

Grisons embroideries

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Grisons embroideries

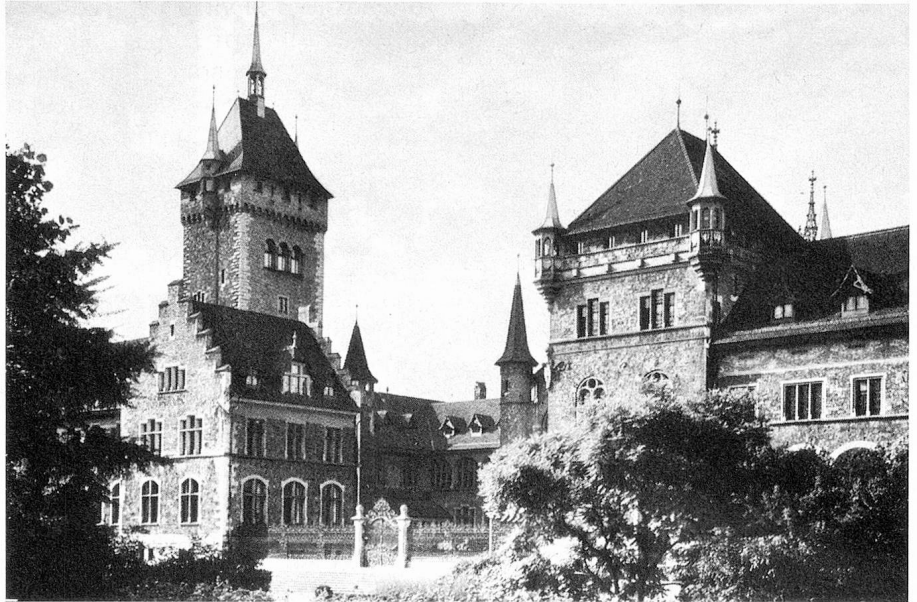
The Swiss National Museum in Zurich was opened in 1898 and houses the largest cultural and historic collection of Switzerland. In changing exhibitions, it presents an easily comprehensible picture of Swiss culture in past eras. On the occasion of its 80th anniversary, the firm «Läckerli-Huus» in Basle has chosen an Engadine comb-bag as model for its new *Leckerli* tin; the bag is one of the show-pieces of the extensive textile collection of the Museum.

On the four side panels of the new tin, the embroideries are pictured which decorate the four sections of the comb-bag.



Comb-bags were made in various materials: samples in clay, wood leather, paper are known apart from those in cloth. According to the name, toilet articles should have been kept in the bags, such as hairpins or combs. Since none of the Engadine comb-bags made from textiles show any signs of wear which would indicate such use, one assumes that flat articles only were put inside: perhaps some popular texts, perhaps exam papers or samples, congratulatory cards or letters from members of the family overseas. The embroidered decorations are usually most beautiful and thus made the bags into genuine ornaments which hung next to the looking-glass in the living room and helped to embellish the room.

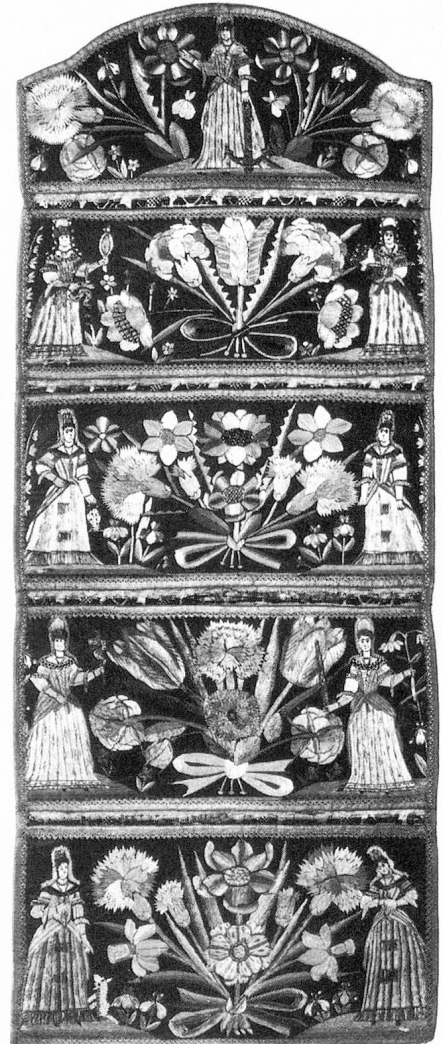
Perhaps some botanical work of that epoch provided the



The Swiss National Museum in Zurich

models. The empty patches in the composition were filled in with pansies, and between the figures and the border of the bag, one placed lilies of the valley which almost look like little trees. The ladies are dressed in the fashion of the French Court, with small waists and sleeves which are decorated with various ribbons and whose cuffs open up wide. Typical of the years around 1685–1715 in the pictured headgear, the so-called *fontange*: hair, both one's own and artificial, was pulled high on a wire construction in the shape of a pyramid. Another interesting peculiarity of that time was reproduced in art-needlework, the iron support which is inserted vertically in the front of the dress. The ladies represented various characteristics, and their attributes signified what allegories were involved. So for instance, the anchor means that its bearer is hope personified, sword and scales are worn by a woman of justice, the lamb signifies patience, and the serpent wound around a cross means faithfulness. These are just the best-known symbols.

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(Dr. phil.)



(photos Swiss National Museum)