

Village-research in the Netherlands

NOWADAYS THERE ARE ABOUT 980 MUNICIPALITIES in the Netherlands with a total population of about 13 000 000. In 1880, just before the start of a very rapid process of urbanization, there were only 4 000 000, 60 % of whom were living in the country (nowadays 40 %). There has been a marked drift from the land to the big towns. Besides this, the number of rural municipalities of an urbanized character (with 10 000 and more inhabitants) has been growing quickly. A number of communities are entitled to the name of "town" on account of either their having acquired municipal rights some long time ago, or their possessing (the remains of) town walls or again on the strength of the number of their inhabitants (which, on the other hand, in some "towns" is no more than about 700!). The minor communities are colloquially called villages as opposed to the more urbanized towns, small as the latter may be. Officially this distinction does not exist, all of them being regarded just as municipalities. In connection with village research one might regard as "villages" all communities which have a restricted number of people living in a geographical (historico-geographical) milieu which has a close connection with and a distinct meaning for the inhabitants.

With regard to the many problems of a practical character concerning our villages and the rural situation in general, mention must be made of a special variety of the social sciences which, in the Netherlands, is called "sociographie". As contrasted with the more or less abstract science of sociology, sociography is concerned with the social life and structure of individual communities and groups. This differentiation, again, is mainly a matter of a national, if not local, historical development.

Sociography, using aims and methods of its own, has done a lot of work concerning the general situation of Dutch villages. Publications by Sj. Groenman on Staphorst (1947), H. D. de Vries Reilingh on Markelo (1949) and similar works by the same writers and some of their colleagues have set an example followed by many others, both on villages and small-sized towns. Bibliographies recently published by the Bureau for Demography and Statistics on research work done on regional and local problems quote an overwhelming number of studies and reports on the social and economical situations, the housing conditions, the planological developments, the need for industrialization, etc., in short all kinds of practical problems, the solution of which is being furthered by sociographical research. It is, moreover, not quite superfluous to include in our survey the category of so-called "pre-sociographical writings", novels and reminiscences by the country people (or one-time country people) themselves, very well-informed and sometimes with an outstanding interest in the way of life in their (former) communities which makes them valuable correspondents of the Volkskunde-bureau at Amsterdam or the Open Air Museum at Arnhem.

Again, the authors of several books on local dialects, such as recently D. van der Haar on that of Genemuiden (1967), have inserted a general introduction about the characteristics of the community studied by them from the point of view of linguistics. It is, generally speaking, a very good thing that various branches of science nowadays apparently are interested in the role of Man. The

more is it disappointing that ethnology (including „Volkskunde“) as a specialized science of Man is not more widely put into practice with regard to the Netherlands herself. Nevertheless the ethnologist who wants to get acquainted — with a view toward further studies of his own — with Dutch villages, in various cases will find his way with the help of research work and surveys of the types referred to above. An interesting approach is John and Dorothy Keur's "The deeply rooted" (1955), an ecological and ethnological description of the village of Anderen in Drenthe, based on the authors' participation in village-life during one year (1951—'52). Recently (1968) Mrs. C. H. M. Nooy-Palm has published the results of an ethnological (cultural anthropological) research made in Staphorst since 1957. It is an interesting fact — not very surprising though — that in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Keur two scholars from abroad — a biologist and a cultural anthropologist, Americans — have given a survey of Dutch village life which is in many regards more profound than those of Dutch research workers generally are. On the other hand, it is a fact that some of their Dutch colleagues have written analyses of foreign village communities which may favourably compare with ethnological literature of the same type and period. H. Baudet recently wrote a penetrating little book, „Mijn dorp in Frankrijk“ (⁵1957), on a village 35 km. from Paris, where he lived during the preparation of a book on the history of France. V. E. Korn's "Tnganan Pagringsingan" (1933), a Balinese village, and H. Th. Chabot's description of a village in South-Celebes (1950), both of them starting from the point of view of Adat (traditional) law, may be called "ethnology" in the usual sense of this word.

An ethnologist who takes a broad view of his subjects is often disappointed in his expectations with regard to the more material aspects of village life, even by sociographies and the like which otherwise give a reasonably good survey of the social situation. An ethnologist more than most other people will be apt to confer upon Man the central place in his studies, Man in his totality and many-sidedness. Besides this, we will see this Man as closely connected with the place where he is living, with the milieu which the ethnologist will see as culturally, more than physico-geographically determined. His approach is essentially different, therefore, from that of the geographer and even of the sociographer who are apt to stress the physical side. A very useful starting point for an all-round ethnological research can be provided by the locally used utensils, the locally worn dress, the locally preferred food etc. All of these aspects of village life are very personal indeed, directly connected with the villagers, often more so than religious and social situations which are apt to show a more interlocal if not international character. Both aspects of village life may be used as a starting point, but scholars using the social approach apparently are disposed to forget the material side. They may answer our remarks by pointing out that others will be able to discuss ploughs and other agricultural elements, pottery etc. from their points of view. These others, however, usually will not treat them in connection with and as integral parts of village life but with technology, folk-art etc. in general.

