

EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY IN OUR TIME

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This opening essay of the then newly founded journal *Ethnologia Europaea* surveys the heterogeneous disciplinary landscape of the field which constitutes its target audience. Situating the field within anthropology, it argues for tolerance of the various kinds of ethnology being pursued in different institutions in Europe, from universities to museums, in order to be able to join forces. All are engaged in folklife research (folklife being equivalent to social life), whose task is to elucidate culture and its role in life as well as the influence of life on the development of culture. The article closes with remarks on method. [Abstract and keywords added by the editors 2017]

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Before we begin to analyse the present conditions and the future possibilities of European ethnology we wish to recall the vast research work which is going on in various countries in this field of study and which we hope will be brought according to plan to a successful end.

There is at present much difference of opinion in our field. Even the term of ethnology has met with opposition in certain quarters, where the need of a universal term has not been understood. However, the field of ethnology is vast and must allow a great variety of conceptions. We are a little worried, though, by a certain discouragement which is found here and there. Some have even felt tempted to reject most of what we have achieved until now and to claim an ethnology that implies either a transition to and acceptance of some or other of our neighbouring sciences or else abstractions or pure indifference.

Circumspection and balance are certainly required here.

Every country and every independent territory has its own history and therefore also to a certain degree its own ethnology. The same applies, or should apply to research workers and their schools. The scientific results that have been achieved in different countries demand attention and a fair appraisal. This may be very difficult, especially with regard to smaller countries. Translations or summaries in one of the principal languages are not sufficient. It will be necessary to supervise, bring together and utilize what is produced. For this we need much more than bibliographies. We also need excerpts, organs to treat the material with the general aims clearly set out, as well as modern documentary methods.

Ethnology as a subject of study is represented in very different ways in different countries. Some-

times there is no academic teaching, sometimes it is combined with some other subject, in other cases it has its own chairs, sometimes even special professorships for different branches of the subject. In Sweden European ethnology is represented by independent chairs at the universities of Stockholm, Lund and Uppsala, under the name of “Nordic and comparative folklife research” (“nordisk och jämförande folklivsforskning”). In Finland and Norway we find a differentiation with separate professorships for ethnology, folklore, and social ethnology. The faculty of humanities at Stockholm University has contemplated organizing a special department for anthropologic studies, which should include Nordic and comparative folklife research, general ethnology, and history of religion, including psychology of religion. If this project is realized, other allied subjects may be added. This might be a good solution and mark our European line of thought as opposed to the American, where anthropology is kept together as one subject embracing a great many specialities within its field of study, such as physical anthropology, linguistics, sociology, archaeology, etc.

For the rest, the scientific work in Europe is carried on by museums and archives. Special scientific institutions for studying and publishing the materials are usually lacking, at least in Sweden. In this respect private enterprise has borne the main burden. A great difficulty is the lack of financial means. Neither institutions nor research workers can afford at present to carry out their projects to any larger extent or to undertake new, comprehensive investigations. Instead, they are forced to simplify matters. Often research workers are obliged to accept appointments with institutions and business firms for the sake of special investigations. Others go in for popularizing. Nothing of this is in itself an evil but has a tendency to influence research workers and thus to modify the science.

Nordic or European folklife research in Sweden has its roots in the Renaissance period, with the *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (History of the Northern peoples) of Olaus Magnus as a monumental introduction. Thereafter the subject has slowly progressed with

several outstanding representatives, but it achieved an independent position only in the first half of this century. Surveys of its older history in Sweden have been published, for example in *Folk-Liv* 1962–65. A summary of important achievements in our field during the twentieth century was given in *Schwedische Volkskunde* (Swedish ethnology), printed in 1961. In *Gwerin, a Journal of Folk Life* for 1962 a survey of my own works since 1912, when the so-called village investigations started, and of the relations of folklife research to general ethnology is printed. Our folklife research has during this century proceeded by stages, each decade has had its own major problems to deal with, which by no means implies indifference to or ignorance of current debates on principles.

At first Nordic folklife research devoted itself exclusively to rural life and its sphere of ideas, since the peasant class was less affected by changes than the others and since its communities and milieus presented the stable order and conformity to tradition which was a condition whilst the new science was being built up. But quite soon we progressed further and besides rural life we have also investigated the life and conditions of the working-class, both in the country and in the towns. Much has been done with regard to the conditions of industry, trade and crafts as well as those of towns and villages. The Laps have aroused interest from early times and have been studied and described, intermittingly from the seventeenth century. These studies have greatly stimulated both Nordic ethnology and European ethnology in general. An important chapter is social life. As modern Swedish sociology, which made its appearance comparatively late, has in general abandoned the historical aspects and concentrated upon present times, folklife research has taken charge of certain sides of the historical development in this field. During the last decades cultural geography has penetrated into the field of folklife research and taken a lively interest in our investigations of such settlements as villages and hamlets. All this makes our own work easier.

A uniform European folklife research in systematic form, taking Europe as a whole, does not yet exist, in spite of many attempts and contributions

to this end. Arthur Haberlandt ventured on a general survey in his *Die volkstümliche Kultur Europas in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, in connection with Michael Haberlandt's, his father, more superficial survey of the Indo-European peoples in Buschan's *Illustrierte Völkerkunde* of 1926. It was, however, only a kind of introduction and was never carried on or made complete. Better situated in this respect are certain groups of states with cognate languages where several research workers have managed to achieve results also of general importance. Linguistics however have had the great advantage of clear boundaries and a firm basis thanks to the phonetic laws which were launched above all by the brothers Grimm.

The need of a systematic cooperation within ethnology has long been felt in Europe. Already ten years after World War I the CIAP was founded and did some good work. Among other things a number of special committees were constituted. Then World War II came and destroyed the majority of these. Many joint enterprises organized since the war have been supported by Unesco. Much has been said about the activity of the CIAP after the last war. The congresses of the international anthropological union, which recently has shown a new understanding for European ethnology, have usually had a section for Europe. At the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Moscow, in 1964, it was decided to extend the collaboration to the whole of Europe and to arrange as soon as possible special conferences for different branches. On that occasion, however, the main principles and needs of European ethnology with regard to organization were overlooked.

In Sweden, European ethnology is usually defined as a branch of general ethnology though without any identification. In this connection, European folklife research, however, holds a special position in having for its subject an extremely sundered part of the world, with only vague remnants of comparatively primitive survival cultures. For the rest it is mainly concerned with mixed circles, stagnating domains and eventually the varying manifestations and fields

of activity of the general development, where we deal both with the current of time and changes and with human stability and traditions.

European ethnology deals with given human material, and with a much larger amount of historical awareness and traditional learning than is usually to be found, with exception made, perhaps, for the more learned classes of China and India. It is also concerned with areas, where progress at least in certain parts, has proceeded at a varying but uninterrupted rate and where we usually do not find completely stagnated or special kinds of degenerated forms, such as occur in primitive cultures outside Europe. We have to reckon with a continuous influence from centres of different kinds, also with a central direction from authorities and institutions as well as from leading circles, at the same time as economy and technique become more and more systematized and developed. On this basis, research must perform its work, that is collect its data, systematize the materials, plan distribution and connections. Problems of diffusion and ways of communication are of utmost importance.

General anthropology has gone through a striking development during the last half century. It has dealt with nearly all primitive folk-groups and cultures and furthermore made serious attempts to integrate the results with a view to bringing out, on an abstract level, the conditions of human life universally and as a whole. To become a guiding science is the ambition of general anthropology. The only question is whether this will be possible. The opinions differ as to that. The multitude of new and sometimes even conflicting ideas forces criticism or acceptance, or else in some cases evasion and specialization upon some special matters.

The old colonial powers, such as England, France, Germany, Portugal and Italy, have achieved most important results. Also Denmark and Russia have made important contributions. At times, Austria has taken a leading position. Still, it is the United States that have taken the lead. An outline of what general and European ethnology have in common is given in the international dictionary of Åke Hulkrantz.

