

## ETHNOGRAPHY IN HUNGARIAN MUSEUMS

The ethnographic collections of the Hungarian museums are hardly older than 100 years. A most important question in their history so far is how the objects collected as interesting items turned into a basis for scientific research and how the organisational changes of the museums helped this increase in the values?

Established in 1872, the Ethnographic Department of the Hungarian National Museum collected only Asian items. Since the last one third of that century however they started collecting ethnographical pieces from Hungarians and national minorities living in the Carpathian basin, and the number of such pieces kept on growing at an increasing pace. This had made it possible for Zsigmond BÁTKY to develop the typology of ethnographic items. That guiding line (*Guiding line for the organisation of ethnographic museums*. Budapest, 1906) has been in use ever since forming the basis for a standard system of ethnographic collections. Prior to the beginning of ethnography tuition at university level at the late 1920-es and early 1930-es the Ethnography Department of the Hungarian National Museum and the Székely National Museum organised courses to ensure that the items collected by the museums would be registered in a standard way. The work of the museums in the countryside used to be coordinated by the high level scientific and museological work of the specialists of the Ethnographical Museum.

In 1949 the National Center of Museums and Historic Monuments was established to assist the state in taking over public collections and set up a new system of museums. Museum work had been coordinated by that central organ, then, after 1953 by the Museum Division of the Ministry of Public Education and still later the legal successors of that latter body. They have been trying to establish a homogeneous organisational system, and central funds have been allocated to develop the collections, organise exhibitions, and professional supervision helped registrations, and the standardisation of museum work in general. At that time several new museums were established.

A new era for Hungarian museology has started in 1962 with a basically new organisational system. That was the year when the system of county museums was organised. That was partly through decentralisation, because it weakened central management providing greater independence to county museums operating mainly in county seats; at the same time it was also centralisation, for within each county the county museums became responsible for all types of museum collections inside their respective counties. A homogeneous museum network has been established under the management and support of the county councils. The counties objective has been to divide the areas of their counties between their museums, defining the tasks, ranges of collections of the individual museums. Consequently the *county museum* collects the materials of the entire county, and in addition to their existing collections and staff them with specialists. Thus the county museums are able to undertake complex tasks, can closely cooperate with other museological branches and at the same time supervise the work of the member-museums of the county organisation. In the county museum organisation the *country museums* study single regions each, but collectively their collection ranges cover the entire county. They are not as complex as the county museums, and usually only deal with local history and ethnography. *Urban* or *village museums* generally collect items related to local history or ethnography. It was in the



1960-es that they start establishing *regional houses* in increasing numbers to preserve local folk monuments not as research bases, only for display at the scholars' level. Where *open air ethnographical museums* have also been set up these were also entrusted to manage regional houses, with which they all form parts of the county museum organisation. The Ethnographical Museum acts as the professional supervisory body for the ethnographic collections of the county museum organisation, and the Museum Division of the Ministry of Culture coordinates their work.

The different museum-types have set up their archives. In addition to the collections of objects they all have archives of manuscripts, of photographs, of slides, and several museums collect films and music. Their systems correspond to the system of the collections of the Ethnographical Museum regarding registration and indexing. Certain ideal sizes have been established for the different collections. An average of 9–15 000 ethnographical items in the county museums can already present the ethnographic and regional groups of the counties. 4–7 000 objects can effectively display a smaller region in a country-museum, while 1 000 to 3 000 items present a reliable picture on a settlement as displayed by an urban or village museum. The documentation departments of the county museums have 80 000–100 000 sheets each, and their collections of photo-negatives on ethnographic subjects reach 15–30 000 pieces. Since the late 1960-es almost every county museum publishes a year-book which deals also with ethnography. These publications make it possible to have domestic and foreign book exchanges.

At the end of 1988 the Hungarian Ethnographical Museum and the Open Air Ethnographical Museum together have, among other collections almost 200 000 objects, over one and a half million pages of documents and almost 400 000 photographic negatives. This is a collection available for scholars interested in studying Hungarians (and of course other peoples also) from the second half of the 18-th century onwards. The collections of our museums in the countryside are more recent, having materials mainly from the last three decades of the 19-th century and of the 20-th century. The number of items which form the collections of the county museums is similar to that preserved by the Ethnographical Museum and the photo-negatives and documents collected by them are about the same in numbers than those found in the archives of the two national museums combined. And we must not forget about the materials displayed by the country museums and the urban and village museums, as well as about the genuine interiors in the regional houses and open air museums in the countryside. The number of ethnographic objects preserved in the Hungarian museums today is close to 800 000. It is an impressive material the methodical study of which may form the basis of the renaissance of Hungarian ethnography.