

Preface

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Preface

After several years of preparatory work (which unfortunately took longer than anticipated), the SEG/SSE Museum Committee can now present what is for the time being the final instalment of their compilation of inventories of ethnographic collections in Switzerland: Volume II. The broader conceptual context in which this project may be placed has been explained by Christian Kaufmann in his preface to Volume I.

Volume I was concerned with publishing the inventories of museums with large ethnographic collections (Basle, Berne, Geneva, Neuchâtel and Zurich). Volume II is an attempt to give an account of the smaller collections, excluding private and mission house collections, although we are aware of the fact that it is precisely there that extremely interesting documentary evidence is still to be found. The project originally seemed quite simple (preliminary work in Burgdorf, Fribourg and St. Gall having already been done in connection with Volume I), but a great many problems arose during its realization, some of which were related to the special conditions prevailing at smaller museums. Often curators of such museums do their museum work in addition to their regular professions, so that in spite of their great personal efforts, the amount of time, personnel and money available is very limited. Often ethnographic objects have come together more accidentally than intentionally (for example gifts from businessmen or missionaries returning home, as objects accompanying natural history collections, as parts of legacies, etc.) – we suggest that the reader should consult the introductions to the respective museums. The lack of systematic collecting and the extremely incomplete (often non-existent) documentation of the pieces may thus make work with the collections seem somewhat unattractive in many cases. But it is expressly because various pieces and whole collections are in storage rather than on show (and will probably remain so for years to come) that it seemed important to us to present some comparatively detailed information here – although we are well aware of the doubtfulness of data which could often not be verified (for instance because of the inaccessibility of the pieces). The original intention of the Museum Committee, namely to make a comprehensive survey of all known collections, had to be dropped in view of the regional distribution of the collections. We were forced to restrict ourselves largely to compiling lists on the basis of available information: specialists of all kinds are urged to pass on their knowledge to smaller collections – the field of China/Japan/East Asia is in particularly dire straits!

Various factors unfortunately made it impossible for us to take all the collections in Switzerland containing ethnographic objects into account (this would have gone beyond the scope of the project), and this has led to a definite – sometimes quite accidental – geographical imbalance. For a

general survey, the reader is referred to the synoptic table at the end of the book, where all the information available to us at present is listed, the date gleaned from the 1978 museum questionnaire having been integrated. Information on the organization and interpretation of the lists can be found in the general introduction in key-words (including maps) following the Preface, in the statistical survey preceding the lists of each collection and in the introduction to the museums. The authors of the contributions are listed in the Table of Contents.

Although we fully realize the inadequacies inherent in a project of this kind, we sincerely hope that this volume will provide new ideas and new impulses to its users.

We should like to express our gratitude to all the people responsible for or working with the single collections, who so readily gave us information and did their best to make our work as pleasant as possible. Our special thanks go to Cornelia Vogelsanger (President of the SEG/SSE Museum Committee) and E. R. von Buettner (President of the SEG/SSE) for their support and encouragement during our work on this book. Our thanks go also to all our colleagues on the Museum Committee, with special thanks to Roland Kaehr (Neuchâtel) for all the work he did and to Christian Kaufmann (Basle) for his painstaking preparations. We are indebted to the Executive Committee of the SEG/SSE and to the Swiss Association for the Humanities for their indispensable support of this comparatively long-term project.

I should also like to extend my thanks to the others involved in the project: lic. phil. Heinz Joos (Basle) for all the time-consuming work he did; B. Modetta (Maienfeld), E. Saxer and Christian Saxer (Sargans) for their careful typing of the manuscript, and to the Büro für Technische Geologie AG (Maienfeld/Sargans) for their material support. Finally I should like to thank my family for all their patience and consideration.

Sargans, December 1982

Ruth Kobel-Streiff
Editor of Volume II