

Preface

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PREFACE

This is the first survey of the five major ethnographical collections at Swiss museums. It is aimed at two categories of users: for the one the volume will be a working aid; for the other the lists may serve to bring about an awareness of the scope and significance of scholarly material little used up to now. But this compilation of facts - and that is what the Swiss museum-ethnologists' communal project provides - must first be placed within a wider conceptual context.

According to a definition upon which the various international agreements within the framework of the UNESCO are based, cultural property in the broadest sense of the word is the common possession of all peoples, and it is thus everyone's task to respect the cultural heritage of every single society or ethnic group. It is true that so-called material goods, as tangible expressions of local cultures, are only part of the whole; but their relative independence within the framework of cultural tradition lends them particular weight in the field of ethnology: objects remain vivid continue to bear witness without any mediator, even if the people who invented, produced and used them are long since dead - assuming that they themselves survive. The way they can best be protected is by letting as many people as possible become acquainted with and find out as much as possible about them. For only in this way will a large number of people discover more about man's ingenuity and adaptability in his worldwide historicity. This in itself could facilitate the road to the future.

It is our task to keep the collections of unique documents preserved at our ethnographical museums alive both physically and by constantly bringing up to date and passing on the knowledge pertaining to them. This process should also include the descendants of the people whose original works were once admitted to the collections - truly a programme of no small challenge.

But to return to our prosaic inventory - we hope that a survey of the objects found in the five collections will facilitate both object-documentation work and research on the ethnic groups and individuals whose historical achievements are represented in the collections. Not the least of our expectations is that the museums' exhibition activities will be

stimulated by it. For information on the arrangement and object of the lists, the reader is asked to turn to the general introduction in keywords (plus maps) following the preface and to the statistical survey preceding the lists for each individual museum.

Finally, I should like to express my gratitude to all my colleagues who belonged to the Museum Committee of the Swiss Ethnological Society SEG/SSE between 1974 and 1978. They are, in alphabetical order: Elisabeth Biasio (Zurich, since 1977), Eberhard Fischer (Zurich, since 1974), Karl Henking (Zurich, until 1977), André Jeanneret (Geneva, since 1971), Roland Kaehr (Neuchâtel, since 1974), Cilette Keller (Neuchâtel, until 1976), Ernst Kläy (Bern, since 1974), Walter Raunig (Zurich, until 1977), Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger, now Foote-Baldinger (Basle, since 1974), Daniel Schoepf (Geneva, since 1974), Cornelia Vogelsanger (Zurich, since 1977).

Some of them were involved in the painstaking work of laying the foundations for the success of this project. But all of us must also thank our colleagues at the museums, who so actively supported us. In 1974, with Pierre Centlivres (Neuchâtel) as its President, the then executive committee of the SEG/SSE succeeded in providing a general goal to set the Museum Committee moving in the right direction. We are indebted to the present SEG/SSE executive committee and the Swiss Association for the Humanities for their indispensable support of this comparatively long-term project. A second volume dealing with the smaller collections in Burgdorf, Fribourg, St. Gall and a number of museums not yet dealt with is in preparation.

Although we are all aware of the inadequacies of this volume, we nonetheless hope that for the subject's sake it will inspire both active confirmation and lively opposition.

Basle, October 1978

Christian Kaufmann
President of the SEG/SSE
Museum Committee