Radcliffe Brown urged ethnologists to seek the universal which he regarded as the original. But this is true only in certain cases. There are cases of general likeness that are due to simplification, wear and degeneration. As an example I take the phenomenon called “offerkast”, a heap of stones or wooden sticks thrown together on the ground near dangerous passes, for example in the mountains, or at places where accidents and deaths have occurred. It seems evident now that in such cases older and richer offering ceremonies have been simplified or vulgarized into this universal manifestation.

Tylor inspired the idea of culture as being an internally coherent unit, an idea which through Malinowski’s influence was then taken up in the United States, where it was further discussed together with an analysis of balancing conditions and models. Malinowski’s hostility towards the idea of historical derivations and relations outwards were mainly due to the fact that he was working with isolated island cultures, where such evidences of influences were lacking. On the contrary, these are usually to be reckoned with.

Whether we consider von Luschan’s levelling and recurrence or Lévi-Strauss’ transformation mechanisms, new likenesses may arise. For the rest development depends on normal cultural relations, meetings with other culture circles, and in later times influence from superior cultures with acculturation as a consequence. Research committees are certainly required to estimate this. Some are already working. In Europe they exist only with regard to some special or some smaller areas. But even a small piece of work in a small area may be a useful building-stone in a greater construction, and guidance and system are necessary.

Fortunately the essential historical material has been collected. The enormous work involved in collecting the material and arranging it in categories and groups according to functions and similarity, in determining it with regard to time, place, and social position, in making comparisons and juxtapositions, also on a social level, and in solving the problems concerning tradition and origin as well as surviving connections, all this can only be touched upon here.

An important chapter concerns the methods used for collecting material: visits, studies, and interviews in the field, questionnaires or direct correspondence. The questionnaire method has been much used in Sweden ever since 1630. Vast collections of scientific material are stored and filed in many European countries. All forms of documentation are being used.

On the whole the research tasks may be divided into groups which deal with either life, society, culture, or the individual. To life belong the ways and conditions of human life (cf. *Folk-Liv* 1962–65). Unfortunately it is not possible to neglect the biological side. Life is a whole. Knowledge of life and its different aspects is indispensable both for comparisons and for abstract epitomes. In northern Europe ethnology has launched the term of folklife, which means that part of life which is due to social transmission and contact. In other words, folklife is social life.

It is the task of folklife research to elucidate culture and its role in life as well as the influence of life on the development of culture. What is culture then? Kroeber’s and Kluckhohn’s explanation in their great analysis may be formally accepted. Here folklife and culture are juxtaposed, though culture is not fundamentally kept apart from the concept of nature. On this point a complement is necessary in my opinion: nature and culture are two different concepts. Culture was created by man. It is another alternative than the biological in the great process of life, connected just as much with the past and the present as with the future. Culture is specially meant to be a source of help or happiness for the future. It is, for us, something material, mental, and social. It consists as much of memory as of plans for the future and tradition. It is ideas, symbols and technique. It is tool and product and capacity in the work which lies in between. It is the human means of transforming terrain and environment and of creating new forms for human subsistence. It is also custom and feasting. It is fashions and forms. The ready, the formed, the hinted are also culture, on condition that interpretation or explanation go with it. It is training according to patterns given, and so

on. The transformation from culture into folk culture occurs in different ways. There exists a mobile culture, as is the case, either for example in the shape of recently created technical culture or propaganda and trade. In this, the special upper classes are generally consumers. Society stores culture reserves in its arsenals. They are sometimes forgotten but may be revived and even used again, if the way of using them is self-evident or directions for their use are given or can be found. Culture must be maintained by work, sometimes by struggle. The historical development must be investigated by means of material in archives, museums and other depots and also interpreted field work. Nowadays experiments are occasionally used in connection with this, at least with regard to certain elements.

There is also a social culture, or culture in and through society. That is something else than "socio-culture" according to Gjessing, who with this concept seems to mean folklife as a whole.

Society is often based on a concrete foundation with a division and grouping determined by natural and historical conditions. On this foundation social life continues, with its groupings, interchanges, systems of compulsions. With reference to them, terms and aspects of varying kind have often been applied, with clear distinctions. This is particularly the case, I think, with Ferdinand Tönnies' concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The former, which would correspond to Durkheim's Horde, can hardly be applied to any concrete case in contemporary Europe. We also find, that the English terms of society and community are commonly used regardless of their abstract sense, which is proved by several American and English social anthropologists, who have also made clear, that the term of society in ethnologic literature has a vague, even varied meaning. I refer for example to G.P. Murdock and I. Schapera. The conclusion is that there is no longer any correspondence between the holistic social concept of society on one side, and the phenomenon which Tylor calls culture or complex whole, on the other side, nor Leslie Brown's social system and social structure, nor Malinowski's integral, which in

modern anthropology in the United States is called a "holist entity". The American anthropologist Kroeber pointed out that culture must not simply be regarded as the common property of society, it is a system of its own with indistinct social demarcation outwards. The integral was regarded by Malinowski as an automatically formed apparatus, in which human beings are inserted to realize their cultural life by groups. Redfield has said, that the medium does not receive the novelties as a whole and that these are gradually reshaped. This will lead to groups within the group. The word of group is the abstract expression for the formation of circles. For the rest the expression lacks special distinctions but it is still indispensable. Fromm, an American socio-psychologist, has said: There is no "society in general, only specific social structures which operate in different ways". Man does not live in a social bath, but in circles, groups, and combinations. Our investigations of villages, families, and societies become, from this point of view, concrete case studies where we try to find out how the different circles cooperate. In the United States anthropologists will nowadays often use the term of constellation. The territorial concept of community means an area. Most productive is the concept of primary group, which was introduced by C.H. Cooley in 1909 to designate human beings who live in physical proximity, more or less in intimate cooperation face to face. All this necessitates control and consideration.

But the study of society also includes other human groups and teams within or including several concrete communities. Here we first of all meet with the family, which in its preliminary type of parents and child is older than culture itself. Fully developed elementary families with two parents may be found also among some species of animals, they are therefore as a type pre-human. Man has then developed and transformed the families whether we think of extended families or other forms with two or more wives or two or more husbands, etc. Everything connected herewith as well as the introductory stages of marriage and the different stages of life until death exemplify how society is composed both of biological and social matter. More specifically ethnologic

are many groupings of a more instable character and permanence which give life its shape and which, in spite of their vagueness, are of a decisive importance for subsistence. Here research has to be done more as a field work, since it is not self-evident.

Every social group has its own pattern of activities, value norms and prestige viewpoints, but, in addition, also a representative upper layer which indicates much of what prestige demands. In the compulsory system of society there are also divisions into layers and groups with regard to economic, mental and cultural character. Many cultural phenomena may be explained with regard to their development through their transmission from one social milieu to another, which corresponds to acculturation.

The destiny of man follows the course of history and the same is true of culture, the equipment and training of man, and also of society. It is the changes of social structure as a consequence of the direction of the inner balance that constitutes the basis of the structure study and of the models belonging to it. "Folk" is synonymous with the adjective "social" and indicates that it refers to the manifestations of human life. "Folklife" thus is social life in its various shades. Foster has defined the European village society as representing a halfculture, as it has been depending on superior units. The term may not be quite satisfactory but it is correct so far as in Europe it is usually a matter of communities and individuals in tribes or states with super- and subordination. This is, however, not the same thing as the serfdom and ceremonial system of the feudal culture which is more characteristic of southern and partly central Europe. In northern Europe the development passed, where the guild system did not exercise its influence, from a more or less primitive village organization directly to forms regulated by military or centrally directed principles.

We do not reckon with a uniform and homogenous upper layer having an individualistic culture. Instead we have what I would like to call active separatist groups with leading functions from a mental or at least organizational point of view. The upper class as such is in this case more a consumer than a producer.

Cities and larger centres demand a specialized ethnology which more belongs to the study of modern time.

