

# Current Activities

## XV.

*THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY  
FOR EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE 30 September - 6 October 1982*  
by Alexander Fenton

The Second Congress of the International Society for European Ethnology and Folklore was held in Suzdal in the USSR, from 30 September to 6 October 1982, under the auspices of the N N Mikloucho-Maqlay Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The Director of the Institute, Academician *Yulian Bromley*, guided the arrangements.

The Society, known in abbreviation as SIEF from its name in French (*Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et Folklore*), replaced the earlier CIAP (*Commission Internationale des Arts et Traditions Populaires*) in 1964. Its function is "to promote the study of traditional life and popular traditions and to stimulate co-operation among research workers and scientific organisations concerned with the study and to contribute within its fields to the knowledge of man and to mutual understanding amongst people" (*Bringéus* 1982, 149).

The wide coverage in space and time of such study is clearly brought out by the subject matter of the 10 Symposia into which the Congress was divided (*Aratyunov* 1982):

- I Stability and Changes in Cultural Systems of Contemporary European Countries
- II Urban Ethnography: Theme Studies, Problems and Methods
- III Local and Regional European Communities: the General and the Peculiar
- IV Ethnocultural and Ethnodemographic Processes in Post War Europe
- V The Problems of Historical Ethnological Mapping
- VI Interaction of Cultures of Europe and other Continents
- VII Calendar and Family Customs and Rites
- VIII The Problems of General Ethnology
- IX Ethnogenesis and Ethnic History of Europe (on Ethnological and Folklore Materials of Europe)
- X Modern Folklore of European Peoples, its Forms and Conditions of Being.

Reports from all Symposia were presented at the final Plenary Session, but otherwise Congress members worked within their own groups, under Conveners who had been appointed in advance. The present reporter's involvement was with Symposium V, where, as at the other Symposia, the presentation of papers touching on both theoretical and practical problems led to much animated discussion and exchange of ideas. It can be said, too, that the range and amount of activity within the Soviet Union came out strongly in every Symposium. In the case of ethnological-cartography, it was most impressive and instructive to hear at first hand of the work being done in, for example, the Ukraine, Moldau and White Russia, and to meet those involved with atlas work in these areas.

The hard work of the Congress was lightened by excursions in the beautiful town of Suzdal (*Milovski* 1982) and in Vladimir and during these outings and at other free periods (which were few because of the intensive work of the Congress), discussions between ethnologists from the 20 participant countries went on in a more relaxed way, leading as always to much useful cross-fertilisation of ideas in academic research.

Professor Bromley also delivered a talk on the value of ethnographical research as a means which was of even greater importance than language in understanding the cultural unity of the Slav peoples, in spite of the many differences amongst the Slavs. Ethnography - or ethnology, or cultural anthropology (though these are not exact synonyms) - was a very basic subject, and tribute had to be paid to scholars such as Zelenin, whose efforts at synthesising had aimed at reconstructing the life of

ancient times. A major work, constituting a massive, fresh synthesis, was being prepared, on the East, West and South Slavs, with specially appointed staff carrying out complex research of a comparative nature based on fieldwork, museum data, archaeology, written sources, questionnaires, and anthropological data. It would appear first in Russian, and it was hoped that this substantial contribution to knowledge of a large part of Europe, for which data has already been processed for many areas, would later be translated into English, perhaps with funding from UNESCO.

The Congress thus left the members with a great deal to think about, and with a better understanding and knowledge of work that is being carried on in the Soviet Union and in the other participating countries. In order to give increased possibilities for following up fresh initiatives, some organisational changes in SIEF were agreed to and made. Professor *Jean Cuisenier*, Paris, was replaced as President by Professor *Nils-Arvid Bringéus*, Lund. Professor Cuisenier continues as a Vice-President, jointly with Professor *Bromley*. The number in the Council of Administration was increased from 15 to 35, this number including an Executive Committee of five members. The positions of General Secretary, and Editor of the publications of SIEF, remain for the moment to be filled.

It is expected that the new organisation will give SIEF increased strength and flexibility, and allow it to work in close harmony with groups whose interests are related – such as ETHNOLOGIA EUROPAEA itself and the European Ethnological Atlas Commission.

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