

Robert Wildhaber (1902 - 1982)

On 16 July 1982 Robert Wildhaber passed away in Basle; for years he had been the conservator of the Swiss Folklore Museum, editor of the Swiss Folklore Archive (Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde) and also editor of the International Folklore and Folklife Bibliography. The career of this scholar was characteristic of an older generation in our field, coming from philology to folklore and finding a spiritual homeland.

Robert Wildhaber was born on the third of August 1902 in Walenstadt, in the Swiss canton of St Gall. He qualified for admission to the university in St Gall and then studied German, English and Italian philology at the universities of Zurich, Heidelberg, London, Perugia and Basle. In 1928 he was awarded his doctorate for a philological thesis on "Jakob Ruf, ein Zürcher Dramatiker des 16. Jahrhunderts". Like his contemporaries Paul Geiger, Karl Meuli, Paul Scheuermeier and Richard Weiss, Robert Wildhaber started his career as a secondary school teacher (1931 - 1946). But this profession gradually took second place to the new task of developing and directing the Swiss Folklore Museum. The Basle board of education allowed him more and more time for this purpose, until he had to give up his duties as teacher completely. As museum director Robert Wildhaber gained a reputation beyond the borders of Switzerland, mainly through his wide activities in collecting objects in Europe and through his thematic exhibitions (on peasant pottery, paintings on glass, votive pictures, folk art of South America, Slovenia and Switzerland, European pastoral culture etc.). These exhibitions yielded a lasting contribution in the form of Wildhaber's catalogues, which amounted to monographs.

Robert Wildhaber served international folklore well by means of the International Bibliography that he published regularly from 1948 and through his editing of the Swiss Folklore Archive in which his inexhaustible review work (more than 2000 reviews) was particularly appreciated. As an internationally recognised scholar in his field he was invited to give series of lectures in Britain and as a visiting professor at the University of Indiana in Bloomington (USA). His constant need for contact with folklore work outside Switzerland brought him into the Executive Committees of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde and also of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore. Similarly he worked hard at organising meetings between colleagues within the free research group in folklore in the Eastern Alps, *Alpes Orientales*. His knowledge and judgement contributed to the Hamburg Jury for the *J. - G. Herder Prize* and the Europa Prize for Folk Art (*Europa-Preis für Volkskunst*). In addition to museum work, his long journeys in collecting material, and the lectures and catalogues on which he worked with great scientific dedication, Robert Wildhaber found time for

numerous pieces of research, impressive by the diversity of the topics treated and by the multiplicity of references to parallel researches in the European field.

Robert Wildhaber always did his time-consuming editorial work on a voluntary basis. In 1969 he received the rare honour of being designated an Honorary lecturer to Basle University. He was for many a friend, always ready to help, one who would act immediately and use his great organisational talent, without any sentimentality. The fact that in 1972 over 75 scholars from 25 countries contributed to the *Festschrift* on the occasion of his 70th birthday is proof of the great respect in which he was held.

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