

Editorial

On the 26th of March 1988 it was the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the central figure in Swedish ethnology, *Sigurd Erixon*. The occasion was marked by a celebration at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, the institution where the basis of his ethnological research was laid, and in connection with which he created the Institute of Ethnology when he was appointed Professor in 1934.

Sigurd Erixon (1888-1968), with his multifaceted research and his characteristic organizational talent, must take much of the credit for the status ethnology has won in Sweden. Yet his ambitions reached further. He wished to unite the many small and very different national ethnologies in Europe in cooperative organizations and in joint projects. In the 1950s and 1960s these efforts resulted in a number of international initiatives, some of which went no further than the tentative stage, while others were to survive their initiator.

Among these last is the journal *Ethnologia Europaea*, which was conceived at a conference of European ethnologists at Hässelby Palace near Stockholm in 1965. The first volume of the journal appeared in 1967, and the two next volumes were to be a *Festschrift* on the occasion of Sigurd Erixon's 80th birthday, but became instead – because of his unexpected death in 1968 – a work dedicated to the memory of this undisputed leading light in the subject.

Ethnologia Europaea has chosen to mark the hundredth anniversary of Sigurd Erixon not with a commemorative article, but with an annual volume whose content clearly exhibits the heritage from Erixon. In between the many books and articles on concrete ethnological topics, Sigurd Erixon returned time and time again to the subject of ethnology itself, its history and development, its delimitation from the related disciplines, and not least its theoretical and methodological potential in a present-day and future research context.

It is impressive that Erixon himself, in his last years, did not fall into a rut, but retained his intellectual flexibility and openness towards new ideas and directions. This is very evident from the two small outline articles he wrote for the first volume of *Ethnologia Europaea*, entitled "European Ethnology in Our Time" and "Urgent Ethnological Tasks". Here he is concerned with the incorporation of new fields of study like workers' and urban culture. But it was in particular methodological problems he busied himself with, and here he is very far from the historical-geographical method and the atlas problems that occupied him in a substantial part of his work. He discusses the development of a distinctly Scandinavian "community study" method, more historically-oriented than the methods of social anthropology, and with consideration of, among other things, "time studies" of patterns of human activity in various environments. The possibility of studies at the individual level also interest him: "personal destinies" may reflect general patterns and encapsulate social and cultural changes; there is a potential in "the study of life cases by means of memoirs, diaries and account books", and he concludes: "On the whole the individual case study is one of the most important tasks in present time".

One can say with some justification that Sigurd Erixon is here anticipating the interest in history at the individual level which is typical of much of the history of mentalities and historical anthropology of the 1970s. It is this interest in "little history" that is taken up for critical assessment in Palle O. Christiansen's article on "Construction and Consumption of the Past", which opens this volume of the journal. His point of departure is some of the most popular of these studies of the everyday life and conceptual worlds of ordinary people, and the dissociation from the old "grand theories" represented by this type of culturalist study. Through the analysis of these works, their presuppositions and implications, Christiansen

makes an important contribution to the understanding of the current situation in research on culture and society.

Sigurd Erixon's interest in the "roots" of ethnology is followed up by Wolf-Dieter Könenkamp (Regensburg), who, in a detailed study of the beginnings of the research on mankind and culture in the latter half of the 18th century, demonstrates the parallelisms in scholarly development in the related disciplines ethnography and "statistics", focusing on the interplay between nature and national character.

Of the other contributions to this and the next fascicle of the journal which find their topics in current ethnological research areas,

just a few will be mentioned: Kitty Verrips (Wageningen) writes on the development of tenants' attitudes on a Dutch estate; Carla Bianco (Rome) on family organization and kinship roles in a *mezzadria* district of Italy; Bo Lönnquist (Helsinki) on the ritualized everyday life of a Finnish Manor House, viewed semiologically; and Jeremy Boissevain (Amsterdam) gives an example of the "new ritualization" of the past 25 years: the growth of courtship and marriage rituals in Malta.

This volume of *Ethnologia Europaea* has been supported financially by the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities.