

Editorial

The Process of Civilization

“What is to be meant by the concept *civilization process*? What has been the general path of this process over time and space? What explains the process? Finally, should the civilization process be seen as cumulative and irreversible?” These are four questions raised by *Arne Jarrick* and *Johan Söderberg* in the opening article of this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*. In the article they present a critical survey of recent studies of that long term trend in the cultural history of Early Modern Europe, which is usually called the process of civilization. Based on a Swedish empirical material they question the dominant role of impulse control, supposed by Norbert Elias, and point to another important development: the gradual growth in communicative competence among people, which breeds as well tolerance as indifference.

The remaining four articles in this issue are all of them – in one way or another – contributing to the understanding of the process of civilization. *Jürg Glauser*’s field of study is the relations between elite and popular culture in Early Modern Europe. By analyzing a selection of Scandinavian “chapbooks” he comes to the conclusion, that their character is changed radically from about 1800. The old late medieval stories are adopted to bourgeois norms and values and in that way transformed into implements for a civilizing and disciplining project.

Food and eating habits often played a role in processes of distinction and disciplination. In that way the study by *Eszter Kisbán* on the introduction of noodles to Hungary from Italy can be related to such problems although she

is not explicitly treating the subject from that point of view.

The process of civilization, however, in historical and ethnological research is used not only as a scientific model by which important trends in European development are analyzed and explained. It is also used to designate a central idea in the self-understanding of modern Europeans. In her article on “Subhumanity and Civilization”, *Edith Mandrup Rønn* discusses the strong biological element that from around the turn of the century is added to the idea of the process of civilization, resulting in intense discussions of eugenic measures meant to increase the childbearing of “the good stock” and to put a stop to the “progressive degeneration” that was thought to be a threat to civilization.

The basis for her article is a work in progress on the treatment and care of the mentally handicapped in Denmark. Another group that was not easily adapted and therefore was supposed to represent a threat to civilization was the travelling people called “gypsies”. In his article on gypsy occupations in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th century *Leo Lucassen* comes to the conclusion that no such thing existed. However, people who chose a way of life combining self-employment and travelling with one’s family were likely to be labelled as gypsies. The “power of definition” was so strong that it might lead to ethnicity: people began to feel different from others and to cultivate their own way of life and the symbols attached to it.