a bibliography in a new browser window.

The video player is marvelously tricked out with pedagogically-useful features. As expected, one can play, pause, advance, and rewind the video, adjust the volume, and expand to full screen. Additionally, one can choose to stream in different bit rates (400 kbps or 2 mbps) and save the clip to a new or existing playlist. Most notably, the video is accompanied by an annotated timeline in which the scene, event, and collection appear as different-colored layers stacked on top of one another. The “Event”

and “Scene” layers display points with hyperlinked text of the video clip title that, when clicked, displays core metadata about the clip and the option to play it.

There are a couple options for bookmarking video. Users can create their own playlists and, if logged in, can access them through the “My EVIA” tab in the Archive site’s navigation bar. This feature is useful for an individual who wants to bookmark certain scenes; it could also be used by an instructor for convenient access to segments in the classroom. Alternatively, there are abbreviated reference URLs offered for video collections, scenes, and events, but one must select the option to e-mail the permanent URL to oneself in order to view it. The URLs that appear in the browser for both search result sets and video records – though persistent – are a bit unruly in length.

This project offers a solution for researchers who work extensively with raw video, a high-maintenance medium in terms of durability, cataloging, storage, and access that at this time is relatively unsupported by institutional repositories or other digital archiving systems. EVIA is a welcome addition to digital humanities initiatives, for in both mission (preservation, access) and methodology (open source systems, extensible data), it brings us closer to melding digital technologies and traditional scholarship.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.eviada.org/faq.cfm?mc=11&ctID=2&qID=11#11>
- <sup>2</sup> This search only appears to index the [eviada.org](http://www.eviada.org) domain and thus will not return any results from the video collections.
- <sup>3</sup> Detailed information about EVIA’s preservation workflows and standards may be found on this page, as well: <http://www.eviada.org/subCat.cfm?mc=6&ctID=25>.