Specialization has played a decisive role both in society and for the development of culture. It leads to a state of things that differs from the older conditions of man with their multiplicity of duties and participation in the development of culture. It requires other methods than those used for the investigation of older periods and traditional culture.

What is now required is above all a study of the material culture both on a concrete and on an abstract level and in its relation to custom and spheres of ideas.

In this connection we will also have to take up the study of individuals. The individual is the only independent organism and he is, as Linton has stressed, the really creative factor. Since systematic studies concerning both man and culture deal with the relations between individual, society, and culture, and therefore are standing just in the point of intersection between psychology, sociology, and anthropology, the study of the individual requires cooperation. Before this can be realized, ethnology has to study individuals both from the outside, and through their own destiny and experiences. Through his way of living, his division of time, his moves, his products and his consumption, and finally through his conception of things and cultural traditions, the individual represents certain cases which should be studied and then systematized. Here also the individual's status and role may give some clue, like his power of endurance, well-being, and achievements. We also have to reckon with the need of compensation and remuneration as creative factors.

Another method is to study life cases by means of memoirs, diaries, and account books. The same method might also be applied to families, companies, and smaller communities. On the whole the individual case study is one of the most important tasks in present time.

The investigation of our modern time implying an analysis of the present moment, is impossible since nobody can get a survey of a whole communi-

ty at one and the same moment. Nevertheless it will therefore be necessary to select one special period, and this may be surveyed as a whole in the same way as older periods and be compared with them.

The choice of the methods and instruments to be employed is a delicate one. As the older stratification, the geographic division and different situations and climates have lost their importance, and frontiers and distances are being eliminated, the way is open to a national culture or an even more general culture type. Thereby the heavy burden of making detail investigations of material conditions, techniques and equipment belonging to it is lifted off the shoulders of the ethnologist and he may concentrate upon the distribution, selection and various combinations of the goods of consumption, and taste and preferences on the part of the consumers, whereas the mass production can be analysed in different places. The groups will then become more and more dependent on the way in which reception takes place and on the initiative and capacity of the individuals. But individuals move and are exposed to influences from different parts. We will then turn mainly to samples, case studies, and certain detail problems. Propaganda through mass media may be analysed in princi-

ple and also the way in which man may come into possession of the benefits of society, or the contrary. Population problems are growing more important. In certain cases statistics with sampling may be used but only for special purposes.

Ethnology should be in some senses a summary of the results achieved also by its neighbouring sciences with regard to living realities. But not only this. Of course we may also investigate how traditional forms disappear and how others (more or less) arise. Some control may also be required of mental and socio-psychological influences.

These research problems can hardly be solved otherwise than by way of cooperation, some joint publications and division of work with different groups assuming special tasks, as was done already with the bibliography, the atlas, the dictionary, with research on agricultural implements, etc. One example: investigate villages at different places in the world, using the same system with the same questions and maps, then compare the results at conferences, and build up a social study in the ethnological sense. In the meantime we shall have to limit ourselves to a number of such concrete tasks.

Sigurd Erixon (1888–1968), Professor of ethnology in Stockholm and Research Director of the Nordic Museum. Erixon was the founder of *Ethnologia Europaea – Journal of European Ethnology*, as well as of the journals *Folk-Liv* and *LAOS*. Throughout his *oeuvre*, Erixon was devoted to the European atlas project of which the *Atlas över svensk folkkultur* (1957) was a part. Building up a knowledge base on folk-life research in Sweden, Erixon conducted in-depth studies of peasant material culture and social organisation. Among the central works are *Skultuna Bruks historie* (1935).

For further readings, see Karl-Olov Arntsberg 1989: *Utforskaren: Studier i Sigurd Erixons Etnologi*, Carlssons Bokförlag; Bjarne Rogan 2008: *From Rivals to Partners on the Inter-War European Scene: Sigurd Erixon, Georges Henri Rivière and the International Debate on European Ethnology in the 1930s*. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 64, 275–324; Bjarne Rogan 2013: *Sigurd Erixon on the Post-War International Scene: International Activities, European Ethnology and CIAP from 1945 to the mid-1950s*. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 69, 89–152.