IN THIS CONNECTION I SHOULD LIKE TO DRAW ATTENTION — not as an all-round ethnological survey, but at least as a many-sided approach — to the work done on the island of Marken (being a village on its own). After the building of the IJsselmeer Dam which was completed in 1932 most of the villages and towns along the coast of the former Zuider Zee were bound to lose the character of their own which they in part still possessed. During World War II the situation was still more urgent and, besides this, people were available for research work which might keep them from being sent to Germany. The director of the Open Air Museum, at the time S. J. Bouma, therefore started a team of draughtsmen under the supervision of H. J. van Bon, which visited various places around the Zuider Zee, among others Marken. Highly elaborate drawings, including a complete survey of the quarters and separate houses of Marken, were made. For all practical purposes all of the drawings from Marken (plans, sections etc.) were published in 1961 in one of the portefeuilles with architectural drawings of the Open Air Museum. A general description of various aspects of village life and especially of the houses is given in a booklet „Toen Marken nog het Eiland was“ (Open Air Museum, 1965). In it is included a very general survey of the costumes still worn by the villagers. A very extensive and detailed inventory of this subject, including specimens of the materials used, and a large collection of costumes was started by two members of the museum staff under the supervision of the actor and artist Cruys Voorbergh (= E. P. C. van Vrijberghe de Coningh). These materials and costumes are in the Open Air Museum and are being studied in further detail. At the same time Maria van Hemert composed a report on needlework which was published by the museum in 1959 (²1967). Again at the same time a team of dialectologists, conducted by J. van Ginneken, made an extensive survey of the dialects of Marken and two neighbouring villages, in part starting from the material culture and consequently providing very important materials for ethnologists as well. The results were published in 1954 by students of van Ginneken in two big volumes.

We may add that in 1912 the anatomist-anthropologist J. A. J. Barge wrote his doctor's thesis on skulls from Marken and that, in later years, two other scientists resumed work on the physical anthropology aspect. Again, that in 1932 P. Kuin gave a valuable sociographical description of the island and that various others contributed more. If the island of Marken had not had such a very complicated communal life, dress and handicraft, we might have said that Marken was very well taken care of. As it is, there is still very much to be done.

I do not like to end this summary of the work done in connection with Dutch villages without shortly mentioning a type of research work still being done by C. Th. Kokke, again of the Open Air Museum. It is concerned with the little village of Zieuwent in the „Achterhoek“, the eastern part of Gelderland. Mr. Kokke has composed his research, which is not yet finished, starting from the material culture and leading up to a general survey of the way of life. As contrasted with most sociographies, which do not include original historical research, the ethnologist, besides synchronic surveys, has to make reconstructions of

previous situations and developments in order to get a complete view of the community under discussion. It is not enough to trace this development, as is often done, from the official maps of 1832 onwards. These represent a more or less final situation, not the beginning of the development. In the main, there are two different historical evolutions in the Netherlands: an officially and consciously effected issue of grounds, since the 11—13th century A. D., by the landlords, or, much more complicated, the spontaneous growth of a community. The latter has been described in a generalized way by geographers like H. Blink and H. J. Keuning. It usually started with the occupation of the higher fields, traceable by archaeological research, onomatology, official records and C¹⁴ datings. An evaluation of the physical milieu, including the character of the soils, must be the beginning of any historical ethnological study, followed by a survey of the ways in which the inhabitants have developed within the possibilities of this milieu. How did they succeed in providing themselves with their primary necessities: food, shelter, clothes, heating? In the case of an agricultural community — as Zieuwent is and used to be —: how did they till the soil, did they keep animals for manure? How did they live and provide shelter for themselves and their cattle? Again, more in detail than other types of village research the various types of dwelling, working and the behaviour in connection with these subjects will be studied and described, together with the techniques and tools used. In each case the subject discussed will be seen as connected with Man and his ways. The same applies to the aspects of dress. All of this will give access to various aspects of the social and economic situations, in due course to the ideas connected with them, eventually to social structure and spiritual culture.

Starting from that individual village community, we may acquire an insight into the development and into the atmosphere of other, comparable communities, in a similar way — though different — as Baudet by way of his "Village in France" gives an insight into the characteristics of rural France in general.

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